

# Boston Unfurled

## Evaluation

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*Photo: Boston Hanse Group*

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## Background

Boston Unfurled is a project run by [Boston Hanse Group](#) and [Transported](#). It has been supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England, and Boston Big Local.

The Boston Hanse Group was formed in 2016 and is part of a wider network called The New Hanse which connects towns and cities across Northern Europe that seek better economic, social and cultural ties in the spirit of the original Hanseatic league which brought great prosperity to Boston in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Boston Hanse Group is formed of volunteers that seek to develop the understanding of Boston's heritage and develop tourism, commercial links for Boston businesses through Business Hanse and international links for young people through Youth Hanse.

Transported is a strategic, community-focused programme which aims to get more people in Boston Borough and South Holland enjoying and participating in arts activities. It aims to empower local communities, arts organisations, museums, libraries and local authorities to experiment with radically different approaches and develop inspiring, sustainable arts programmes that will engage audiences in those communities.



*Photo: Boston Hanse Group*

## Introduction

The project 'Boston Unfurled' involved the creation of 20 unique flags and finials (decorative pole tops). The flags and pole tops were created in workshops led by experienced artists. Community members had the opportunity to learn new skills and design flags and finials reflecting the town's European history.

Members of the Boston Hanse Group attended the [International Festival of Hanseatic Cities](#) in 2016. They saw that many cities had their own flags and a clear sense of their identity. This set into motion a thought process of Boston's identity and how it could be showcased and finally resulted in the idea that local residents could make flags. Community members could come up with designs that reflect current themes and the identity of Boston today rather than past motives.

The project was started off with a free exhibition at the Boston Guildhall about the use of flags and banners for both identification and celebration and showcasing how Boston has been represented in design form in the past. At this exhibition, the workshops where flags and finials to represent and celebrate Boston today were advertised.

Workshops ran from 9 February 2018 through to 27 April 2018 led by artists Ruth Pigott (Curiosity Creators) and Kathleen Smith.



## Aims

As mentioned above, the aim of the project was to engage with questions about the identity of Boston and to design motifs that showcase this. The Boston Hanse Group hoped to bring together both older and newer residents, especially encouraging foreign nationals to participate. They aimed to ensure that participation was accessible and engaging for all, regardless of previous experience with making art. The following sections will break down the aims stated in the funding application and examine what steps were taken towards reaching these goals.



*Photo: Ruth Pigott*

## Find and show Boston's identity as a Hanseatic town

During the workshops participants learned much about the history of Boston as a Hanseatic town and its background. The makers were able to not only hear about Boston but actively engage with its history and their own themes and perceptions about the place as they were designing the flags and finials. The designs they produced were representations of what happens in Boston and references to its history. However, most of them celebrate Boston in its present state and the way current residents see and experience it.

In the 3D printing workshops participants received an information pack from Kathleen Smith including both guidance on the technique but also extensive information about different historical buildings in Boston, the market place, motives used on the roof of the church and in its stain glass windows and other details about architecture, trade and culture.

The completed flags that were produced in the workshops have been taken to the [2018 Hanseatic Day](#) in Rostock, Germany where many people were able to see and learn about Boston's identity through the design of the flags. They have also been showcased at the [Boston Hanse Day](#) in May 2018 where they were carried in a parade through town and then exhibited at the St Botolph's church ("The Stump") for a number of days. They also received quite a bit of attention during [Boston in Bloom](#) and there have been discussions about showcasing the flags permanently in the Boston Guildhall.

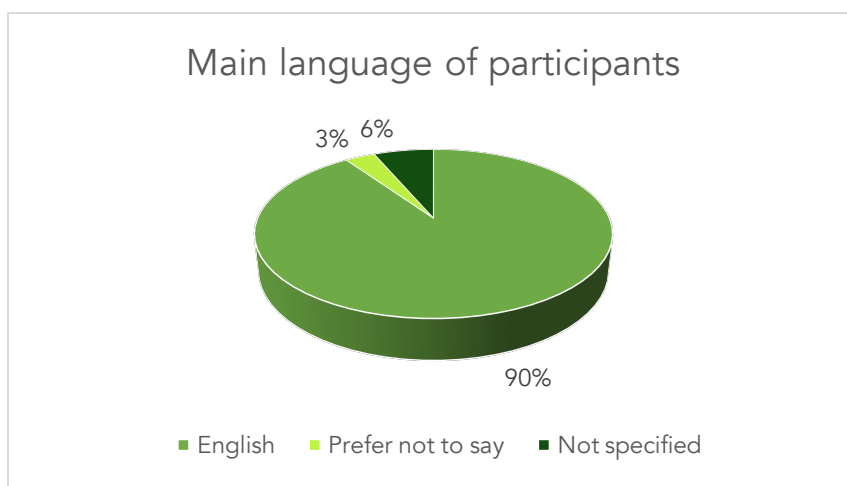
The project certainly represented an important step towards exploring and discovering Boston's identity as a Hanseatic town. Lindsey McBarron, the Treasurer and one of the directors of Boston Hanse Group sees this as the beginning of a journey. Showing Boston's identity is something the organisation will continue to work on.

## Increase understanding of Boston's historical links to Europe

During the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Boston was significant in trade with the continent of Europe and became a ranked member of the Hanseatic League. This strong connection to Europe is mirrored in the population today with 11% of residents having been born in EU accession countries such as Poland and Lithuania. During the workshops people learned about Boston's history as a Hanseatic town and there was a lot of interest as history seemed to parallel what is happening today, the visible presence of European citizens in Boston has made Brexit a hot topic. Boston's links with Europe were also focused on during the exhibition that was held at the beginning of the project. Transported organised displays about the use of flags in the past and showed how widely Boston was connected to the rest of Europe.

In addition to discussing Boston's links with the rest of Europe, the hope had been for workshop attendants to represent a mix of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Attempts to reach diverse communities had been made: e.g. announcements and advertisements had been translated into Polish and Latvian to encourage foreign residents to attend. According to survey data, 28 of 31 people indicated their first language as English. The data does not reveal what other languages participants spoke. 93% of participants surveyed identified themselves as White British.



## Get people to make art, learn new skills and raise their confidence

One of the major aims of the project was to encourage people to participate in the design and creation of the flags, finials and panels that held the banners. Ruth Pigott, Design and Fabric artist explained that participants were able to learn the necessary steps to go from an idea, to creating a design, then a pattern and to finally doing the sewing. The flag workshops saw a wide variety of people in terms of skill level, some of them being experienced in sewing and quilting whereas others learned to use a sewing machine for the first time as part of the workshop. It was especially great to see some men showing interest in learning how to sew. Everyone learned new skills, even those who could already sew had never made flags, and learned a technique called reverse applique which no one knew before.

Kathleen Smith, who ran the 3D printing workshops, reported that many participants had heard of 3D printing and laser cutting but had no real idea how it worked. During the workshops participants learned what to look out for when designing for 3D printing and came up with the designs for the finials. They were provided with lots of information and practical tips on how to become more proficient in this craft. Kathleen said that there was a couple of people who were very keen and showed interest in getting their own 3D printer in the future. A young teenage boy mentioned that his school had a 3D printer that no one really knows how to use and was very excited after the workshop to be able to make use of this resource and show his class mates how it worked.

The sewing workshops ran for a few months and there was a number of people who came to most of the sessions and most attendants came more than once.

Another side of the project developed as some people gave feedback that they would like to do hand sewing. At the back of this, Ruth Pigott started a hand sewing group which had about 10-12 people in it which met every week for 2 months. In



these meetings people were able to learn a medieval gold work technique, which they did not know about previously. Together they produced a hand sewn banner.

As the same people met every week, people became very close and friendships formed. During the workshops a very good and intimate atmosphere developed, many of the attendants sharing very personal stories. Participants fed back that the regular contact with this group of people and working with their hands had a positive impact on their mental health and overall wellbeing. This group advocated to keep meeting after the project's completion and showed strong interest in continuing in this craft.

Overall, people became more confident in coming up with designs and knowing how to turn them into something that can be used.

Ruth told about a man who was very hesitant to begin with but as a result of attending the workshops, he learned how to sew and he produced a flag featuring the Lincolnshire red bull. He really enjoyed the process and expressed surprise that he had managed to complete such a great flag. He also really seemed to enjoy the company of everyone in the group and invited everyone out for a drink after the project had finished. In general, lots of people wanted to keep meeting up after the end of the workshops.

In May at the Boston Hanse Day, all the makers turned up with their families and carried their flags through town. The artists mentioned how, in their experience, this was quite unusual. Getting children to showcase their art is easier, adults normally do not want to do stuff like this. It was a great result that participants took such pride in their work that they happily showcased it in the parade.

## Participant Data

- 74% of participants indicated they planned to engage with other arts after having been involved in the activity
- 80% of participants indicated that the type of activity was new to them

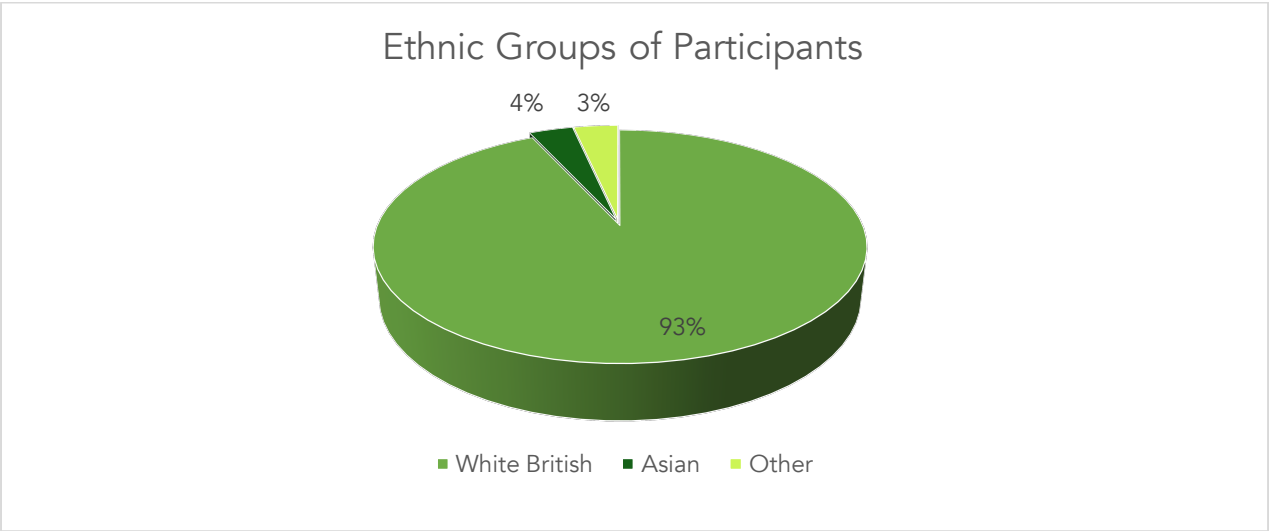
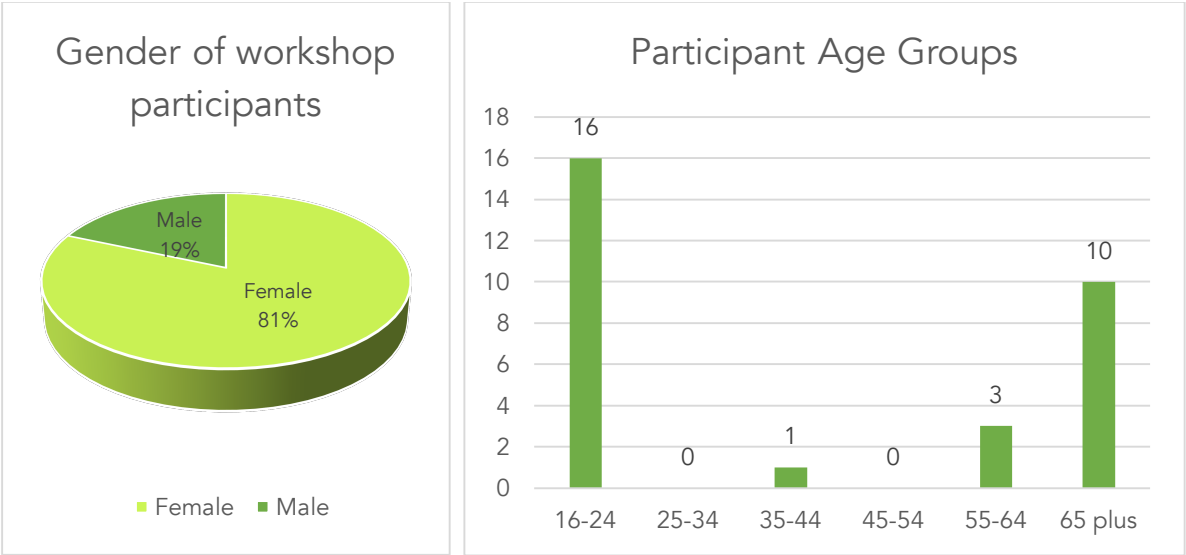
## Demonstrate diverse Bostonians can work together

As mentioned before, the workshops did not have a very ethnically diverse group of attendants. They were a number of students and young people from other European backgrounds who joined the workshops. Lindsey McBarron said that attracting more international participants is a learning curve and something they will continue to focus on with future events. Workshops received a good mix of participants who were of different ages and genders. Especially the 3D workshops saw a wide range of people attending. Kathleen said how nice it was to see young and old mixing with each other and enjoying good conversations with one another. A fair few art students and teachers attended the workshops and were excited to use their new skills in the classroom.

Ruth reported that there were a few people from different European countries who participated. The demographic of those attending the flag-making workshop was mostly older/retired people as the workshops ran in the daytime during the week, the majority of people were above 40 years old with a few young moms. The average age of the hand sewing group was around 60.

Both types of workshops saw a mix of male and female attendants.

Participant Data:



## Raise the profile and confidence of the Boston Hanse Group

Boston Unfurled was the first arts project that Boston Hanse Group ran and it was chosen specifically to provide additional outcomes to help with the organisation's development and raise its profile.

The project received good attention in local newspapers, with a range of articles following along with each step of the project. There was also a report on the radio. Lindsey McBarron saw a significant increase in reach of Facebook posts by the Boston Hanse Group and more people have liked the organisation's page.

As the workshops were held at the Guildhall, which is a central and famous building in Boston, people dropped by to see what was going on and learned this way about the project and the Boston Hanse Group. Ruth Pigott reported that people showed a lot of interest in the project and the Group.

The parade of the flags and their subsequent exhibition has increased the visibility of the project and knowledge of the Boston Hanse Group manifold. As a result of the success of the project, people asked whether another event could be run in the future.

Many people were interested in becoming part of the Boston Hanse Group, Lindsey McBarron reported that around 60-70 people signed up to become members as a result of Boston Unfurled. Additionally, there was also an increase in interest in Transported and the events and activities they run.



## Story of Change

By working with the Transported Team, the Boston Hanse Group wanted to ensure that quality arts experiences are at the very centre of the programme, engaging local residents in the work and ensuring that high quality artworks are created that proudly and positively reflect Boston in its fabulous diversity.

As the project is embedded within Transported, its wider outcomes were also reflected in Transported's Story of Change, which is displayed on the following page. The outcomes listed on there are:

*Creating public art with visual impact and surprise, sharing narratives of people and place*

This was at the heart of Boston Unfurled. The community was asked to share their stories and their take on Boston's history and reflect this in a visual way. Beyond the participants, the wider community was able to see and take pride in the artwork that showcased their town.

*So people are healthy and happy, confident and proud*

Participants were able to enjoy the company of others on a regular basis and formed new friendships. Some reported improved mental health as a result of participating in the sewing workshops. Beyond that, many people left the workshop empowered, encouraged and confident to create more in the future and try out new techniques.

*A sense of history, community and pride and place and better friends and family*

The artists reported that in conversations at the workshops people expressed a lot of interest in their town's history and it also came through that they feel very proud of the place that Boston is. This sentiment also came through and was nurtured in the creative process. The designs featured different stories and included a mix of both

historical and present motives, such as sheep, which were a significant part of medieval trade and the Boston fair which many present residents love. Some motives connected the present and the past really well, for example the Boston Stump which has been a landmark in Boston for many years.

## Story of Change (to be reviewed after Y1)

**Everyone:**

A context of low engagement and lack of a sense of entitlement

### Effective programme management:

Management that is strategic and maximises 'yield'; using the right roles and maintaining commitment

Focusing on need, team work and partnerships, communicated with frequent reviews, word of mouth and the right publicity

Creating tangible, material culture, and maintaining impact with sustainable approaches

### To deliver a varied programme within new and existing opportunities:

A programme that is relevant, accessible, developmental and high quality

To make the everyday exceptional: Fun; Captivating; Empowering

To engage and increase ambition, mixing people and making a difference

*2 To what extent was excellence achieved?*

*3 What approaches succeeded?*

*1 Were new people engaged and inspired?*



Evaluation managed by MB Associates

**Who?**

**How?**

**What**

**Why?**

Tangible products

Personal

Social outcomes

Community

### With partners

Public Sector & Private Sector

With an approach that suits the public sector, and an appropriate approach for business

Funded thru' investment, earned income and in-kind resources with support to groups to raise their own funds

Delivering pilots and bespoke and relevant activity with public and private partners

embedded and funded in the public sector, with productive partnerships in the private sector

Developing people's practical, creative, cultural and decision skills

Workforce development & team building for diversification & productivity

Sustaining the arts and developing local economies

### For audiences & participants

Residents, families, visitors, voluntary sector and community

Delivering in-depth, and staged over time for audiences and participants

That ranges from big, bold and outdoors, to small, subtle and shared

Creating public art with visual impact and surprise, sharing narratives of people, place

So people are healthy, and happy; confident and proud

A sense of history, community and pride in place and better friends and family

## Conclusion

Boston Unfurled empowered residents of Boston to engage with their town, learn about its history, think about what Boston's identity is today and how that can be represented. Participants learned new skills which gave them confidence in their own abilities and made them excited about making. Makers proudly showcased their flags to other Bostonians and their designs and creations were also seen by an international audience at the Hanseatic league festival.

In the workshops participants did not only learn new crafts and techniques but also engaged in discussion about Boston's historical links to Europe and how this impacts life in Boston today. This learning was also made available to a wider audience at the exhibition that started the project. This week, audience members have the opportunity to see the exhibition once more together with the finished flags.

Participants were able to form new relationships and friendships and worked together with a diverse group of other makers of different ages and genders. Whilst not many foreign national participated, the project provided helpful learning on how to make future events more suitable and gave the Boston Hanse Group a greater enthusiasm to bring Bostonians together. The large number of new members and the increased publicity has propelled the organisation forward and given it fresh momentum to keep exploring Boston's identity as a Hanseatic, diverse place.



*Photo: Boston Hanse Group*