

# SEE MONSTER

## Unveiling local community perceptions and impacts in Weston-super-Mare: an exploratory study.

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Figure 1. The SEE Monster (Author, 2022)

## Methods

Multi-method approach of triangulation allows for gaps in main method alongside accounting for any potential low response rates. It also ensures for another perspective when conducting data analysis.

- 2 online surveys, one before the exhibition opened and one afterward posted on local discussion groups.
- Local stakeholder semi-structured interviews, 3 conducted out of 20 requests. 20 minutes each.
- Participant observation, conducted on the residents day of the exhibition for one hour.



## Recommendations

Public art planning in the future should not take a generic approach; what works for one town may not work for another. Community voices should be consulted more often, especially on exhibitions as large as this. Communities can also be helpful sources of ideas for what their town actually needs.

Weston-super-Mare was one of ten locations selected by the government for public art exhibition 'SEE Monster'. An exhibition on this scale is not without controversy, and this has been prominent on locals. Public art research in geography is scarce in the context of the locals perspectives. Few local perspectives are considered in the exploration of the impacts of the arts. This project aims to fill this gap in knowledge through understanding how locals feel and are impacted by short-term exhibitions. Through a qualitative, multi-method approach of primary research, these insights have been investigated. By understanding common insights identified by locals, policymakers can ensure that future public art is in the interests of the community.

## Findings

### Plop art (Miles, 1997)

- The exhibition has no place association with the town.
- Despite this, most feel intrigued towards the exhibition due to Weston's lack of association with oil rigs; it is the first time seeing one in person.

### Throwtogetherness (Massey, 2005)

- SEE Monster has created a collective atmosphere of locals being interested.
- Sometimes the atmosphere was negative due to hostile online interactions.
- Community created from interest evidenced in online forums and observation.

### Big expectations, big let down

- Most feel underwhelmed despite the marketing of the exhibition.
- Negative connections formed due to the lack of events and features promised by event organisers.
- Lack of educational information outside of schools; adults felt they had not learnt anything upon visiting from signage and staff.

### Interruption of place attachment

- Those aged 55+ felt the SEE Monster threatened their memories of being in the Tropicana because it indicated change or the future (see figure 2).
- Community collective nostalgia felt by many.
- Despite its threat, many experienced 'FOMO' and visited anyway.

### Appearance

- Sensational in the night, underwhelming in the day.
- 'Blot on the landscape' but allowed locals to admire views of the town.

### Political misjudgement

- A government 'waste of money' placed in an area prone to economic hardship, therefore poorly timed with recent cost of living crises.
- Locals recommended other affordable ways to spend money that the SEE Monster cost.

Figure 2. The Tropicana, est date 1983 - 2000 (Tropicana, n.d.)



Figure 3. The Tropicana in 2014 (Eye in the sky, 2014)



Figure 4. Proposal images of the SEE Monster (Unboxed, 2022)



## References

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