

Valuing Voluntary Arts

SECTION C

CHAPTER THREE

Public Events and the Audience

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A. Public Opportunities

89% of respondents in Dorset and 88% in Somerset stated that their group engage in public performances. This corresponds to the percentage reported in Northern Ireland. We can see from the figures below that although the mean (average) number of public performances per group is 9 in Dorset and 8 in Somerset, most commonly a group would put on 2 public performances per year. It is suggested therefore as the median (midpoint of the total values) lays somewhere between the two, this may present a fair average in terms of using these figures for extrapolation.

Engagement in Public Arts Events

Public Events	Dorset	Somerset
Mean	9	8
Median	4	4
Mode	2	2
Sum	538	545

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The sum of all public events engaged in by respondent groups in Somerset equalled 545. In Dorset this stands at 538. Using the median, it can be assumed that the groups on the database provide a total of 2,208 public opportunities to experience the arts in Somerset and 1,544 in Dorset.

B. Attendances

The figures are based on actual 'attendances' rather than individual 'attendee', thereby counting each experience of the art rather than each person. This is continued throughout the report.

B.1. Level of Attendances

The sum of total attendance figures for respondent groups' public events in Somerset and Dorset are calculated to be 147,950 and 115,588 respectively. The mean annual attendance to public events per group in Dorset is reported to be 1,675 compared to 1,873 reported by groups in Somerset. In Dorset, the total public attendance figure calculated for the groups known to the database is 648,225. In Somerset, this figure is 1,035,769.

Level of Attendance - Dorset and Somerset

County	Population (Census 2001)	Mean Annual Public Attendance	Expected Annual Public Attendance of Gps on Database
Dorset	390,980	1675	648,225
Somerset	498,093	1873	1,035,769

B.2. Researching the Audience

Mirroring the results in Northern Ireland, over 75% of groups in Somerset have not researched their audience along with 70% in Dorset. However, unlike NI where 40% stated they would like to, a staggeringly smaller percentage (13% in Somerset and 19% in Dorset) agreed with this statement.

It could be suggested that lack of resources and capacity for a group to carry out research on their audience may have been the driving factor in answer to this question. However, when looking at the groups' feelings towards ticket sales there is a more positive view in Somerset than in Northern Ireland.

75% of groups in Somerset stated that they found it either fairly easy or very easy to sell tickets or get attendances to their public events, compared to 53% in Northern Ireland. This difference in feeling about audience numbers could provide an explanation for the lower interest in researching their audience.

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However, this should not be the case in Dorset where figures are similar to those in Northern Ireland, 54% feel that tickets sell fairly or very easily, which leaves 46% feeling that ticket sales are fairly or very difficult.

With these similarities it would be expected that Dorset's interest in researching their audience would also be similar to that of Northern Ireland.

Despite this when thinking about obstacles to audience size, around one third of groups in Somerset and Dorset realise the importance of better marketing, which is in no doubt linked to further research of possible audiences.

C. The Nature of the Audience

Owing to the few numbers of groups that have researched their audience, the information regarding audience composition must be seen to be educated estimates in around 75% of cases in Somerset and 70% in Dorset.

Around a third of the average audience were comprised of family and friends (30%, Somerset; 32%, Dorset). The greatest proportion were those from the local community (60%, Somerset; 56% Dorset). Those travelling from further afield were deemed to make up the lowest percentage (10%, Somerset; 10%, Dorset). This closely resembles the audience composition noted in Northern Ireland.

C.1. Gender

In Somerset, on average groups estimated that 45% of their audience comprised of men and 55% of women. In Dorset, the split is greater with 60% women, 40% men. When split by their art forms, the performing arts and cross form in Somerset reflect the gender ratio noted above, displaying a fairly even attendance by both sexes. However, groups involved in craft, literature (70%) or visual arts (60%) attract a far greater percentage of women. Similarly in Dorset, performing arts attracts equal numbers (50:50), the remaining art forms all attract a greater percentage of women exactly reflecting the total ratio noted above (60:40).

C.2. Disabled People in the Audience

On average groups in Somerset estimated that 7% of their audience was comprised of people with disabilities. In Dorset this figure was estimated to be 9%. However, the mode was less than the mean displayed here, which has been skewed by groups that specialise for people with disabilities or older people who may experience disabilities associated with age. The range was between 1% and 50% in Somerset and 1% and 60% in Dorset.

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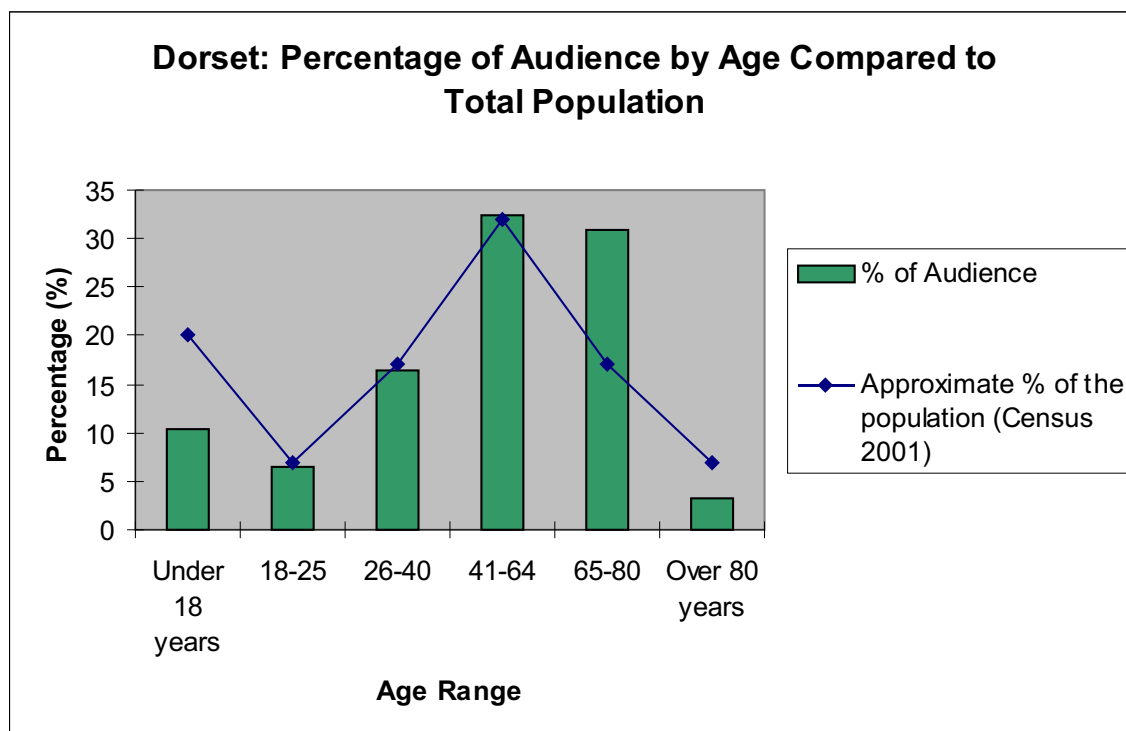
C.3. Age

66% of the average audience in Dorset were over the age of 40, with over half of these being over 64. The over 40s contribute 57% of the population in Dorset and are therefore well represented in voluntary arts audiences. However, under 18s comprise 20% of the population and are therefore, considerably underrepresented.

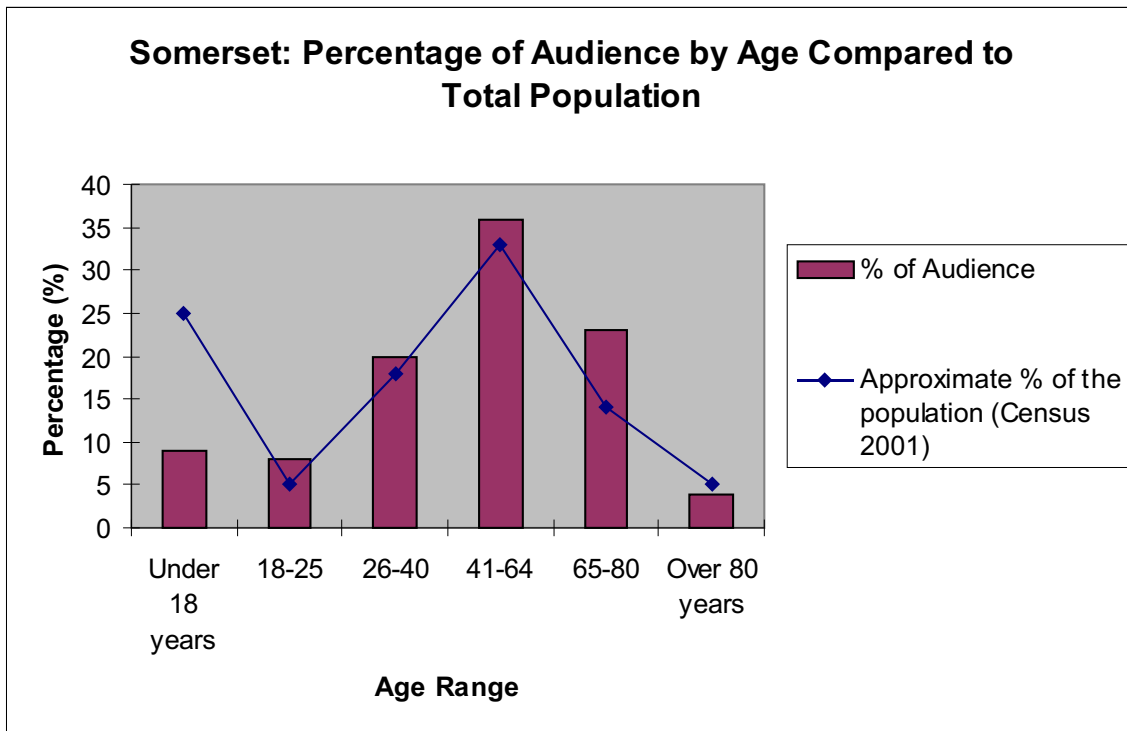
Arts groups in Dorset generally realise that their groups could be attracting a greater number of younger people, with some noting the importance of this to their aim to keep their individual group alive and pass down the skills and traditions of their craft or art form. Percentage of groups noting that attracting younger people was important

Like Dorset, 63% of the estimated average audience in Somerset are over the age of 40, but in contrast over half of these are aged between 41 to 64. This almost exactly reflects the proportion of the total population (32%). However, all age groups over 40 only make up just less than half of the population. There is therefore a higher representation of this group in arts audiences than in the population as a whole.

Groups estimated that less than 10% of their audience were under 18. Yet according to census 2001, this age group make up around 20% of Somerset's total population. Somerset's groups estimated that those aged 18-40 contributed 28% of their audience, this matches the figures given for the total population, resulting in a fair representation of this age range as voluntary arts audiences.



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Therefore, although youth appear to be proportionately represented as members or regular participants in voluntary arts group, more needs to be done to increase the under 18's audience figures. The concern over low attendances in youth is clearly recognised by voluntary arts groups. Respondents deemed the efforts to attract younger people to be the most significant issue in ensuring a continuously thriving sector.

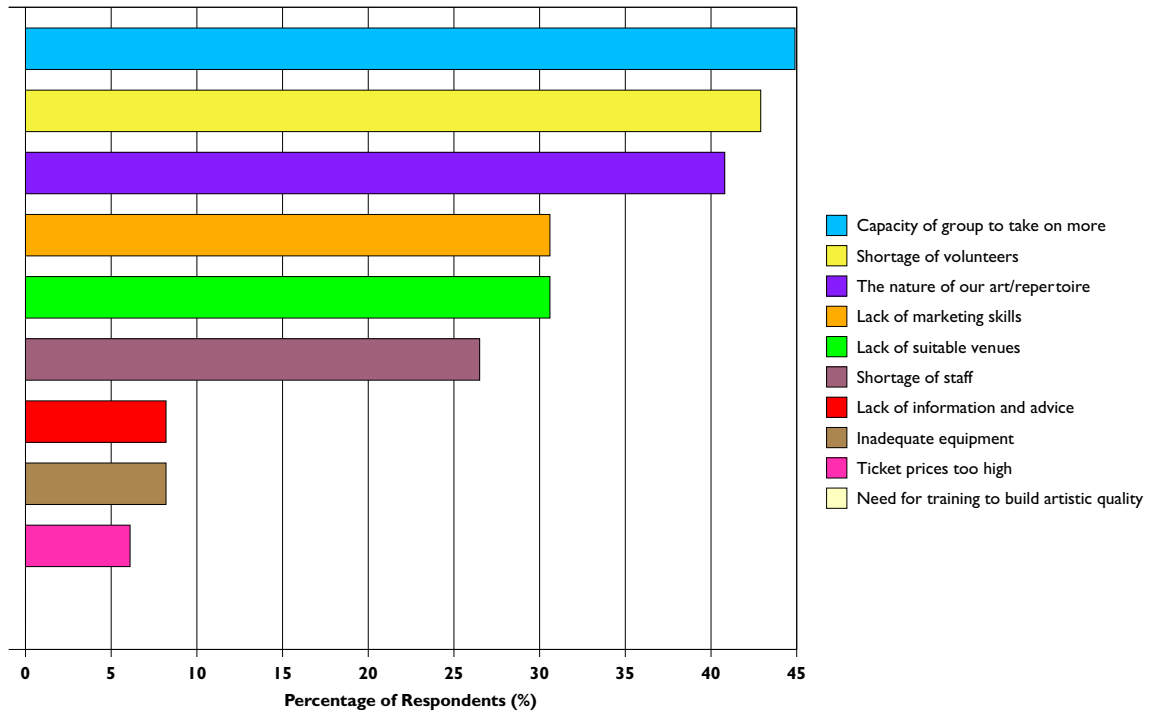
D. Obstacles to Audience Size

The capacity of the group to take on more was deemed to be the greatest obstacle to audience size in both counties (45%, Somerset; 44% Dorset). This compares to around 31% in Northern Ireland.

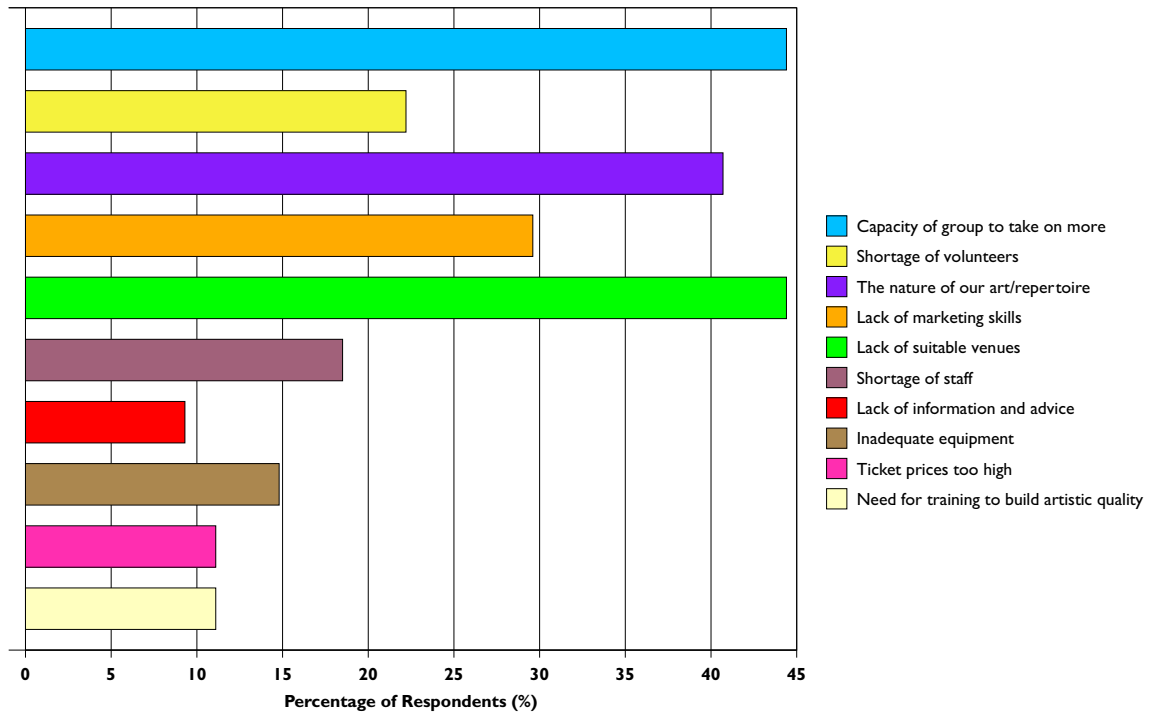
Although, this is positive in terms of groups fulfilling their capabilities, it must not detach from the importance of ensuring the public are given ample opportunities. If one group has reached its capacity then it must be ensured that other opportunities are provided for the public to experience the arts.

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Dorset: The Main Obstacles to Increasing Audience Size



Somerset: The Main Obstacles to Audience Size



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The next issue of greatest significance to groups in Somerset was the fact that there is a lack of suitable venues (44%).

This may be linked to the previous comment as groups often associate their own capacity with that of their venue. A group may view its capacity to be increased simultaneous to an increased venue capacity.

The lack of suitable venues was deemed to be significant by 10% less respondents in Northern Ireland, despite being third most important.

Of second greatest significance in Dorset was the shortage of volunteers (42%), which was deemed to be of similar significance to respondents in Northern Ireland.

A significant proportion of respondents (41%, Somerset; 40% Dorset) felt that the nature of their art/repertoire might act as an obstacle.

There could be a correlation between this and poor marketing capacity i.e. in order, in order to find suitable audiences and those that may have more specialist interests in the art form. It may also suggest a need for adaptation of the art/repertoire to better suit the audience.

More research into audiences is clearly a priority.

"...the range of our audiences varies with the type of production.

Some productions, for example, will attract considerably more children..."

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CHAPTER SUMMARY 3: Public Events and the Audience

- Respondent groups provided 545 public events per year in Somerset and 538 in Dorset. An average (median) of 4 per group.

- Over 75% of groups in Somerset stated that they find it easy or fairly easy to sell tickets for public events. This compares to 54% in Dorset.

- The under 18 age group are considerably underrepresented in voluntary arts audiences. In both counties they comprise half the proportion of the audience than they do in the population as a whole. The capacity of a group to take on a larger audience was deemed to be the greatest obstacle to increasing audience size.

- A lack of suitable venues was deemed to be a significant restriction on increasing audience sizes by 44% of Somerset's respondents.

- 42% of groups in Dorset felt that a shortage of volunteers was preventing their group from increasing audience sizes.

- Despite a lack of widespread direct interest in audience and participant research, responses to questions regarding audience levels revealed groups feelings that a greater audience could be reached through improved marketing.