

# THE ART OF DELIBERATION

## How making a collage can start new conversations about difficult issues

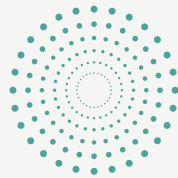
Can a **creative activity** help people to think and talk about difficult issues that often polarise communities? Our pilot project used **collage-making to start conversations about Wales's constitutional future**, but the process we developed can be used to engage a wide range of people, places and issues.

### We found that:

- 1 Creative activities can facilitate deliberative conversations, and we do this through an integrated process that provides appropriate materials, key information, and careful facilitation.
- 2 Creative deliberation is highly inclusive, drawing in experiences and perspectives that are typically excluded from conventional forms of deliberative citizen engagement.
- 3 The creative outputs of these conversations have the potential to engage the wider public.

### What is Deliberative Citizen Engagement?

Deliberative approaches to citizen engagement aim to **bring ordinary people together** to hear and discuss a full range of opinions on a given subject. These include **citizens' assemblies, citizens' juries** or **panels**, and **deliberative opinion polls**.



This project developed out of a collaboration with **Omidaze Productions** who have been developing creative and inclusive approaches to democratic deliberation. Omidaze are researching and developing four Democracy Box prototypes including The Talking Shop, a democratic and cultural space which they piloted in 2019. The Talking Shop model is currently being trialled across Wales. To find out more: [www.omidaze.co.uk/the-talking-shop/](http://www.omidaze.co.uk/the-talking-shop/)

We collaborated with Omidaze inside The Talking Shop trial in Cardiff in 2022. Researchers were paired with Talking Shop hosts, who are professional freelance creatives and trained facilitators, and used collaging and bunting making to start conversations about Wales's constitutional future. This project builds on that work and develops a more structured approach to having inclusive, creative and deliberative conversations.

The creative activities used in the Talking Shop have been developed significantly during their subsequent trial in Merthyr Tydfil including using music, poetry, painting, journaling, crafts, creative writing, illustration, dance, drama and spoken word.

Omidaze will finish blueprinting The Talking Shop model for creative approaches to democratic deliberation by the end of 2023. To date The Talking Shop trials have had over 8500 recorded visitors. Omidaze are partnering and collaborating with multiple organisations to explore how The Talking Shop model can be used for public engagement and consultation in any town or city.

### What's the added value of a creative approach to deliberation?

Compared to existing deliberative formats, a creative approach adds value by including **more people** and **different perspectives** in the conversation.

Typically, deliberative formats ask people to talk, discuss and reason about a given subject.

A more creative form of communication – such as drawing, poetry or music – offers a different way of expressing what we think and feel about a subject. Creative activity offers a way of including people who prefer not to debate, or feel they can't express themselves in that way.

## Developing a creative approach to deliberation

### What we did...



5 collage-making workshops (4 to 10 participants) with community groups in Newport, South Wales



Thematic focus on Wales's constitutional future



Iterative development of a structured process, based on feedback from participants and reflections by the research team

### Key challenges...



- 1 **Limited time** – typically workshops lasted between 1 and 2 hours
- 2 **Nature of the topic** – low levels of interest in, and knowledge about constitutional issues
- 3 **Session structure** – need to balance facilitation with providing objective information to inform discussions

# How to have **creative** and **deliberative** conversations about **difficult issues**



## The Practicalities

- 1 Facilitator and participants sat around a table
- 2 Selection of printed materials (magazines, newspapers, leaflets with a focus on Welsh politics and society) and craft materials (scissors, glue, pens and crayons, stickers) on the table

## The Process

- 1 Introduction**  
‘Ice-breaker’ activity to get to know the facilitator and participants  
Introduction to the workshop topic: facilitator shows and talks through a pre-prepared collage: ‘Who decides for Wales’
- 2 Creative Phase**  
Participants produce a 1-page A3 collage on ‘My Wales, Now and in the Future’  
Facilitator prompts discussion with participants around images and words selected for their collage
- 3 Deliberative Phase**  
Participants present and interpret their collages  
Facilitator leads a group discussion of and reflection on common themes
- 4 Conclusion**  
Participants invited to complete an anonymous survey reflecting on their experience of the workshop

## What Worked

### Going to places where people already meet

Familiarity and trust between participants made discussing difficult topics easier

### Providing information on the topic as a pre-made collage

This provided participants with baseline information on the topic, and they could see for themselves what a collage looked like

### Starting conversations from what matters to people in their everyday lives

We asked participants to make a collage on ‘My Wales: Now and in the Future’ as a starting point for thinking about how Wales is, and should be, governed

### Collage as an activity that gets people thinking

Participants looked through collage materials with a focus on Welsh politics and society, and cut out images and words that reflected things that mattered to them

# CONCLUSION

Creative activities are an effective way of starting conversations about, and deliberating on, issues that are difficult and divisive.

Our process offers a different way of thinking about deliberative citizen engagement: it offers a creative approach that can include different people, with different perspectives, in different places.

Further work is needed to refine and extend the process of creative deliberation and apply it to different issues and in different places.

If you'd like to know more about this project, or Omidaze's ongoing R&D work and The Talking Shop, please get in touch:



Dr Anwen Elias, Aberystwyth University  
[awe@aber.ac.uk](mailto:awe@aber.ac.uk)

Yvonne Murphy, Omidaze Productions /  
The Talking Shop [omidaze@outlook.com](mailto:omidaze@outlook.com)