

## Portavilion: Public Art for London's Parks Evaluation Executive Summary

Portavilion, an UP Projects production, was an innovative public art project that created a trail of temporary structures through Central London's parks. Four world-class contemporary artists were invited to develop and produce their own "pavilion" specifically designed for a park environment as a celebration of the city's most treasured public places.

Portavilion brought high quality contemporary art to London's public realm, offering visitors to a range of urban parks the chance to see significant artworks by some of the World's leading contemporary artists. The Portavilion trail created an alternative map of London, linking green spaces that could be navigated by bike, foot or public transport and linking four different Central London boroughs:

Dan Graham (US); Holland Park (Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea)  
Annika Eriksson (Sweden); Regents Park (Westminster and Camden)  
Toby Paterson (UK); Potters Fields Park (Southwark)  
Monika Sosnowska (Poland); Primrose Hill (Camden)



Toby Paterson Powder Blue Orthogonal Pavilion



Annika Eriksson The Smallest Cinema in the World



Monika Sosnowska The Wind House



Dan Graham Triangular Pavilion with  
Circular Cut-out Variation H

The core pavilion projects provided a platform for the development of a programme of events devised specifically for each park and responding to the themes of each artist's project. The events aimed to open the project out to new audiences, and also explore cross-disciplinary collaborations, and the majority were delivered in partnership with specialist organisations, or by individual artists and creative practitioners. The events programme ranged from high profile public events and performances such as newly choreographed dance commissions in partnership with Big Dance and a Portavilion symposium in partnership with the Art of Common Space and the Design Museum and an exhibition of Dan Graham video works in the Holland Park Ice House gallery; to smaller workshops such as story telling for young children and pinhole camera workshops for elders that were tailored for specific community groups with a core aim to encourage active participation and a deeper level of engagement.



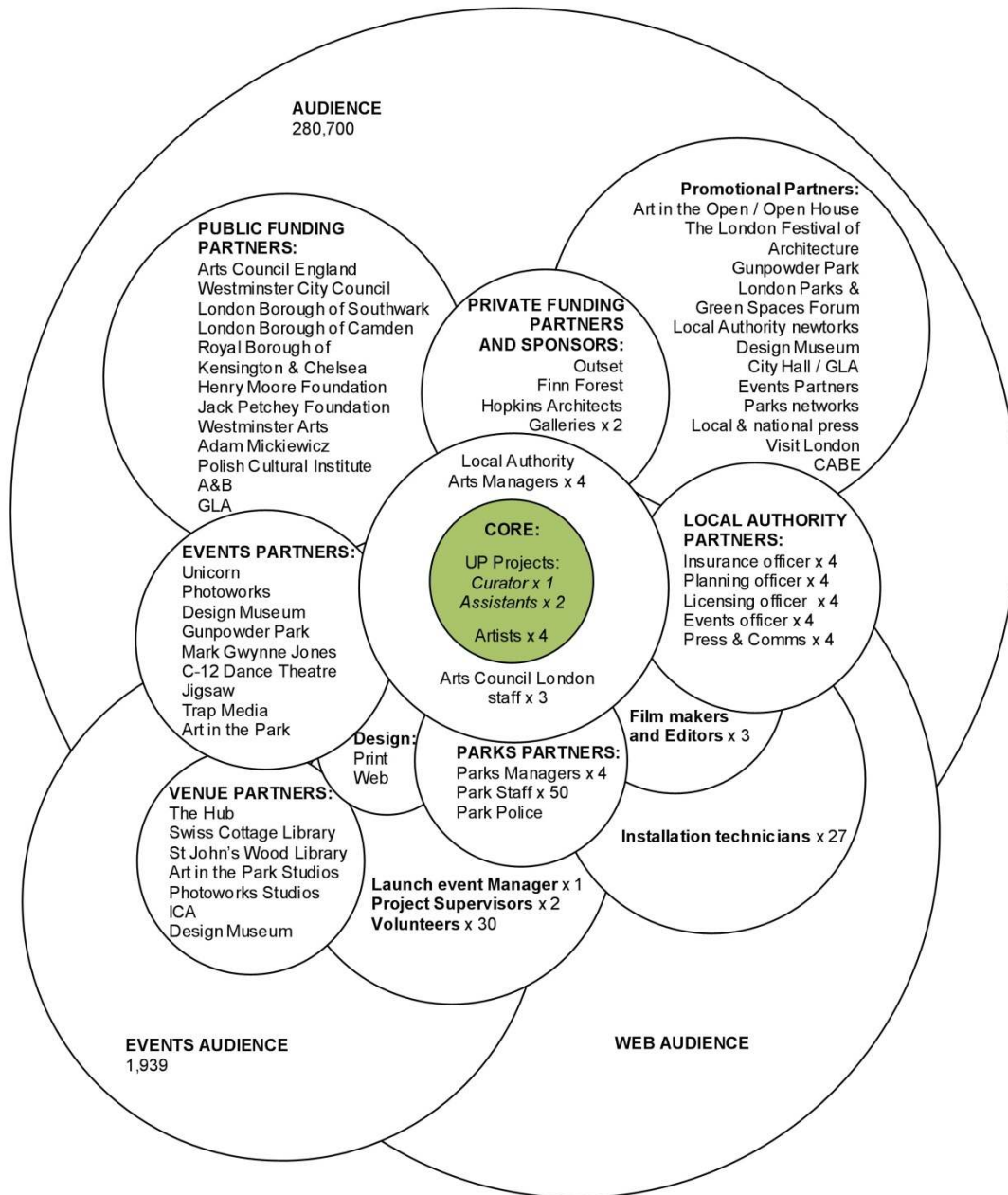
Inside the Smallest Cinema in the World



Unicorn Youth Theatre performing on the Toby Paterson pavilion

### Project Delivery

The project was led by Emma Underhill, Curator and Director of UP Projects who was responsible for all aspects of the project, supported by Project Assistants, Lilah Fowler and Sarah Davies and a team of over thirty volunteers. Specialist freelancers also provided technical support where needed. For UP Projects to have the capacity to deliver a project of this scale, it was essential to develop partnerships with a broad range of organisations and individuals including artists, Local Authorities, park managers, event delivery partners, venue partners, volunteers, funding and promotional partners. The number of individuals and organisations involved in the delivery of Portavilion across the pavilion projects and events programme extended way beyond UP Project's core delivery team and the complexity of the partnership is best illustrated in the diagram below:



## Audiences Audiences

Portavilion recorded visitor figures (based on averages over the whole project run):

Project	Number of days	Dates	Figures
Dan Graham Holland Park	112	6 June – 28 September	40,000
Annika Eriksson Regent's Park	57	20 June – 28 September	5,500*
Toby Paterson Potters Fields Park	84	5 July – 28 Sept	168,000
Monika Sosnowska Primrose Hill	91	25 July – 26 Oct	67,200
<b>Total Portavilion audience</b>			<b>280,700</b>

\* Eriksson's cinema was open for 6 hours, 4 days per week in June, July, August and weekends only in September with an extended opening 15 – 19 October during Frieze art fair weekend all other projects were open every day.

Audiences engaged with Portavilion in three main ways; by visiting the pavilions in the parks, by attending events or participating in workshops, and by interacting online with the project's website and e-newsletters, and mentioning Portavilion in their own blogs. From the visitor survey responses, 49% of visitors to the pavilions had come to the parks specifically, either because of publicity seen or read, receiving a recommendation, or because of knowledge of an artist(s)'s work, and/or because of a personal interest in the arts. The remaining 51% of the Portavilion audience was accumulated from the existing park visitor groups. The project therefore generated 137,500 new visitors to the parks and 143,200 new audience members for the arts project.

1,939 people either attended or participated in the 21 Portavilion community and education events. On average, 79% feedback that they were likely to engage in other arts events, 83% said that the event was either Excellent or Great, 17% responding that the event was OK. 90% lived in a London borough.

The interaction of those who read about Portavilion online, both on the dedicated website [www.portavilion.com](http://www.portavilion.com). E-newsletters, or by writing self-published articles online, greatly extended the reach, range and level of interaction of Portavilion's audience. This online audience participation was further extended through self published blogs and Flickr sites which exponentially increased throughout the project run.

### **Parks and Green Spaces**

The core objectives for the Portavilion parks as well as for UP Projects was that the project would enhance the park environment, attract new visitors and provide opportunities for engaging local communities that were harder to reach. Portavilion added significantly to each park's cultural offer and the related events provided specific community participation benefits. It is important to note that presenting art in a park is a different proposition to its presentation in other urban contexts. Parks provide a relatively neutral context politically, but it is important that the environmental impact is considered, and that these "green lungs" of London are of extreme importance to the quality of life of Londoners and visitors alike; while one of the roles of the artist is to challenge and provoke, they must also be sensitive to the park environment and the visitor experience. Feedback from each park manager as well as visitors illustrated how successfully Portavilion enhanced the park environment and visitor experience at each site.

Portavilion's events programme worked hard to bring new visitors to the parks, particularly those from communities surrounding the park that may not think it is an environment "for them".

### **Innovation and Critical debate**

Portavilion was a natural progression curatorially for UP Projects and proposed a new approach to presenting art in the public realm. Rather than commissioning permanent site specific works, the premise was for portable or transportable structures that could move to other parks after their location in Central London. While presenting artist designed pavilions is not a new concept (designing architectural structures, follies or pavilions is a tradition that has been explored by many contemporary artists within the last twenty years) it seems to be particularly pertinent

to now, and in 2008 many other pavilion projects appeared independently of each other. This apparent "zeitgeist" created a much wider reaching dialogue, clearly evident at the Portavilion symposium, that extended from the theme of temporary art projects for parks to broader debates around public art commissioning.

*"There's a disease out there", American artist Dan Graham observed last year. "Artists want to become architects, and architects want to become artists – which I think I may have started."*

### **Conclusion**

Portavilion successfully brought a series of international contemporary artworks of the highest calibre to London's public realm and, through their situation in some of London's most popular and well-loved public parks, engaged a far broader public audience than the typical audience of a contemporary gallery or museum exhibition. Whilst UP Projects appreciates that London's parks are not accessible and/or used by all sectors of society, particularly certain minority groups, the events and education programme attempted to redress this by offering activities designed specifically for those groups, and Portavilion was successful in engaging new, harder-to-reach audiences both with the parks and contemporary art.

The popularity of the artworks and the project in general is reflected in recorded visitor quotes and feedback, anecdotes and also through the physical respect that visitors of all ages to the park demonstrated towards the works which, even when in spaces that were open 24 hours with no security or invigilation, were not damaged or vandalized in any way.

Visitor numbers recorded at each site also reflect the keen public interest in the work, along with the success of Portavilion's press and publicity campaign. Successful partnerships were essential to the effective delivery of Portavilion, and the high level of support and the depth of input that each partner contributed to the project (that went far beyond straight forward funding/sponsorship partnerships) enabled Portavilion to become something far bigger and wider reaching than the sum of its constituent parts.

*For more information download a detailed illustrated Portavilion report at*  
[www.portavilion.com/#####](http://www.portavilion.com/#####)