Culture and Place in Britain

How arts and culture help to create healthier and more prosperous places for everyone

KEY CITIES UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

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Written and edited by Kasper de Graaf FRSA

Contributors Thea Behrman, Eleanor Clyde-Evans, Prof. Shirley Congdon, Dr Karina Croucher, Laura Dyer, Prof. Chris Gaffney, Orlando Gough, Tim Harrison, Prof. Nick Henry, Prof. Maria Hinfelaar, Prof. Nicky Marsh, Stephen Marston, Ed Matthews-Gentle, Cllr John Merry, Dr Josh Siepel, Sarie Mairs Slee, Cllr Alan Waters

Additional research Chris Batsford, Lucy Bird, Lotte Boumelha, Pascale de Graaf, Sara Harrison, John McLinden, Joe Shaw, Rachel Todd, Thomas Valentine

Special thanks to Rebecca Blackman, Paul Bristow, Joanne Dobson, Eliza Easton, Alastair Evans, Malcolm Garrett MBE RDI, Peter Knott, Clare Kristensen, Benjamin Kulka, Rebecca Long-Bailey MP, Iain McCreaddie, Lucie Murray, Lauren Pascu, Simon Poulter, Emma Squire CBE, Jonathan Stancombe, John Stevenson MP, Anna Vinegrad

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Front cover: (L) Lincoln's Imp Trail is an art trail with 30 lifesize imp sculptures. Photo: John Aron / The Lincolnite. (R) This is the city – Coventry UK City of Culture 2021. Photo: Joe Bailey.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACW	Arts Council of Wales
ACNI	Arts Council of Northern Ireland
AHRC	Arts & Humanities Research Council
APPG	All-Party Parliamentary Group
APW	Arts Portfolio Wales Organisation (ACW)
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
BCP	Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole
CoC	UK City of Culture
CPP	Creative People and Places
CRF	Culture Recovery Fund
CS	Creative Scotland
DCMS	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
KTN	Innovate UK's Knowledge Transfer Network
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
NES	North-East Somerset
NLHF	National Lottery Heritage Fund
NPO	National Portfolio Organisation
NTE	Night-time Economy
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PEC	Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre
RFO	Regularly Funded Organisation (CS)
SF	(Covid) Stabilisation Fund (ACW)
UKRI	UK Research & Innovation
URF	(Covid) Urgent Recovery Fund (ACW)

Foreword

Key Cities and Arts Council England share a conviction that arts and culture enrich the lives of individuals and communities throughout the country. We believe also that they have a crucial role to play in reimagining and regenerating our towns and cities and the wider areas they serve.

Local and central government have a responsibility to work together to foster the local partnerships, capabilities and leadership that are needed to create an environment in which culture can flourish for everyone. That collaboration is expressed in close partnership working between local government and the Arts Council. The Arts Council, as an expert sector development agency, works alongside local authorities which provide vision and leadership for place and are able to bring together local partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors. But connections, priorities and networks are not only shared within our regions. Our places and cultural institutions have much to learn from – and teach – others in different parts of the country and beyond.

This report looks in some detail at what culture means in the 27 Key Cities and how that translates into public funding programmes. It is a significant snapshot of culture and place in 2023, viewed from the perspective of a diverse network of places that together present many of the challenges as well as the opportunities that culture speaks to in our national life. The data also offers a baseline that can be further interrogated and built upon in years to come, as the importance of Place in national policy is increasingly understood.

We are grateful to all those who have contributed to bringing this detailed picture together, including the cities, the universities in the Key Cities Innovation Network, colleagues at the Arts Council of Wales and Creative Scotland, other experts including those at the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre and stakeholders from the culture sector.

The report's analysis and recommendations are Key Cities' alone, but Arts Council England has worked in close partnership with the authors to provide robust and verified data within the focus area. We hope to build further on that partnership in the years to come for the benefit of culture not only in the Key Cities but for individuals and communities throughout the country.

Cllr John Merry CBE
Chair of Key Cities
Deputy City Mayor of Salford

Laura Dyer MBE
Deputy Chief Executive
Places, Engagement & Libraries
Arts Council England

Summary

The culture of the 27 Key Cities that are dotted throughout the country is incredibly diverse.

POLICY REVIEW

Diverse and collaborative

With urban and rural, highly-engaged as well as hard to reach communities, Key Cities combines ancient heritage with new communities formed in the last half century. It includes UNESCO Creative Cities and UK Cities of Culture. It has areas where opportunity is plentiful and others that are crying out for it. But what they have in common is that culture is important to all of them and they have a shared belief in working together to leverage its potential.

Key Cities co-sponsored the Cultural Cities Enquiry and supports its recommendation of developing Cultural Compacts as diverse, cross-sector, independent local partnerships.

Supporting culture

In a Key Cities Workshop, the cities expressed a shared view that funding for culture should be accessible to all cities and towns, contingent on building effective local partnerships and on demonstrating community engagement and benefit. Member cities favoured knowledge sharing across government on opportunities for culture to repurpose spaces and revitalise town centres.

A policy discussion with DCMS, Arts Council England and Parliamentarians organised by the Key Cities APPG examined government support for culture through its funding programmes and initiatives such as UK City of Culture.

This has led to a wider collaboration with Arts Council England, focused on cultural impact, information gathering, Priority Places, innovation, supporting member cities in shaping development proposals, exploring knowledge exchange and looking at the benefit of culture across other policy areas.

Benefits

Existing evidence for the wider benefits of culture that are claimed for the economy, health and wellbeing, society and education includes ***regeneration*** – although this carries risks for communities too, if not rooted in their needs and experience – ***positive mental and physical health outcomes***, ***increased pride*** and ***interest in places***. Public funding and commercial approaches to arts and culture both have an important role to play, but the wider picture is that the benefits brought by culture are underestimated because of a lack of internationally comparable data.

A survey of Key Cities revealed that most prioritise economic benefit in order to deliver on wider social objectives. Community cohesion, connecting with hard-to-reach groups, and health and wellbeing are all within the top 10 priorities, but rank below culture-led regeneration, skills, revitalising town centres, economic growth and jobs. That picture is shared across the network, but even more pronounced in the north than the south. There are interesting non-regional patterns in cultural priorities: Blackpool and Norwich focusing on regeneration, Bradford and Southampton on identity, Salford finding common ground on hard-to-reach groups with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

Local Government

All Key Cities invest significantly in culture and most have, or are developing, partnerships such as Cultural Compacts. With three already having won the UK City of Culture designation, most member cities see the programme as a positive way to leverage the benefits of culture.

Key Cities supports the recommendations of the recent LGA Commission on Culture and Local Government to improve access, develop creative industries, promote cultural education, jobs and the role of culture in improving health and wellbeing. How does local government empower culture without controlling, enable without inhibiting? Partnership with community organisations, industry and anchor institutions is key to developing sector strength and working across related policy areas such as skills.

Policy and strategies

Awareness of Place is growing as a factor in government policy and driving some funding programmes, although the overall funding picture, following a decade of austerity, remains affected by the shocks of post-Brexit adjustments, the Covid pandemic and inflation. The underlying trend in funding for culture is away from revenue support towards investing in capacity and broadening engagement. A review of the culture strategies of the 27 Key Cities underlines the importance of “strategic fit” with the wider priorities of a place.

Skills and jobs Culture is projected to create a million new jobs this decade – but for whom? Diversity in the creative industries is poor and not improving, and this is a significant challenge and opportunity for unlocking talent.

Driving growth Of the nine creative clusters established by the government following the Bazalgette Review, only three have a direct connection with any of the 27 Key Cities. How can culture and creativity drive growth in the places that are outside combined authorities and creative clusters? Evidence from microclusters and community wealth building through local procurement are encouraging and should be further explored.

Cities of Culture Evaluating the experience of the three UK Cities of Culture since 2013 points to the importance of building legacy and evaluation planning into programme development from the start. Cities competing unsuccessfully for the designation also benefit from the process and the government has started giving some funding to runners-up to build on their ideas.

EXPERT EVIDENCE

Town Centres University of Gloucestershire VC Stephen Marston describes the university's role in partnering with the city of Gloucester to put culture at the heart of redevelopng the city centre, and how the partnership is supported by Arts Council England.

Evaluation Coventry University's Professor Nick Henry sets out how Coventry and Warwick Universities developed an evaluation model not only for Coventry but also for future UK Cities of Culture.

Town and gown University of Bradford VC Professor Shirley Congdon and colleagues describe the active role of the university and its Culture and Identity Research Group in the cultural life of the city including UK City of Culture 2025.

Bid benefit Professor Maria Hinfelaar, VC of the University of Wrexham Glyndwr, shows how a failed bid for UK City of Culture energised the city and provided the platform for a multi-year research opportunity and events programme to bid for 2029.

Cultural Compact Salford's Sarie Mairs Slee presents Suprema Lex, the local partnership that is in effect a Cultural Compact, and its functioning as a compass for the city's path through the pandemic.

Town and country The crucial wider relationship between cities and their counties and regions is explored from a cultural perspective by Creative Lancashire's Ed Matthews-Gentle.

Public engagement Composer Orlando Gough relates his experience in developing a major musical spectacle and public engagement event for Kirklees' Year of Music programme, highlighting the diverse cuiltural life of the region and connecting with its heritage.

National and international networks Tim Harrison of We Live Here describes how a new programme of cultural collaboration between communities across the UK and internationally is being developed.

Culture creating skills Metal's Thea Behrman shows how the Estuary Festival, connecting coastal communities in Kent and Essex, has created opportunities for creative skills development and careers for local young people.

Ecosystems The University of Southampton's Professor Nicky Marsh outlines the AHRC's 'And Towns' programme, exploring the needs and ecosystems of towns and smaller cities.

Microclusters Dr Josh Siepel of the University of Sussex and the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre examines the case for supporting creative industry microclusters as engines for growth.

DATA

Compare and contrast A broad selection of data from the Arts Councils, ONS and others is viewed through the lens of the 27 Key Cities to enable member cities and others to compare and contrast, to facilitate more general insights and to inform investment.

Capacity Public investment before and during the pandemic is closely connected with local capacity. NPO investment in the Key Cities has been increased by a quarter for the next period. Free public libraries continue to be an important resource for many.

Engagement Higher levels of engagement with culture are associated with lower levels of deprivation.

Outcomes The Priority Places and Creative People and Places programmes deliver positive outcomes for individuals and build local ecosystems.

The power of partnership

Cllr Alan Waters
Leader of Norwich City Council
Deputy Chair and Culture Lead of Key Cities

Cooperation is at the heart of Key Cities' approach to culture. Cooperation with communities, cultural organisations, anchor institutions and stakeholders in our cities. Cooperation with each other and with towns and cities across the country and beyond. Cooperation with funding bodies and government across all relevant policy areas.

There is a long track record of cities working collaboratively with partners in this area, contributing crucial local authority investment and support to deliver the benefits that are well described here, in a report that itself is a picture of collaborative effort with valuable contributions from our universities as well as other stakeholders and experts. Our efforts are greatly strengthened by the innovation network we started in the past year, which will add significant value to the cultural brief by driving innovation and understanding.

In this report we offer a policy review with expert evidence and extensive data, for our member cities and everyone else to draw their own conclusions. For our part, we have distilled a series of recommendations to leverage the power of culture for all our places and, in doing so, for the productivity and wellbeing of the whole country.

There are many interesting stories in this report, which cities can use to look at themselves in the context of similar places elsewhere. Each place is different, but all our efforts contribute to developing best practice that we can share – on convening, consulting and cocreating with our communities and stakeholders, on forming effective Cultural Compacts to unlock empowerment and opportunity, on working with anchor institutions and others to reinvigorate our town centres and stimulate growth through the creative industries. There are lessons here too about the value of the UK Cities of Culture programme as a catalyst for developing our places, not only for those who win the title, and about how to make sure the objectives are achieved.

We highlight the connection between town and country, city and rural, that is so significant to the experience of many of our member cities. Efforts to build sustainable approaches around that in deprived communities in Essex, Kent and other parts fits well with Arts Council England investment in those areas.

Sharing these experiences may spark new collaborations – and perhaps a role for the Key Cities network in coordination. Certainly, we will continue collaborating to better understand and communicate the benefits and opportunities that culture brings to our cities and to those who live and work in them.

"Culture is central to sustainability. Government should embrace the innovation and inclusive growth it promises and invest more in long-term capacity building."

This report is a contribution to strengthening our partnership with central government through better understanding and transparency around the needs and opportunities. We often talk about culture's ability to regenerate and reimagine places. For many that opportunity is still more distant than it needs to be, with the benefits of devolution going to metropolitan authorities, and investment for creative innovation to the major clusters. These are both important in opening up new horizons, but the PEC research about microclusters and community wealth building suggests we have a chance to avoid creating fresh divides.

We have seen some of this thinking coming into play in Arts Council England's latest spending round, and the increase in NPO funding within the Key Cities is welcome. Government departments recognise the value of cultural investment for their own policy agendas, but a large part of cultural investment is discretionary spending by local authorities and we risk throwing out the golden eggs by squeezing that funding.

Culture is central to sustainability, and to forming an alliance with people and communities everywhere to build resilient and sustainable approaches. Key Cities' aim is to persuade government that at a time when the country faces unprecedented social and economic pressures, we should not direct cultural investment away from parts of the country where we are doing well, but embrace the innovation and inclusive growth that are promised by culture and our creative industries everywhere, and prioritise investment in the sector for patient, long-term capacity building.

Recommendations

Culture reaches the parts other policies cannot reach, and connects with key levelling up policies such as skills and jobs, health inequalities, transport, diversity and inclusion, and sustainable communities.

KEY CITIES RECOMMENDS THAT:

GOVERNMENT places culture at the heart of a renewed drive for **hyperlocal devolution**, connecting policy agendas to make sure that all places in the UK, both within and outside mayoral combined authorities and creative clusters, are empowered and supported to drive local growth.

GOVERNMENT through AHRC working with Arts Council England establishes a £100m nationwide development programme for **creative industries microclusters** outside Creative Clusters.

GOVERNMENT develops further programmes alongside Levelling Up for Culture Places and Creative People and Places working across policy areas aimed at **patient building of ecosystems** and scaling up capacity needed for deprived areas to compete.

GOVERNMENT supports local authorities to enable public libraries to continue evolving their offer to meet local need, and to continue providing **free public libraries** as an essential service supporting local communities.

GOVERNMENT through Arts Council England funds the establishment of a **cooperative platform** for and owned by Cultural Compacts to promote collaboration, knowledge exchange and best practice.

KEY CITIES AND ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND collaborate to **promote development of Cultural Compacts** as genuinely cross-sector partnerships. working out the need and the potential for culture to improve their places and to feed into the wider strategy of a place.

KEY CITIES AND ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND catalyse and support development of strategic programmes and networks across places which have shared cultural priorities to explore **cultural collaboration and knowledge exchange**, not only within the UK but also, with British Council, between regional towns and cities across Europe and further afield.

KEY CITIES AND ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND collaborate to develop the existence of a well-function ing **Cultural Compact as a quality mark** for public and private sector place-based investment.

KEY CITIES INNOVATION NETWORK AND ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND collaborate to develop models and frameworks for **better and internationally comparable data** about the benefits of culture for people and places.

KEY CITIES INNOVATION NETWORK AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES PEC establish a joint study into the potential and strategies for **creative-led inclusive growth** in all parts of the country.

KEY CITIES works with the Key Cities Innovation Network to develop new models for **monitoring, evaluation and longitudinal research** into the contribution of culture to place-based development, including models for optimal data collection to suit both hyperlocal and generalised needs.

MEMBER CITIES (and cities and towns more widely) share best practice models of **community engagement** that can better connect diverse communities, encourage meaningful civic participation and build community cohesion.

MEMBER CITIES use their convening power to continue developing and empowering **cross-sector Cultural Compact partnerships** as key drivers of their cultural strategy, taking into account the learnings of the Cultural Compacts and Creative People and Places evaluations.

Part One:
Policy review

Culture and Key Cities

Spencer Tunick's Sea of Hull nude artwork during Hull's year as UK City of Culture. Photo: PA

In February and March 2023, Huddersfield Art Gallery hosts *Of Time And Place*, an exhibition that asks whether it is the people or the buildings, the past or the present, the language or the landscape that make up the cultural heart of the town, while the surrounding Kirklees district is poised to launch its Year of Music with young people front and centre, engaging communities and creating new opportunities to make, play and listen to music.

In March, two months before its annual festival of literature and music, the city of Bath will see the closure of its famed Fashion Museum as the first stage of a major infrastructure project to build a new home for the museum surrounded by a fashion district in the city centre's Milsom Quarter.

"Culture is part of what distinguishes us as cities"

At the northern tip of England, the city of Carlisle – just sixteen miles from the wall built in AD 122 by the Roman emperor Hadrian to protect the northernmost edge of his global empire from the Caledonian hordes beyond, and home to a magnificent cathedral and castle dating from the 12th and 11th centuries respectively – celebrates its heritage as a military stronghold alongside a vibrant cultural offer for residents and for visitors from the region and around the world.

Three Key Cities are UNESCO Creative Cities: Bradford – home to the National Science and Media Museum – is a City of Film, while Exeter and Norwich are Cities of Literature.

The importance attached to culture by Key Cities is illustrated by the fact that three of the four cities that have been named as UK City of Culture since the designation was launched in 2009 are members of the network – Hull in 2017, Coventry in 2021, and Bradford is preparing for its year as UK City of Culture in 2025. Elsewhere in this report (p. 72), we look at what the programme has delivered for the places and people of Derry, Hull and Coventry and we look ahead at Bradford's plans for 2025.

But it's not just Cities of Culture. As the Key Cities Survey reveals, many other cities and towns are conscious of the benefits that culture brings to places. It is an important driver of growth and beneficial outcomes for all places. It is, as Cllr John Merry, the chair of Key Cities and deputy mayor of Salford, told the Key Cities Culture Workshop in July 2021, "part of what distinguishes us as cities." Apart from the cultural offer to residents and to the wider area, he pointed to its significant role in regeneration. In Salford, the opening of the Lowry Centre in a previously run-down area in 2000 attracted much wider investment, a crucial precursor to the creation of Media City as the home of the BBC ten years later, creating thousands of new jobs in Greater Manchester.

Places that do not currently aspire to be UK City of Culture are no less interested in the benefits culture can bring by pursuing policies that are right for them. The Creative Industries Council's recent report ***Place Matters***[1] noted that four Key Cities (Doncaster, Gloucester, Hull and Medway) had submitted bids to the Levelling Up Fund with a cultural/creative industries component. Bids with such a component to the Towns Fund were submitted by eight Key Cities (Blackpool, Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole, Carlisle, Doncaster, Lincoln, Norwich, Preston and Wolverhampton).

THE CULTURAL CITIES ENQUIRY

In 2018, Key Cities helped establish an independent, industry-led enquiry looking into how the multiple benefits of culture can best be leveraged in the urban context.

The Cultural Cities Enquiry – sponsored by Arts Council England, Key Cities, Core Cities, Belfast City Council, Creative Scotland and the Arts Council of Wales, and supported by London Councils and Arts Council Northern Ireland – was launched in April 2018 by Arts Council England Chair Sir Nicholas Serota to investigate the potential future for culture in cities across the UK with 13 commissioners including Key Cities' Cllr Alan Waters, deputy chair of Key Cities and leader of Norwich City Council, under the chairmanship of Dame Jayne-Anne Gadhia.

At the outset, the enquiry's aim was to investigate how policy makers, funders, and culture creators and providers can create an environment in which culture has the resources to flourish, looking specifically at possibilities such as:

- How culture's contribution to government priorities like integrated communities, combating loneliness, or skills and education could unlock new funding streams

In a series of reports, the independent Cultural Cities Enquiry recommended sector-led Cultural Compacts as the best way to maximise the beneficial impact of culture locally.

- How tax incentives may be used to encourage cultural investment and philanthropy
- How cultural organisations could be supported to develop sources of commercial revenue, to become more self-sustaining
- How cities and cultural organisations can make greater use of innovative financing mechanisms - including social investment, peer-to-peer lending and other forms of repayable finance
- How non-traditional sources of giving may be increased, including at community level, through crowdfunding or local sponsorship
- Whether the planning system or incentives for developers could be used more effectively to provide spaces for culture

These questions stand in even sharper relief in 2022, in the aftermath of a global pandemic with the economy under strain from rising inflation and a cost-of-living crisis. The work done by the Cultural Cities Enquiry, however, makes a powerful case that investment in culture is an essential element in driving growth and mitigating the effects of economic stress.

In its 2019 report[2], the Cultural Cities Enquiry noted that culture is key to delivering many of the broader improvements that national and local government seek: revitalising urban centres, stimulating the creative industries, developing skills, creating jobs, inspiring innovation, building community cohesion, improving mental health, driving change, attracting investment and enabling growth.

Its central recommendation of creating local Cultural Com-

pacts is something Key Cities regards as a keystone policy on which to build. The idea of these cultural sector-led Compacts is to bring together local partners with a shared interest in maximising the civic role of culture – business, universities, the NHS, local authorities and planning partnerships such as LEPs – to maximise the social and economic benefits from a thriving cultural ecosystem.

The government responded by providing seed funding through DCMS and Arts Council England to help 20 cities and towns set up Compacts, and 18 months later an Arts Council-commissioned evaluation by BOP Consulting reported that this had created new visions and ambitions and positioned culture more centrally in the local agenda, adding value and making a difference. It also highlighted lessons to make the initiative even more effective, namely that Compacts should be culture sector-led, the chair must be an effective and independent champion, and that Compacts must learn to be genuinely cross-sector.[3]

The Cultural Cities Enquiry had meanwhile reconvened to consider culture's role in post-Covid recovery and made a series of fresh recommendations in a Cultural Cities Recovery report[4], from funding Compacts in a further 100 cities and towns, to subsidising tickets in a culture equivalent of the Eat Out to Help Out scheme, in an effort to turbocharge the wider benefits that could deliver. Two months later the Enquiry published a very useful and instructive collection of 20 case studies[5] clustered around the Enquiry's themes of Leadership, Investment, Talent and Place, illustrating the benefits of partnership in transforming the aspirations and perceptions of a place.

The Key Cities culture survey carried out for this report shows broad support for local partnerships as a mechanism to promote culture. The evaluation of Cultural Compacts to date can help places structure and organise those partnerships in ways most likely to achieve the beneficial outcomes they seek.

As a group, Key Cities strongly supports sector-led, inclusive and well-run Cultural Compacts as a means to achieve sustainable social benefit and economic growth through culture and will work with members and Arts Council England to promote knowledge sharing and best practice, and to support coordination.

KEY CITIES CULTURE WORKSHOP

A workshop of 16 cities in July 2021 concluded that an even spread of investment in culture for all towns and cities, based on their populations and weighted to tackle deprivation, was one of the most effective tools the government could use to deliver the economic and social benefits of culture everywhere.

In a wide-ranging discussion about cultural highs and lows, Kirklees council's service director for culture and the visitor economy, Adele Poppleton, pointed to a programme of commissioning local artists – some of whom had worked internationally but never locally, to create rapid public art interventions in the area, in a pilot that tested so positively that it is being turned into a regular programme. Among other initiatives, Kirklees has looked internationally for inspiration and created a new outdoor gallery, and is testing ideas for musical projects as part of Kirklees' Year of Music programme in 2023.

These efforts are seen as key to economic recovery and ambitions to achieve the UK's fastest return to pre-pandemic levels of footfall. Kirklees is building partnerships, and plans to explore the potential of the Cultural Compact process.

Represented by leader Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe and healthy people and places portfolio lead Cllr Sarah Ferriby, Bradford cited the success of its Cultural Place Partnership, which supported the city's bid for UK City of Culture 2025. They pointed also to Bradford's Cultural Voice Forum, which continued offering resources and productions to communities during the pandemic – distributing art packs to children and young people, performing art groups working with domestic abuse victims and distributing content through online channels such as YouTube.

Back to the future

Newport (under the aegis of the Arts Council of Wales, not Arts Council England) sees strong opportunities to link its cultural offer to its regeneration strategy, reported the city's regeneration manager Matthew Tribbeck.

Newport is rich in nationally significant heritage assets, including the Transporter Bridge – the second and the oldest-surviving suspended ferry bridge in the UK, one of only ten still operational worldwide – and the Westgate Hotel, known for its associations with the Chartist Uprising in 1883. Newport has been successful in linking its heritage to regeneration with projects such as the restoration of the Transporter Bridge with a £15m grant from the National Lottery Heritage Lottery Fund

Culture in the child-friendly city

Cllr Alan Jarrett, the leader of Medway Council, told the workshop how culture is central to the council's approach to placemaking and community.

Presenting a detailed look at the Medway experience, council leader Cllr Alan Jarrett told the Key Cities Culture Workshop that the Cultural Compact process had brought the community together – not around funding, but around identity and aspiration, addressing health inequalities and opportunities for young people, and around initiatives such as reanimating town centres and creating a child-friendly city. Culture has long been prioritised by the local authority, whose "Ideas Test" – an Arts Council-funded Creative People and Places programme – has run since 2013, collaborating with Swale and also more widely in the context of the North Kent Partnership.

The cultural strategy is owned by a Medway-wide partnership with shared goals, mutual respect and strategic leadership at its core, with five sectors represented at Board level: children and young people, business and economic growth, health and wellbeing, the voluntary sector and the local authority, alongside the chair of Creative Medway. The approach is to co-create and co-deliver a holistic vision for culture in a place, connecting the cultural sector to broader issues that intersect with the aims of other organisations and agencies.

In Cllr Jarrett's view, the Compact helps to "park some of the noise" of the loudest voices, while connecting with harder to reach groups to make sure everyone is included.

As a collection of towns that came together in a new authority 23 years ago, culture is central to Medway's placemaking agenda and it was one of the contenders to become UK City of Culture 2025.

Medway's vision is to be internationally recognised for its culture and creativity by 2030, demonstrating its positive impacts on everyone's lives. The Cultural Compact process plays a key role in cementing that approach and connecting the community and wider stakeholders to the cultural strategy.

and the Welsh government.

Citywide programmes such as the Elephant Parade in London and Manchester's Bee in the City have proved very effective in engaging families, children, schools and businesses in art and cultural activity. A similar scheme in Lincoln, the Lincoln Imp Trail, was described by the city's deputy leader Cllr Donald Nannestad. Artists were commissioned to create individually-designed large "imp" sculptures to reactivate 30 locations along the trail route. The "mass participation public art event", organised by Lincoln Business Improvement Group with Wild in Art, has already engaged many people and organisations, with spin-offs including 50 individually customised "mini imps" created by schools, colleges and universities.

The head of Salford's Culture & Place Partnership, Sarie Mairs Slee, highlighted Box on the Docks, an initiative from developers Peel L&P who commissioned artists to adorn 30 sheds and greenhouses as hospitality pods for outdoor dining in the MediaCity area. Even in the Covid-restricted period the project succeeded in drawing new audiences, creating new relationships and demonstrating the demand for this sort of intervention. Salford's annual light festival was another example that draws in many people.

Salford's Cultural Compact – called "Suprema Lex" (referencing Cicero's observation and Salford's motto that the welfare of the people is the "highest law") – is coordinated by the Culture and Place Partnership, which brings together the local authority, the University of Salford and MediaCity UK with cultural institutions such as The Lowry, Walk The Plank and creative artist hub Islington Mill, with voluntary sector organisations and initiatives such as the Local Cultural Education Partnership. Salford's policy officer Niamh Whitney echoed the view of other cities, saying the Compact had been hugely successful in bringing people together.

In Norwich, which as a UNESCO City of Literature, home to the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts and long-established centre for arts education enjoys a global reputation for its culture, the city council sees cultural activities as an opportunity to support democratic engagement – a great example of which was an extended visit in 2021 of Dippy the Dinosaur – the Natural History Museum's iconic Diplodocus cast – which took up residence in the nave of Norwich Cathedral and attracted many thousands of visitors including primary and secondary schoolchildren and families, complemented with illustrations commissioned from local artists.

Could do better

The workshop also looked at examples that were less successful, where lessons could be learned. Not sufficiently co-creating with communities. Not including 'invisible' communities in the local narrative. Not actively valuing minority groups. Not reconciling sometimes differing visions of culture between cities and surrounding areas.

In Kirklees, connecting with Muslim women and children – after initial obstacles – produced valuable insights into what they needed and when. The council has acquired a disused shopping centre and will allow diverse groups to take over units before it is eventually redeveloped, to create visibility for obscured groups. Flying flags to mark special days such as Windrush Day is another way to show communities they are seen, valued, and part of the mainstream conversation.

In Salford, the city must meet the challenge of ensuring that all its communities can benefit from its cultural offer. Some groups, for example children and young people in some communities, have never had cultural experiences like attending the theatre, going to an an art gallery or to a football match. In South Wales, Newport is keen to revitalise its strong independent music scene, having lost ground to cities like Cardiff and Bristol.

Like Salford, Bradford felt it had more to do to ensure its cultural offer reaches everyone. They'd like to see more locally-produced cultural output that resonates with residents. Early in Bradford's culture journey the council tended to lead, but this is neither desirable nor sustainable in Covid-constrained times. There is a need to empower more groups and organisations to lead and to access different funding sources, with the council supporting and facilitating an ecosystem of culture providers.

Few cities have given much thought to the image potential of their cultural engagement and many feel their cultural story should be better told – to grow engagement, increase effectiveness, attract investment and secure much-needed government support.

Cities working together

There is real scope for members of the Key Cities network to share knowledge, data and experience, and for culture portfolio leads to discuss what works and what is more difficult, while remaining focused on connecting with communities rather than top-down targets. Such collaboration will strengthen rather than undermine cities' sense of their distinctive offer and uniqueness of place. There is, it was felt, a potential role for the network in helping cities in post-Covid recovery to develop new approaches to localism and build on positive aspects of lockdown, such as people reconnecting with the public realm and greenspace assets, leading to new, place-based cultural offers.

An important role for the network would also be to provide knowledge to members about promoting themselves and their culture offers.

Government

Like the Cultural Cities Enquiry, the workshop saw constructive engagement with Arts Council England and its arts funding counterparts in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and with Government more broadly, as key to leveraging the potential of culture in achieving sustainable growth and prosperity in our cities and towns.

Part of this is to do with funding, but equally important is working with relevant Government departments on the broader implications and outcomes.

There is a delicate balance to be struck, for the purpose of government involvement is to enable people, places and communities to thrive – not to direct them centrally. Funding is certainly part of that enabling function, but what should be the ongoing engagement to get the best outcomes for that investment? Equally important is working with relevant government departments on the broader implications and outcomes, such as revitalising urban centres, stimulating the creative industries and delivering positive health outcomes in communities. The creation of local partnerships that is at the heart of the Cultural Compacts process should be matched by coordination with government departments nationally to raise the ambition and potential of place-based investment in culture.

While it is welcome that the government has listened to the Cultural Cities Enquiry (albeit with modest direct funding), there is not much evidence of listening to the local authorities who deliver on the strategy. This gap is not without risk, and ways of building better engagement could fruitfully be explored.

Funding

The Cultural Cities Enquiry called for spending on culture to be maintained at pre-pandemic levels, and Key Cities believes that is a precondition for this strategic approach to succeed.

Short-term and competitive pots of funding do not support a planned, strategic approach to policy. By excluding places, this kind of mechanism is more likely to entrench or redistribute inequality, not eradicate it. City leaders of all political colours are united in their view that cultural and regeneration funding should be based on objective criteria to deliver on the needs of their populations and on the Government's ambitions to level up the country.

"Prosperous societies are ones that take strength from the diversity of their communities. Diversity is a generator of innovation."

The view is that strategic funding for culture should be accessible to all cities and towns. Funding should be contingent on building effective local partnerships that deliver on diversity and inclusion, and evaluation to make sure communities have bought in and see the value of the local approach to culture.

There was consensus support also for two other funding recommendations made by the Cultural Cities Enquiry: stimulating culture through subsidised tickets (that cultural Eat Out to Help Out idea) to trigger a domino effect with economic and social benefits, and using the apprenticeships levy more creatively to boost the sector and support skills development through culture.

Engagement

The role of culture in repurposing spaces and revitalising high streets is widely understood and could be enabled more widely by facilitating a framework for strategic consultation and knowledge sharing with relevant departments such as DLUHC and BEIS.

The Cultural Cities Enquiry highlighted the role of culture in stimulating the creative industries, the fastest growing sector in the UK economy. Cllr Waters emphasised that with its obvious benefits for hospitality, tourism and jobs, and its relative protection from the impacts of automation, the culture sector represents a promising growth area over the next decade. Establishing a joint working group with DCMS to explore this more fully could create opportunities for innovation, effective policy implementation and better outcomes. This can take account of the wider cultural ecology, the inclusion of poorer communities and independent creatives, and reaching out to groups remote from the cultural market, to channel the diversity that is so central to success in the creative sector.

Arts, heritage and culture more broadly, the workshop concluded, all have important roles to play in building resilient communities, connecting with those who are excluded or hard to reach, and supporting mental health and wellbeing. Coordinating with relevant departments where appropriate on issues that affect multiple cities and towns could significantly improve learning and outcomes nationally.

GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT

On 14 September 2021, a meeting of the Key Cities APPG chaired by the MP for Carlisle, John Stevenson, discussed culture policy and opportunities for working with Government, with contributions from Emma Squire, director of Arts, Media and Tourism at DCMS, and Peter Knott, the Midlands region director of Arts Council England.

DCMS

A vibrant cultural offer, Emma Squire emphasised, is fundamental for the success of towns and cities, helping to boost growth, increase visitor numbers, improve talent and generate investment, creating a sense of place and identity, reinvigorating communities, and supporting work and wellbeing.

During the pandemic, DCMS designed and delivered the £2 billion Cultural Recovery Fund jointly with its arms-length funding bodies: Arts Council England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England and the British Film Institute. The funding went to independent cinemas, cultural organisations, museums, heritage bodies, and even to suppliers such as scaffolders, if they could show they were significant to the local culture offer and at risk.

Other funds in addition to regular programme funding include the £250m Cultural Investment Fund to support museums, libraries and cultural organisations with grants from £50,000 to £5m, and the Cultural Development Fund to regenerate communities through capital investment in transformative place-based creative and cultural initiatives with grants between £2m and £5m.

An important programme for culture-led regeneration is that

Blackpool is one of six Key Cities and 54 places across England that are Priority Places for Arts Council England

of the High Streets Heritage Action Zones delivered by Historic England, which can help bring underused heritage buildings on the high street back into use for creative and cultural purposes.

Commenting on the UK City of Culture programme, Emma Squire noted that a record 20 bids for the 2025 title had been received from across the whole of the UK, half of them from Key Cities. “We know that even the bidding process can be hugely valuable in developing strong local, regional and national partnerships and articulating a culture-led vision for a place.”

Culture is also a key component in the Government’s wider programme for investing in places. Culture and heritage is one of the three areas of focus for the £4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund, which aims to empower local areas and benefit communities.

DCMS is working with the Office for National Statistics to add new dimensions to the Treasury Green Book that will make the impact of culture and heritage easier to evidence, as they aren’t always easily monetised.

Arts Council England

Peter Knott was keen to emphasise that cultural regeneration happens at all scales and not just in the largest places.

In terms of the Arts Council’s engagement with Key Cities, overall it is proportional to the size of the network’s population. About ten percent of the population of England live in Key Cities. Ten percent of Arts Council England funding (£64m) went to Key Cities in 2018-2019. 89 of the Arts Council’s 826 National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) in the 2018-2022 period were located in Key Cities (up from 70 in the previous period). However, per capita calculations around cultural investment and regeneration are not always relevant, because they have to be matched to the ambition and capacity of a place to respond to the opportunity. Coventry is a perfect example of ambition and partnership coming together with a clear vision of how culture can lead the regeneration of a place.

Arts Council England works closely with the other funding bodies to help places in developing their Towns Fund bids based on their local vision and capacity.

In the delivery plan for its 10-year ‘Let’s Create’ strategy, Arts Council England is committed to place-based working. Six Key Cities are in its Priority Places cohort, and quite a number of cities in the network have Creative People and Places projects. These, together with the NPOs located in Key Cities, provide a solid foundation on which to build for the benefit not only of cities involved in those schemes but everywhere, as Arts Council England is committed to a universal arts and culture offer for all places.

Many places beyond the original 20 have now started developing Cultural Compacts – often building on partnerships that were already there. Some have harder outputs than others, but all are delivering valuable learning.

In the Midlands, the Lincoln Compact has a real focus on children and young people, and on developing a cultural vision for the city. The Coventry Compact is not only about the City of Culture legacy but looking at alternative models through which arts and culture can be funded, delivering data that is useful and replicable in other places. The Wolverhampton Compact produced an arts and culture think piece to inform the cultural strategy of the city and has fed into the High Streets and Towns Fund proposals, resulting in several cultural projects being funded. Wolverhampton is also leading on coordinating a “Compact-Plus” initiative linking it with the Birmingham and Coventry Compacts.

ONGOING COLLABORATION

Subsequent meetings with Arts Council England explored deepening the collaboration with Key Cities.

Collaboration between the Arts Council and Key Cities working with and through the Compacts can strengthen the case for capacity building in the cultural sector as a key policy objective. Given the continuing pressures on local authority finance, Cultural Compacts can have a significant role to play in the next stage development of many places, and from the Government's point of view, the presence of a Compact provides reassurance when considering investment in culture. Key Cities, representing many Cultural Compact cities, can also play a useful role in supporting the nationwide coordination and knowledge exchange in the Compacts network.

Gathering information from member cities can help provide useful strategic perspectives beyond regions, for example by identifying addressable subsets to inform collaboration and best practice development, and to identify effective ways of supporting places to achieve their objectives.

"The Key Cities network is well placed to develop innovative approaches that are scalable across the whole country, from large places to small."

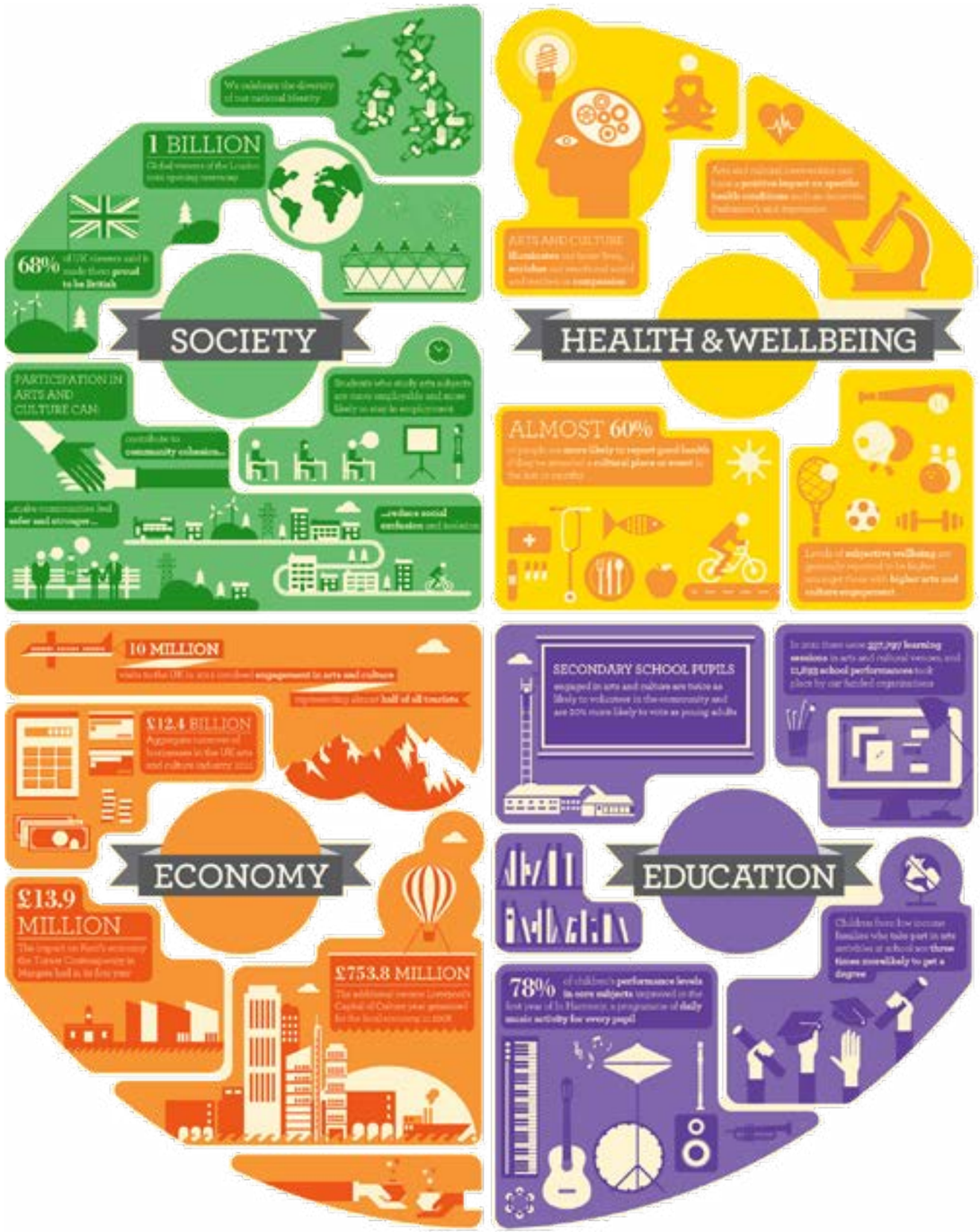
Working together to support and evaluate outcomes in Arts Council England Priority Places that are also Key Cities offers potential benefits not only to those places but wider learnings for Arts Council programmes including Levelling Up for Culture Places, Creative People and Places, UK City of Culture and the Place Partnership Fund.

Innovation is one of the key areas where Arts Council England and Key Cities can fruitfully collaborate, not least given the recent formation of the Key Cities Innovation Network with universities across the member cities, and the significant role universities as local institutions have in stimulating and supporting arts and culture. Given the range, diversity and sizes of member cities, the Key Cities network is well placed to explore and develop innovative approaches that are scalable across the whole country, from large places to small. In a situation where the role of public funding is increasingly to pump-prime rather than provide revenue, innovation in business models is key.

Working with member cities and with Arts Council England, Key Cities will look to develop advice and best-practice guidance on cultural strategies, alternative funding models, building the local case for support and on the formation and development of Cultural Compacts.

The collaboration broadly addresses seven areas:

1. Developing, coordinating and promoting the value of Cultural Compacts
2. Information gathering across the network to enhance support for members
3. Supporting Priority Places in the network
4. Innovation and new business models
5. Supporting members in developing their case for investment
6. Exploring opportunities for knowledge exchange
7. Liaising on the wider benefits of culture across Government



Culture with benefits

Opposite

The Value of Arts and Culture: highlights from our evidence review. (Arts Council England.)

Culture is not a commodity that can be deployed to secure the required return on investment for a city centre development, or a medicine to treat mental health conditions, regardless of its intrinsic value. It is important to remember that without the illumination of our inner lives and enrichment of our emotional world that arts and culture bring, the other benefits do not flow. To reap the wider rewards of culture for a place and its people, it must be considered in its own terms and given the freedom to flourish.

That said, culture is key to delivering many benefits beyond the enriching experience – including successful city centre developments and better mental health.

In a review of the evidence for those wider benefits carried out in 2014[6], Arts Council England categorises them in four main areas: the economy, health and wellbeing, society, and education. It remains a relevant guide for underpinning strategies and business plans.

In the economic area, the benefits for local economies are highlighted as attracting visitors, creating jobs and developing skills, attracting and retaining businesses, revitalising places, and developing talent. More broadly, it looks at areas including the contribution to the national economy, learning improvement, community cohesion, reducing social exclusion and improving health and wellbeing.

Inclusive growth

More recent studies support the argument that culture can deliver across multiple policy areas and offer additional insights for places and local communities. Foremost among these is that if the aim is inclusive growth, culture-led regeneration schemes are better conceived in the local culture sector and the life of the community than in the regeneration department – or at least, schemes should carefully consider likely outcomes in relation to community needs and impacts, including long-term potential for retaining affordable spaces that are needed for community-based arts and culture to thrive.

A 2016 AHRC-funded study[7] noted "an association between long-term arts engagement and positive health outcomes" and that "arts in education has been shown to contribute in important ways to the factors that underpin learning, such as cognitive abilities, confidence, motivation, problem-solving and communication skills."

The study highlighted that major culture-led regeneration projects can risk disrupting communities by driving up values and underlined the importance of including a focus on local community-based culture, e.g. through "small-scale cultural assets – studios, live-music venues, small galleries and so on" to support healthier and more balanced communities.

It went on to note that "some of the most important contributions of arts and culture to other areas are embedded in (…) individual experience: perhaps not economic impact but rather the capacity to be economically innovative and creative; perhaps not urban regeneration driven by large new cultural buildings but rather the way small-scale arts assets and activities might help communities and neighbourhoods; and for health not just clinical arts therapies but also the link between arts engagement and supporting recovery from physical and mental illness."

Placemaking

Blackpool Treasure Trove – a two-year project with seven pop-up museums supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund which ultimately led to Blackpool's Showtown museum which is due to open in 2023 – was identified as a successful example in a 2017 report[8] which highlighted a number of success factors in effective placemaking:

- effective community engagement, including with people disengaged from mainstream cultural activity
- strong partnership between public, private and community organisations
- steering group to include relevant stakeholders
- engendering pride and interest in a place
- attracting investment into the cultural sector to achieve health, economy and quality of life objectives
- bringing people together for community cohesion or education
- ensuring there are champions in the local council and partner organisation
- using success to unlock further funding opportunities and form new partnerships

"Culture," Polly Hamilton, vice-chair of the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association commented, "holds up a mirror to our tired streets, squares, buildings and civic spaces and asks us to look again at what makes them special. It gives people the opportunity to connect their individual stories with collective narratives, helping to make their place feel like home."

That said, the potential benefit of cultural regeneration for local places is widely accepted, as in a briefing note for Italy's G20 presidency in 2021, which stated that "smartly managed culture-led regeneration strategies can help revive towns, villages and urban neighbourhoods… A socially sustainable approach to local development can leverage culture's role to not only attract new residents and tourists, but also in improving the quality of life for existing residents."[9]

Impact on deprivation

Of interest to many urban areas is the potential for culture to have a positive impact in areas of particular deprivation. A 2017 study in New York[10] said the reason for its capacity to bring light to dark corners is that culture is "one of the elements of a life one has reason to value."

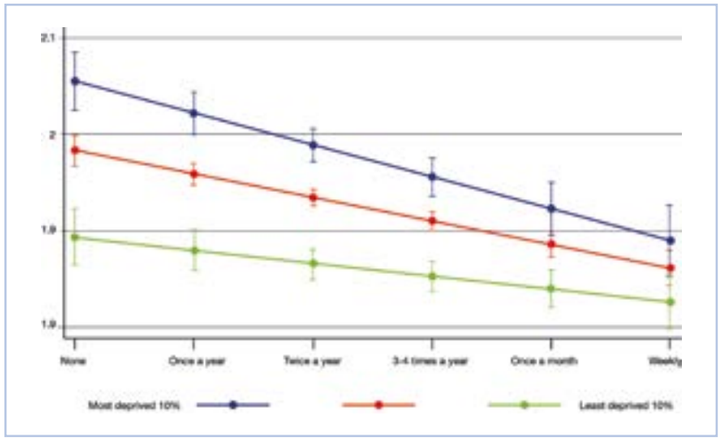
"We've found," it went on "the most consistent relationships between culture (and) social wellbeing in lower-income neighborhoods that, on average, have fewer cultural resources." Whereas in wealthier areas, residents have the means to secure better health, better schools, or safer streets, "in lower-income neighborhoods, this form of capital substitutes for the financial capital that is available in higher-income areas."

A recent study published in BMJ Open[11] specifically examined links between community cultural engagement (CCE) and the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).

Engagement – including things like going to see theatre shows, gallery visits and visiting heritage sites – "has been associated with improvements in well-being, slower declines in cognition, reduced levels of isolation and loneliness, enhanced social well-being in the community and lower mortality rates", the study concludes (Fig. 1). Engagement is generally higher in more affluent areas, partly due to availability of cultural assets but also for a host of other reasons including social behaviours: "'Cosmopolitan' or 'student' areas of England have been identified as having particularly strong patterns of CCE relative to, say, post-industrial communities." This underscores the relevance of exploring the significance of place in the relationship between cultural engagement and health outcomes.

The results of this study, the authors say, “have clear implications for the design and roll-out of place-based programmes (…) that operate under the assumption that investing in areas

Fig. 1. Association between cultural attendance and mental distress by levels of area deprivation.(BMJ Open)



of high deprivation and low cultural opportunity could improve well-being levels.” The data supports the belief that schemes like Arts Council England’s Creative People and Places have the potential to achieve their aims “as there is some indication that the benefits of CCE may be slightly more pronounced in more deprived areas.”

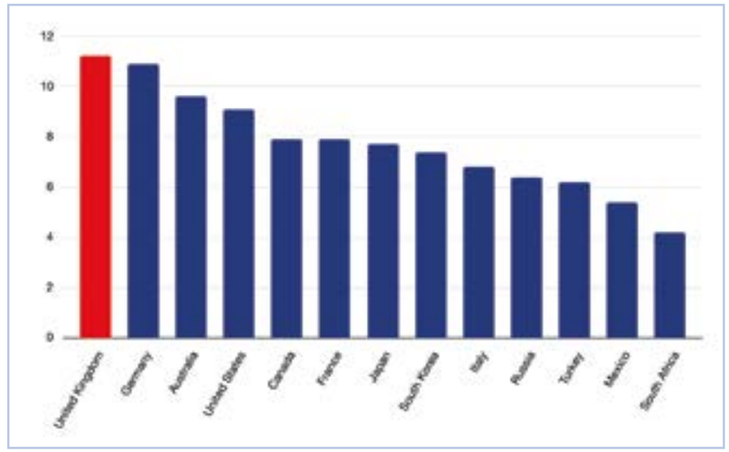
However, they emphasise the importance of looking at the overall picture, including opportunities to engage and entrenched local behaviours. Social prescribing schemes, for example, rely on the availability of cultural assets within communities. “It has been suggested that (engagement) can be increased in areas with more cultural opportunity structures and in areas with high accessibility to cultural infrastructures, especially for groups that have often been excluded (…) The success of such schemes will therefore rely on their ability to overcome the psychological, logistical or structural barriers that could limit individuals’ engagement within more deprived areas.”

The overall evidence, according to a 2017 World Health Organization report, “shows a robust impact of the arts on both mental and physical health.” Its policy recommendations are to “recognize the added health value of engagement with the arts by:

- ensuring that culturally diverse forms of art are available and accessible to a range of different groups across the life-course, especially those from disadvantaged minorities;
- encouraging arts and cultural organizations to make health and well-being an integral and strategic part of their work;
- actively promoting public awareness of the potential benefits of arts engagement for health; and
- developing interventions that encourage arts engagement to support healthy lifestyles.”

Economically, the G20 briefing note states that the proportion of jobs attributable to arts and culture, and the GVA contributed, are higher in cities and “capital regions” than the countryside and it particularly notes the strength of the culture market in the UK, which with 11.2% has the highest spending on recreation and culture per household among G20 countries with available data (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Percentage share of household expenditure on recreation and culture.



The cultural and creative sector along with cultural participation and education “drive innovation across national and local economies… Arts and culture are increasingly recognised as part of a wider innovation system though cross-innovation in other sectors, the role that arts education can play in building a more innovative workforce, and innovation in the culture sector itself.”

Two-way street

Evidence of the social, economic and environmental benefits of engagement with culture is important not only to drive public funding but also to make the case for commercial and philanthropic investment. As the G20 briefing note points out, it is a two-way street: “Strong business-to-business linkages to the creative sectors are associated with high levels of innova-

tive activity and performance."

"It is an error," the 2016 AHRC study concurs, "to see publicly-funded and commercial arts and culture as separate worlds, one dependent on the taxpayer and the other on the market. They operate as part of a complex ecology of talent, finance, content and ideas."

Developing better (and comparable) evaluation of the benefits of culture for people and places should be a major priority for continuing to drive investment. If that is done, the G20 briefing note maintains, things can only get better, because "the absence of internationally comparable statistics that reveal [the cultural and creative sectors'] full economic and social impacts (…) means that the sectors remain largely undervalued in the policy debate."

The Key Cities culture survey

Eighteen cities took part in a survey on culture policy conducted in February 2022 and refreshed in September.

They are:

BCP	Lincoln	Preston
Blackpool	Medway	Salford
Bradford	Newport	Southampton
Coventry	Norwich	Southend-on-Sea
Exeter	Plymouth	Sunderland
Lancaster	Portsmouth	Wolverhampton

PRIORITIES

The cities were invited to rank their culture objectives in order of priority, outline their strategy and comment on a range of topics.

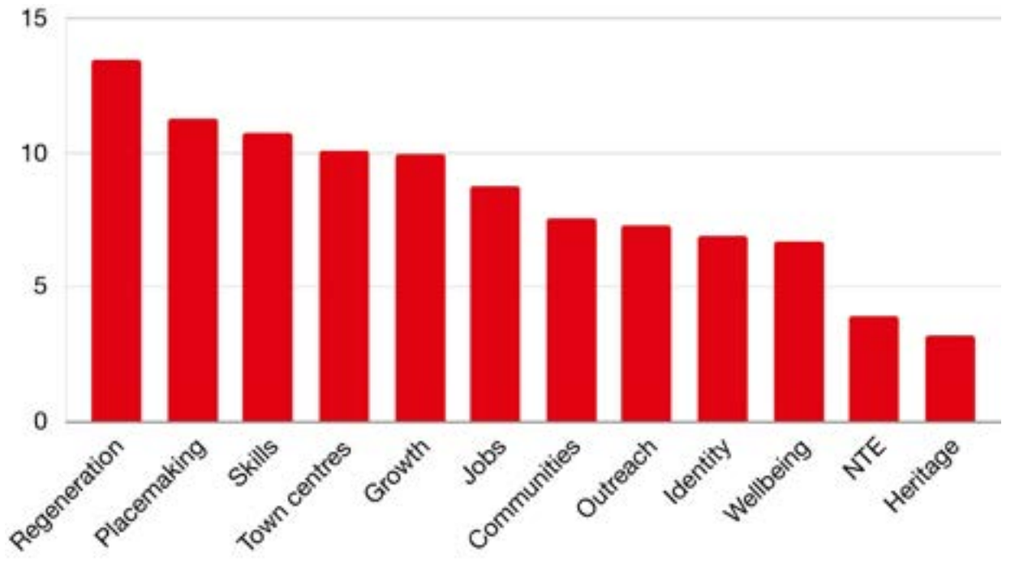


Fig. 3. The top 12 priorities for culture policy objectives across the Key Cities. (Key Cities)

While there were numerous differences in approach responding to local circumstances, there was a distinct emphasis on economic priorities over social ones – highlighting the general pressure on local authority resources – although several emphasised that one is a prerequisite for the other.

Many respondents commented that the objectives are interlinked, and their priorities dictated by what would best deliver on the range of desired outcomes. It is notable however that in the wake of the pandemic following a decade of austerity, the emphasis across the network is on the foundational elements of investing in cultural infrastructure, skills and the economy to yield benefits for wellbeing, individuals and communities.

It is interesting too that Night-Time Economy (NTE) and Heritage, while still in the top 12, widely rank among the lowest priorities when it comes to cultural policy, both perhaps seen as primarily residing in other areas of policy. The lowest overall score was for Heritage which, although acknowledged as a priority by most participants, did not make the top seven for any.

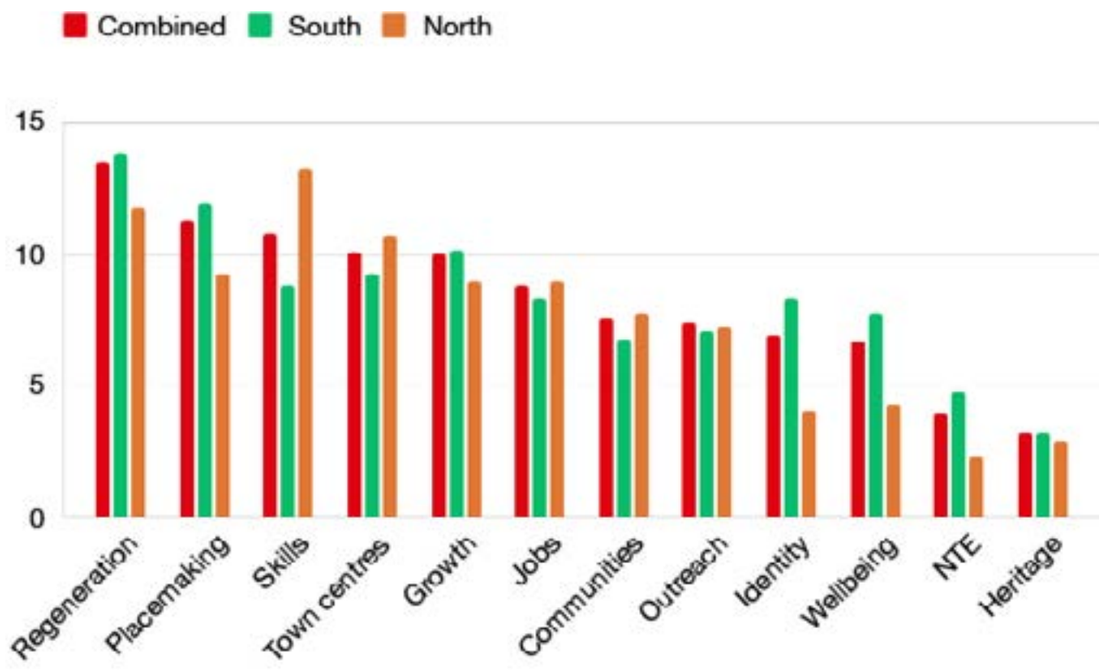


Fig. 4. The top 12 priorities for culture policy objectives – comparing Key Cities in the north and south. (Key Cities)

Patterns and subsets

While the overall pattern is broadly consistent across the country, there are small but marked differences between places in the north and south of England and Wales, with those below the line from Caernarfon to Skegness attaching greater priority than their northern counterparts to Regeneration, Placemaking, Growth, Identity, Wellbeing, the Night-Time Economy and Heritage, while northern places have greater focus on Skills, Town Centres, Jobs, Communities and Outreach. The starkest difference where north outpoints south is on Skills, while Identity is where north's preference is greatest versus the south. It is notable that while Skills Development is the top priority for northern places, in the south it comes a relatively modest fifth.

Overall, this snapshot presents a cry for cultural investment as an effective means to help places to help themselves.

It is possible to discern some subsets within the network that could support wider collaboration and knowledge exchange. Key Cities where multiple places picked the same top priorities (with blue for #1 and red for #2 priority) were:

Regeneration

Blackpool
Norwich
Plymouth
Portsmouth
Preston
Sunderland
Lincoln
Newport

Identity

Bradford
Newport
Southampton

Community

Coventry
Medway
Salford

Placemaking

BCP
Exeter
Blackpool
Norwich
Plymouth

Hard-to-reach

BCP
Coventry
Salford

Growth

Preston
Sunderland

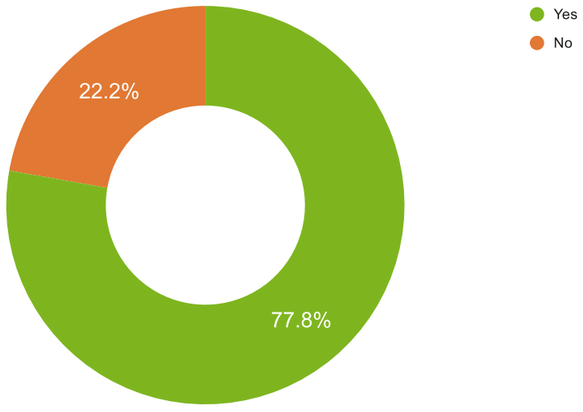
CITY OF CULTURE

In response to the question "Are you planning a bid for UK City of Culture?":

Of 18 respondents, six had been involved in a bid for the 2025 designation (including winner Bradford) and one (Coventry) had just completed its year as UK City of Culture. Of the remaining 11 cities, seven (Lincoln, Plymouth, Wolverhampton, Newport and Southend) were considering a bid for 2029, one (Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole) for 2033 and one (Blackpool) intended to bid but was not yet certain which year or whether part of a wider bid with Fylde Coast or Lancashire. Only four (Norwich, Portsmouth, Sunderland, and Salford) said they had no current intention to do so.

Bradford stated the two-year process of bidding had transformed culture into a high priority, becoming a "key pillar of social and economic regeneration". Coventry commented that the title was "a great opportunity for Coventry, (providing) a springboard to increase the capacity of the cultural sector, build on existing practice and shape a legacy for the future that is inclusive and diverse, and (enhancing) the quality of life in the city."

Fig. 5. Are you planning a bid for UK City of Culture? Yes = planning or recent bid. No = no current intention.



INVESTMENT IN CULTURE

In response to the question "Do you actively invest in culture?":

All respondents actively invest in culture, Newport emphasising the importance of attracting external funding to deliver its new culture strategy.

Blackpool, Bradford, Lincoln and Portsmouth largely invest in public events and festivals, whereas Coventry, Norwich, Wolverhampton and Exeter focus on investing in cultural organisations or funding grant schemes.

Blackpool's main cultural investment is its light festival, Lightpool, which has attracted £4.5m from the Towns Fund to develop over the next three years. The Council has invested in the development of the Showtown museum, which is due to open in Spring 2023. It also invests in two Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations: Grundy Art Gallery and Grand Theatre.

"We are committed to events and festivals that are free to enter for residents."
—City of Lincoln

Bradford has brought economy and culture together with a focus on culture-led nighttime economy interventions. The Council has recently invested in a 4,000-seat venue in partnership with the NEC in Birmingham.

Lincoln primarily invests in culture in public spaces, stating that "We are committed, as a city with higher levels of deprivation, to events and festivals that take place in public spaces and are free to enter for local residents".

Portsmouth has a dynamic approach to making cultural investments. It mainly uses Portsmouth Creates, a Community Interest Company, to collaborate with other organisations and the university to carry out projects such as art trails, markets in repurposed buildings, and wellbeing activities. The Council has recently purchased one of the city's theatres and supports nine libraries. It has invested in the D-Day Museum, after restoring a landing craft tank.

Coventry has created an Arts Programme Grants Scheme to invest in culture through funding third-party cultural organisations. The two-year scheme aims "to grow participation among residents least likely to engage with culture, with an

Exeter's award-winning Royal Albert Memorial Museum takes visitors on a voyage of discovery from pre-history to the present day and from Exeter all around the world.

allocation of £300,000, divided across four open application rounds, providing support of between £5,000 and £12,000 to eligible projects".

Norwich City Council makes five-year partnership agreements with cultural organisations, with annual grants between £2,500 and £10,000 for cultural projects and activities.

Wolverhampton has invested in its cultural strategy including more than £93m in the cultural and leisure offer, of which £38m was allocated to refurbishment of the galleries, civic halls, and leisure centre. Wolverhampton's five-year Events Strategy "targets 2m visitors, generating a forecasted economic impact of £68.4m".

Exeter invests in six national portfolio organisations and the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (a £2.2m annual investment). Its five-year culture strategy considers how current investments will impact the next 20 years of cultural development in the city. Literature is important to Exeter, having recently gained accreditation as a UNESCO City of Literature.

CULTURAL COMPACTS

In response to the question: "Do you have a Cultural Compact or are you intending to develop one?":

At the time of the survey, 13 respondents (Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole, Bradford, Plymouth, Coventry, Exeter, Lincoln, Medway, Norwich, Preston, Salford, Southampton, Sunderland and Wolverhampton) had an active Cultural Compact. The first established was Salford in 2019 (see p.102).

Bradford created its Cultural Place Partnership – equivalent to a Compact – three years ago, bringing together the anchor institutions and grassroots organisations. Plymouth also has a Cultural Partnership. Norwich meets bi-monthly to develop a manifesto to support the sector. Its Creative City Compact is responsible for delivery of the Creative City strand of the Norwich 2040 City Vision.

At the time of the survey, Lincoln was in the early stages of developing its Cultural Compact with Lincoln University: "Our approach in these early stages is uniquely being driven by the views of young people and what they want to see in the city over the next ten years. They are not only the future consumers of culture, but will also become the future creatives. We have commissioned a well-respected local theatre company which specialises in youth engagement to capture their views and thoughts. This will lead to a cultural exhibition as a platform for the Compact..."

Blackpool, Newport, Portsmouth and Southend did not have a Cultural Compact at the time of the survey, while Lancaster's was in abeyance due to governmental reorganisation. Lancaster has joined forces with South Lakes District Council and Barrow Borough Council in the Bay Cultural Compact. Blackpool was in the process of establishing a Cultural Partnership.

Arts Council-supported formal Cultural Compacts are not applicable in Wales, but Newport was creating a cultural strategy in partnership with stakeholders. Without a formal Compact, Portsmouth provides revenue support for local organisations in need, especially those who were not eligible for the Covid Recovery Fund.

CULTURE STRATEGY

Responses to questions about local culture strategies are discussed in 'Culture policy, strategies and trends' (page 52).

Culture and local government

What is the role of local government in culture?

If we rely on culture to empower individuals and communities, to ask questions and challenge orthodoxy, then it cannot be the voice of the local authority or required to reflect prevailing opinions. But culture does have a crucial role in helping places to achieve their social, economic and environmental objectives. So how does local government empower without controlling, enable without inhibiting?

Over the last year the Local Government Association-established Commission on Culture conducted a deep dive examination of local government's role in this area and of how it can best work with the sector and others to deliver the beneficial outcomes that thriving culture can bring to a place.

The commission published its report, ***Cornerstones of Culture***[12], in December 2022 following nine months during which the 16-person commission engaged with nearly a hundred organisations, including four roundtable sessions discussing evidence and compiling more than 50 case studies, including many in Key Cities. The year 2023, commission chair Baroness Lola Young highlights, sees the 75th anniversary of local authority funding of the arts. Although culture forms a small part of its responsibilities, local government is far the most significant funder of culture, spending £1.1bn a year directly on culture and a total of 2.4bn if we include related services. Running a network that includes 3,000 libraries, 350 museums, 116 theatres as well as many historic buildings, parks and heritage sites, local government is responsible for nurturing and looking after a substantial proportion of the nation's place-based cultural infrastructure.

But following a decade of austerity in which local authority funding for culture fell by 40%[13], councils are under unprecedented pressure from rising costs, threatening all non-mandatory spending (the agonising threat to the future of Bury Art Museum & Sculpture Centre, just a year after Bury was Greater Manchester's Town of Culture, is an eloquent case in point). The Commission argues that this is no time to reduce spending on culture, which is needed more urgently than ever for placemaking, economic growth and health and wellbeing. The LGA culture chair, Portsmouth City Council Leader Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, concedes that wider collaboration is required to square this circle:

"No single organisation now has the funding, staff time or skills to do this alone. So councils, cultural organisations, and our partners in central government will need to keep working together to support each place to be the most vibrant, best place it can possibly be. That means pooled and aligned funding streams, open and transparent conversations with communities about what they need, and a shared vision that everyone works towards."

The commission recommends that wider collaboration to focus on four "areas of ambition": improving access and inclusion to address structural inequalities; removing barriers to allow creative industry clusters and microclusters to drive post-pandemic growth; promoting cultural education and pathways into creative skills education and jobs; and supporting the role of culture to prevent harm and promote health and wellbeing. To achieve those ambitions, the commission identifies four "cultural placemaking cornerstones": place-led culture strategies to develop capacity and resilience; extending power and leadership to enable communities and practitioners to shape decision-making; transparent funding to deliver place-led strategies; and a coordinated approach to evidence to measure value and shape investment.

Convening power

Local government has a role to play in convening, connecting and coordinating. Council support of initiatives, even with modest or no funding, can be crucial in obtaining support from sponsors, partners and local stakeholders. The case for supporting culture rests not only on the direct benefit it creates for practitioners, jobs and organisations, but on the wider social, economic and environmental benefits, so there is a need to connect and coordinate with other policy areas.

As seen in the Cultural City Enquiry reports and the evaluation of Cultural Compacts, the evidence shows however that where the capacity exists, it is far preferable that culture should be sector and not local government-led.

An important question for local government is how culture fits into its wider strategy.

A place-based approach will identify local strengths, how they can be built on and what capacities are missing. It will look not just at how public funding lines up, but what other levers are relevant to make the culture strategy work. If you want to grow the cultural sector – especially in urban areas where participation is persistently lower than in rural areas regardless of funding – and you want local people from diverse backgrounds to get those jobs, then skills are vital. But skills are outside the remit of cultural funders like Arts Council England – and also outside that of many local councils, with such devolution as is tentatively taking place tending towards combined authorities. Engaging partners such as the universities can be crucial in convincing metro-mayors that there is little point in bigging up culture unless the local skills development plans are lined up behind it.

It is incumbent on local authorities also to consider how the local vision for culture can be sustainable in the long term, for example by protecting availability of low-cost artist studios in central locations. Given that local government is increasingly constrained by government planning policies such as permitted development rights, partnership with universities, local industry and other stakeholders can again be crucial in offering alternative ways of delivering the desired outcomes.

Place and Government Policy

“All politics is local” was the mantra of US Speaker Tip O’Neill, but successive governments in the UK have found it hard to wean Whitehall off its predilection for central control.

According to the Conservative MP Andrew Lewer, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Devolution, “the UK is one of the most centralised of any advanced democracy. Virtually all British governments claim to be in favour of devolution and localism, but the actual appetite for ‘allowing’ power and decision-making to reside at a local level is much more variable.”[14]

The environment for culture to thrive is certainly affected by the wider policy approach to Place adopted by the government of the day. And when it comes to Place, the differences across the political divide are in language and solutions rather than core objectives, on which a broad consensus has developed over the last two decades.

CITY DEVOLUTION

The 2013 report[15] of the RSA’s influential City Growth Commission chaired by Jim O’Neill brought home a greater awareness that improving below-average productivity levels and stimulating growth outside the South East required effective and meaningful devolution to cities, so that skills and opportunities can be matched to the needs and build on the strengths of local areas. Noting that almost two thirds of the UK’s growth is generated by city regions, the report said that if the top 15 metropolitan regions realised their potential it would add an additional £79 billion in growth.

At local level political differences – while still important ¬– are even more readily bridged in pursuit of common aims, as evidenced in the bromance between the mayors of the West Midlands and Greater Manchester when arguing for greater devolution in areas such as skills.

There have been numerous attempts since the Great Depression to correct disparities between different parts of the country, from the assisted areas of Regional Selective Assis-

tance in the thirties via Regional Development Agencies in the nineties and noughties and on to the city devolution we see today. The cross-party concern with the issue was illustrated when the six original metro-mayors – four Labour, two Conservative – commissioned former Conservative deputy prime minister Lord Heseltine to produce a report called 'Empowering English Cities' in 2019.[16]

When it comes to public funding, significant weight has traditionally been given to 'Excellence' over 'Place' – awarding funding to the best quality bid measured by criteria other than location. This has resulted in disproportionate funding being allocated to the South East at the expense of other parts of the country. This has arguably affected the UKRI funders – the research councils and Innovate UK – more than the National Lottery funders – the Arts Councils and the Heritage Fund – although the latter's funding to the capital has also been skewed due to the preponderance of national cultural and heritage organisations that are situated in London but serve the nation.

INNOVATION DISTRICTS

In his groundbreaking 2002 book, 'The Rise of the Creative Class'[17], the urban thinker Richard Florida highlighted the beneficial impact on urban growth and regeneration of high concentrations of people with creative and digital skills and inclinations, such as artists, musicians and tech developers.

Combined with the growing popularity of the triple helix model of innovation[18] – driving new ideas through partnership between government, industry and academia – this created networks mainly in the larger metropolitan districts with substantial innovation assets such as universities, high skills levels and good (digital and transport) connectivity.

Criticism that such districts drove up inequality by creating gentrified, cappuccino-drinking hipster citadels surrounded by left-behind areas with high levels of deprivation led to more nuanced thinking about whole cities and regions, influencing the thinking behind initiatives such as the Northern Powerhouse and the Midlands Engine.

BREXIT

The emphasis on Place has found expression in various forms of public funding. Prior to the UK's long drawn-out exit from the European Union in January 2020, a major role was played by two European structural funds focused on regional development – the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). These were replaced in April 2022 by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), supplemented by others such as the Towns Fund and the Levelling Up Fund, which had been established to deliver the government's levelling up agenda.

These developments have led to a deeper understanding of and engagement with Place by government and funding agencies which has been growing notwithstanding political upheavals and changes in policy direction. While the political narrative has moved from localism through industrial strategy, then levelling up and simply growth, the underlying reality is that all these things require improved opportunities, skills and productivity in all parts of the country outside the South East.

LOCAL ECOSYSTEMS

Thus, the return on public funding is increasingly judged not only narrowly on the responses to a challenge, but more broadly on the impact it has on the government's Place agenda, and this is turn is influencing the design of funding calls such as the AHRC's Creative Clusters programme. There is greater awareness of the value and importance of nurturing local innovation ecosystems — including the role of startups and microbusinesses of fewer than ten employees, which in many places represent the bulk of the economy.

Despite persistent undervaluing and downgrading by government of creative subjects in education, this wider policy trend is good for arts and culture in that it strengthens its case for support across a wide range of policy objectives.

So what does it mean for local councils and cultural organisations?

Building capacity for culture locally is often not about funding from Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It may come from private development and partnership with anchor institutions like universities and health services, from funding through Town Deals, the Levelling Up Fund or the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Or it could be turbocharged by UKRI investments such as Innovate UK support for creative technologies or the AHRC's Creative Clusters programme.

It reinforces the argument for genuinely cross-sector partnerships working out the need and the potential for culture to improve their places, and to feed into the wider strategy of a place.

Culture policy, strategies and trends

NATIONAL

The national policies that have an impact on cultural capacity and provision locally are not only those concerned with arts and culture.

Austerity

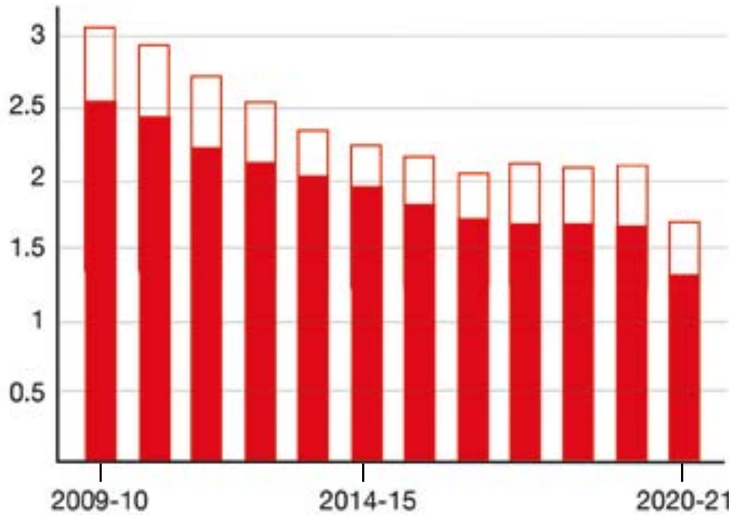
As we have already seen, culture features significantly in the government's Levelling Up and Towns Funds. Equally significant, but in the debit column, is the knock-on effect of austerity on local government finance.

Since 2010, overall spending on arts and culture has fallen in many places.

This was examined directly in a recent study which noted that over the decade since 2010 most local authorities reduced their spending on arts and culture, but by starkly varying levels of between one and 94 percent.[19] In terms of cuts, arts and culture seemed on the face of it to have suffered less than other areas, but on closer examination this was partly due to minimal funding at the start of the period and partly because culture continued to be seen as a factor in growing revenues. The biggest local authority cuts in the wider culture sector came in public libraries. Ironically, unlike other aspects of culture, libraries are a statutory, non-discretionary commitment, but councils were able to change their remit to reduce expenditure. Overall spending on arts and culture has fallen in many places, weakening community resilience when the Covid pandemic struck.

This gloomy picture was starkly confirmed in the latest dataset about public funding for culture published by the Creative Industries PEC in January 2023[20], which showed that investment in the arts in England through local authorities in capital and revenue expenditure has dropped by more than 30% in real terms between 2009-2010 and 2019-2020 in response to an overall decline in local government budgets over this period (Fig. 6). While a significant proportion of this could be attributed to reduced funding to libraries, excluding that factor still leaves a 15% real-terms drop over the period.

Fig. 6. Trends in local government expenditure on culture (x £1bn) in real terms, adjusted.
(Creative Industries PEC)



Brexit

Brexit too has impacted the culture sector by reducing availability of labour and skills, and by creating costs and red tape for UK shows, productions and exhibitions touring the continent. Provided skills gaps are addressed in the home workforce and frictionless arrangements agreed with the European Union, these may turn out to be transitional problems. In the interim however, many artists, cultural organisations and supply chain businesses in Key Cities and other places are feeling the pinch.[21]

Culture

In direct policy on arts and culture, headlines may focus on politicised debates about culture wars and public service broadcasting, but the underlying trends are consistent and twofold: first, a shift away from revenue support to investing

in development and capacity; and second, increasing emphasis on equality, diversity and inclusion – engaging and creating opportunities for all people and communities regardless of background, particularly those who are socially or digitally excluded and hard to reach.

Given that for nearly three decades most public funding for arts, culture and heritage has come from the proceeds of the National Lottery (which has raised more than £46 billion for the arts, heritage, sport, community and voluntary groups since 1994[22]) dispensed by Arts Council England and NLHF, the funding criteria of these arm's-length bodies must be the keystone of any place-based strategies, along with a clear vision of what culture means and can do locally.

Those criteria reflect the trend towards inclusivity. Arts Council England's current ten-year strategy, 'Let's Create'[23] aims to ensure that every person has access to a wide range of high quality cultural experiences. It is a universal approach that means working with every place in England to deliver the best offer possible. The strategy aims to deliver three outcomes over the current decade: "creative people", meaning that everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life; "cultural communities", enabling villages, towns and cities to thrive through a collaborative approach to culture; and a "creative and cultural country", making sure that England's cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international. To achieve these outcomes Arts Council England and those it funds are guided by a set of "Investment Principles" focusing on quality, inclusivity, dynamism and climate responsibility.

Like Arts Council England, NLHF attaches great priority to engagement and inclusivity, combined with preserving and improving heritage. NLHF has a range of nine outcomes that funded projects must seek to achieve.[24] One – a wider range of people being involved in heritage – is mandatory, while a further five – building organisational resilience; greater wellbeing; skills development; improving the local area; and boosting the local economy – are currently prioritised as part of the Covid response. The remaining three are: improving the condition of heritage; identifying and explaining it better; and bringing about change in ideas and actions through learning about heritage.

While NLHF's remit is heritage across the UK, funding for arts and culture in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are separately administered by Creative Scotland [25], the Arts Council of Wales[26] and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland [27] respectively, each with their own criteria tailored to the devolved nations

LOCAL

At local level many Key Cities and other local authorities have developed strategies – often with support from Arts Council England – setting out their vision for culture and how it relates to their wider place strategy. There is no requirement to have a culture strategy, but if a place lacks a compelling story of what culture is doing locally, it is all the harder to convince other stakeholders to put their resources into it, to connect culture into the wider Place strategy or link it with the strategies of a combined authority or local enterprise partnership. Whether it's a formal strategy or not, without a thought-through vision places will find it that much harder to make a compelling case to government for levelling up funding for culture.

Carnival dancer in Bath, July 2022. Photo: Jeremy Richards.

At the time of the Key Cities Survey ten respondents (Bradford, Coventry, Exeter, Lincoln, Medway, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Preston, Salford and Southend) had a formal culture strategy in place while the remaining eight (Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole, Blackpool, Lancaster, Newport, Norwich, Southampton, Sunderland, and Wolverhampton) were in the process of developing or finalising their approach.

KEY CITIES

Developed jointly by the council with business organisation Future Bath Plus and the Cultural Forum, **Bath & North East Somerset**'s Culture Strategy 2011-2026[28] has six objectives: growing the creative industries, festivals and events; growing and promoting tourism; enabling knowledge transfer across the sector; providing financially sustainable heritage and visitor attractions, promoting a healthy and active resident and working population; and enabling activities in the commercial, social enterprise and voluntary sectors. Development of a successor strategy is under way.

Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole is developing a cultural strategy through its Cultural Compact, focusing on talent development and retention, cultural infrastructure development, and quality of place (including health and wellbeing, community involvement and placemaking).[29]

Blackpool Council is looking to enable its Action Plan and engage widely with its cultural sector partners and local freelance creatives. Over the past ten years the council has tended to take pragmatic decisions, wherever possible taking advantage of opportunities for investment to grow and develop the cultural offer in the town – for example securing Creative People and Places funding for the arts organisation LeftCoast. After the pandemic, Blackpool has been reassessing the needs of the town before setting up a Cultural Partnership to produce a strategy and action plan setting out priorities for the next three to five years. This will align with the town's designation as a Priority Place by Arts Council England.[30] In January 2023 the town received a significant boost when the government announced a £40m Round Two Levelling Up award to Blackpool and Wyre Councils to create a state-of-the-art "multiversity" in Blackpool's Talbot Gateway central business district to deliver world-class training in higher skills including in automation and artificial intelligence, operated by Blackpool and the Fylde College in association with Lancaster University.

Bradford, UK City of Culture Designate for 2025 and a UNESCO City of Film, is the fifth largest local authority in England. 'Culture is our plan', its ten-year culture strategy, was commissioned by the independent Bradford Cultural Place Partnership with funds from the council and Arts Council England. Historically, Bradford has underperformed in attracting national investment, so the existing arts, culture and heritage organisations have lacked the capacity to engage with all the city's diverse communities. The strategy sets out a bold vision in which Bradford will offer a new definition of art, culture and heritage that reimagines the district as a place that is knowingly different and radically alternative – a place to realise new ideas, where creativity is celebrated in every home and on every street corner, demonstrating the positive impact of culture in everyone's lives. The plan provides ten ambitions and ten targets for 2031 as well as ten actions to deliver by 2023. The most challenging ambition – becoming UK City of Culture – has been achieved, creating the opportunity to turbocharge delivery on all the others.[31]

In October 2020, the Carlisle Culture Consortium – comprising the city council, the University of Cumbria, Prism Arts and the Tullie House museum and art gallery – supported by Arts Council England, published its strategic framework for culture in **Carlisle** [32] built around four areas of focus: cultural leadership and enterprise; cultural destination and placemaking; community wellbeing; children, young people and lifelong learning.

The new ten-year culture strategy adopted by **Colchester** in March 2022[33] was developed by Counterculture in partnership with the council's arts sector partners. It sets out a new vision and priorities around building a stronger, more cohesive and collaborative cultural sector; ensuring culture in Colchester is relevant and accessible to residents; nurturing creative talent across Colchester; and supporting the innovation, growth and resilience of the sector.

Coventry's Cultural Strategy 2017-27 [34] was funded by the city council and Arts Council England with support from both the University of Warwick and Coventry University and is based on an extensive consultation process. The strategy sets out a ten-year vision for the cultural life of Coventry, during which it held the UK City of Culture title in 2021. The vision builds on the heritage and culture of Coventry, proposes five key goals in

Baskerville at Colchester's Mercury Theatre, 2021. Photo: Pamela Raith.

the areas of partnership, lifelong learning, diversity, and health and wellbeing, and seven 'Big Ideas' for transforming the cultural life of the city. A strategy refresh [35] evaluating progress to date and setting out next steps for engagement was published this year.

Adopted in September 2022, **Doncaster**'s Culture Strategy 2030[36] will build upon existing investments and synchronise with other initiatives in health, wellbeing and skills to make the arts and culture a key part of life in the area and will set out ambitions in areas such as the economy, education, health and wellbeing and the environment to be delivered by 2030.

Commissioned by Exeter Culture with support from Arts Council England and developed by Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy, **Exeter**'s Cultural Strategy 2019-2024[37] sets out a vision for the city to be known nationally and internationally as a city of culture – boosted by gaining accreditation as UNESCO City of Literature in 2019 – built around five overarching themes: environment, cultural wellbeing, heritage innovation, creative literacy and cultural literacy. The sector-led strategy is seen as a 'living document' that will adapt in line with the city's development.

At the midway point of its 2016-2026 Cultural Vision and Strategy, **Gloucester** published an update last year[38] produced by the city council in partnership with Gloucester Culture Trust, putting culture at the heart of the city's future plans and aiming to empower young people to create, experience and participate in culture. The updated strategy has a range of objectives including: to embed culture in the city's future plans, to build up the cultural and creative industries, to support social and economic development, and to develop a vibrant city centre (see Stephen Marston, page 84).

Hull published its Cultural Strategy 2016-2026[39] knowing it was soon to take up the mantle as UK City of Culture 2017. The strategy focuses on aligning cultural investment and city centre development, creating a liveable city and promoting its image with high quality culture; on developing the audience with destination marketing, reaching out to non-core audiences, promoting education and skills; and developing the sector through an independent partnership and working with stakeholders to develop a healthy cross-sector cultural ecosystem.

Kirklees describes its culture as rich, diverse and down to earth, born from a striking landscape and a proud industrial heritage. Culture Kirklees,[40] its vision for arts, creative industries, heritage and museum services published in 2016, sets out a range of desired outcomes in the cultural, economic and wellbeing areas, from having more residents engaging with culture and attracting more visitors and businesses to promoting vibrant urban centres, a strong sense of place and belonging, skills development and improved health and wellbeing.

In August 2022 **Lancaster** City Council appointed Counterculture to support the development of a new ten-year strategy for culture and heritage, building on a policy statement for arts and culture published in March 2019.[41] With a distinctive local offer, the council plays a key role supporting arts and culture but does not seek to steer a sector that has strong local ownership. Development of the strategy will include producing an up-to-date, robust evidence base to provide a better understanding of the impact culture and heritage have on people's lives, and an engagement programme to ensure the views of those involved in culture and heritage are taken into account.

Lincoln's focus is on public access to culture. On the back of a cultural programme[42] with funding from the High Street Heritage Action Zone and Towns Fund programmes, the city council is working the University of Lincoln and the Lincoln Culture and Arts Partnership, with support from Arts Council England, to develop its culture strategy including developing its Cultural Compact and with an ambition to become UK City of Culture in 2029.

Medway's ten-year Cultural Strategy[43] is a bold new vision that speaks to Medway's broadest aspirations to put culture centre stage. The strategy is one of collaboration, partnerships and setting a shared ambition for the future. It is built on extensive engagement across Medway, demonstrating how important culture is to Medway's future, and enabling everyone to have the opportunity to take part in, or contribute to cultural life. The vision is that by 2030, Medway will be internationally recognised for its culture and creativity, demonstrating its positive impacts on everyone's lives. Diverse, collaborative and engaged, it will celebrate the strength and creativity of all Medway residents to inspire a new generation of creatives and makers.

Newport is in the process of developing its Culture Strategy building on the vision outlined in its unsuccessful bid to become UK City of Culture 2025[44], which focused on a range of areas including ethnic and language diversity, historical identity, Newport's transformation from industrial city to data city, excellence in literature, art, music, sports and media, active travel and climate change, and innovative education.

Norwich – a UNESCO City of Literature since 2012 – is a place where culture and creativity play an important part in how the city feels about itself and how others perceive it. Culture is at the heart of the Norwich 2040 City Vision[45] which is built around five themes: liveability, fairness, connection with citizens and the world, dynamism and creativity. Its vision is that by 2040, Norwich will be world-renowned for its creativity – a leader in innovation, culture, education and invention.

Plymouth's Culture Plan[46] has three key drivers – community, environment and inclusive economy – and its strategic priorities driving decisions are place, sector and people. The core ambitions are to make cultural encounters part of the everyday for everyone; to develop a model of co-creation with audiences, to support equality, diversity and creativity in everyone, to be the UK's leading city for immersive cultural experiences, and to embrace the city's unique blue-grey-green landscapes to create experiences only imaginable in Plymouth.

Portsmouth City Council and the city's Victorious Festival, with support from Arts Council England, have established sector organisation Portsmouth Creates[47] to devise a new culture strategy for the city and coordinate new projects such as a bid for UK City of Culture. The aim is to improve access to arts and culture so that everyone within the city, regardless of background, can engage with what the city has to offer, from school children who have low levels of literacy and who may never have visited the beach, through the older generations, isolated during the Covid-19 pandemic. The vision is to pioneer a culture-led regeneration, raising the bar and collaborating with the city's neighbours in the Solent, positioning Portsmouth as a city of creativity and culture.

'Something's Brewing', **Preston**'s 12-year Cultural Strategy[48], has a comprehensive range of priorities focused on four areas – sustainability, connectivity, wellbeing and ambition – which reveal the breadth of the sector, its shared ambitions and its awareness of the wider world.

With a rich heritage and extensive cultural offer including its famous festival, **Reading**'s Culture and Heritage Strategy 2015-2030[49] sets out a range of strategic priorities around enhancing identity ("being Reading, made in Reading"); increasing opportunities through working together; and using culture and heritage to celebrate Reading. In January 2023, Reading was awarded £19.1m in the second round of Levelling Up funding to renovate the Hexagon Theatre and build a new modern library in the Minster Quarter.

Salford's shared, city-wide strategy for culture, creativity and place[50] was launched in March 2020 with five pillars: supporting Salford's creative and cultural professionals, promoting development of high quality, co-created public realm schemes, consolidating infrastructure for creative activity in hyperlocal centres and cultural districts, defining the story about Salford's past, present and future as a city of makers and changemakers, and defining clear metrics for social impact.

One of the runners-up for UK City of Culture 2025, **Southampton**'s ten-year Cultural Strategy[51] is about its communities, their city, their past, their future and how they sustainably navigate their place in the world together. It aims to embrace their history, multiple identities, differences and common ground whilst also striving for high quality work and national and international cultural collaborations. The vision for culture is that by 2031, Southampton is seen as an inclusive city that collaborates and connects at home and on the national and international stage to ignite imaginations, innovation, pride and a sense of belonging across the whole city.

Southend-on-Sea is developing and nurturing existing and emerging cultural practitioners and creative industries alongside grassroots cultural clusters to support a thriving economy and community. Jointly with its neighbours in the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (Basildon, Brentwood, Castle Point, Essex County, Rochford and Thurrock), Southend commissioned the arts organisation Metal to produce a report on "the vital role of culture and the creative industries, and what they need to thrive". Metal was subsequently appointed to lead on the development of a culture strategy which is in progress.[52] In October 2022, Southend West MP Anna Firth launched a campaign for Southend to become UK City of Culture in 2029.

Sunderland's vision is to create a confident, vibrant and international city for everyone, building on Sunderland's unique strengths while focusing on things for which the city needs to become renowned – building on Sunderland's rich history in a fast-changing, technological and environmentally sustainable world, appealing to local, regional, national and international audiences, and creating a renewed and enhanced sense of civic pride. The city's vision for arts and culture is being forged by Sunderland's Cultural Partnership,[53] a collaboration led by the University of Sunderland, the city council and the Music, Arts and Culture Trust with support from Arts Council England.

Wolverhampton is developing its culture strategy around partnerships, placemaking, productivity, participation and pride.[54] The strategy and the work around the city's Cultural Action Zones will be aligned with Relighting Our City, the city's Covid recovery strategy. In 2020, with support from Arts Council England, Wolverhampton established its first Cultural Compact to develop the arts and culture offer for the city.

Wrexham was one of the runners up for the UK City of Culture 2025 title and in September 2022 announced its intention to reapply for 2029. The following month it offered funding for ideas from the sector.[55] The council has started the process of developing a culture strategy in preparation for the bid.

OVERVIEW

Looking at the overall picture, the strategies of places differ in local content and priorities but there are no big changes in overall trends between those adopted a decade ago and newly-developed ones.

What makes a strategy investable?

Broadly, the local strategies set out the case for support based on a vision and action plan to promote the distinctive character and offer of a place. The significant variation in funding made available by local councils pre- and post-austerity is a factor, as it plays into local capacity. Also important are demonstrating strategic fit – with the wider priorities of a place, with the criteria set out by the funding bodies, and where appropriate, with broader government policies in areas such as urban centres and levelling up.

And for public and commercial funding alike, well-run sector-led partnerships such as Cultural Compacts can offer significant reassurance.

Skills and the creative industries

From problem-solving and communication to teamwork and applied imagination, culture both requires and fosters transferable soft skills.

More specifically, it needs carpenters and electricians, set builders and painters, VR/AR/XR technicians, coders, designers, stylists, special effects creators, camera people, sound and lighting technicians, choreographers, writers, librettists, recording engineers, project managers, accountants and cooks. All a list can do is show how much more there is that goes unmentioned.

There is no doubt that culture benefits from access to strong and diverse talent pools; nor that it opens up opportunities for learning and developing skills in more disadvantaged areas. Culture has the added advantage that it can often attract people who are otherwise hard to reach, and create pathways towards high-skilled and highly-paid careers: the focus of initiatives such as The Agency for Creative Production (see Thea Behrman, p. 125).

Cultural Cities Enquiry

The link between culture and the creative industries was central to the Cultural Cities Enquiry[56] co-sponsored by Key Cities, with Enquiry chair Dame Jayne-Anne Gadhia noting that the creative industries is the fastest-growing sector of the UK economy, but adding that "we have the legacy, the talent and the opportunity to do more, and to use culture to unite communities, encourage investment and accelerate economic growth."

Strong local culture, the Enquiry points out "provides skills, talent and unique content for the creative industries".

Skilled workers will sacrifice higher wages to locate in areas with lots of cultural activity – and digital industry champion Tech Nation has shown that access to talent is a key success factor for growing creative and digital clusters across the UK.[57]

Evidence from London and New York, the Enquiry notes,

shows a correlation between the cultural capital of neighbourhoods and property prices – although the impact on local communities needs to be carefully considered.[58] "Culture has a unique catalysing role to play in urban regeneration, and capturing more of the value from this could release additional investment and secure space for grass roots organisations and artists."

But although the sector is set to create a million new jobs in the current decade, there are concerns. "Who will get those jobs; which cities and communities will benefit?"

Skills and talent development are key, plus "stronger action to drive diversity within cultural organisations." The cultural workforce should better reflect the diversity of our communities, and, crucially, "cities could be more strategic about nurturing talent for creative industries." The importance of diversity was further underlined in a recent study based on ONS data showing that a 37% fall in the numbers working in traditional working-class jobs between 1981 and 2011 has not translated into more people from working-class backgrounds working in creative and cultural occupations, still being four times less likely than their middle-class peers to do so.[59]

The Cultural Cities Enquiry, as we have seen, recommends sector-led Compacts to drive culture locally, an approach that both Key Cities and the Arts Council continue to strongly support. When it comes to boosting local creative talent, Compacts can help "by coordinating activity to:

- Establish future creative skills requirements for the city
- Set out a comprehensive plan to meet the city's creative skills needs through coordinated activity to develop local talent, and attract and retain creative talent from elsewhere – securing and aligning resource as appropriate
- Bring together local strategic partners from the cultural sector, business and education to design and build collaborative city platforms for creative talent development
- Ensure that young people from all city communities are able to access local creative talent development programmes"

Bazalgette Review

The national policy context for the creative industries is substantially shaped by Sir Peter Bazalgette's Independent Review[60] in 2017, which highlighted the vital relationship between a strong cultural environment and the growth of creative clusters.

Pointing out that the value of "creative tech" – VR/AR, 5G, 3D printing and the like – lies not only in the sector but also "as enablers of the wider economy", Sir Peter warns that the UK's creative strength "cannot be taken for granted as if it were an endless natural resource: it needs to be nurtured through our education and skills systems else we risk falling back."

The Bazalgette Review recommended a £500m fund to develop creative clusters, as well as added innovation, research and development; promoting talent through career opportunities and apprenticeships; supporting development in games and VR/AR; and establishing a bespoke international trade board for the sector. Adopting a deal along these lines would "provide a more consistent national spread of creative industries, narrowing the gap between the South-East of England and the rest of the UK."

Creative clusters

In response the government invested £120m over five years in a creative clusters programme managed by the Arts & Humanities Research Council, establishing nine clusters as well as the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre (PEC), plus a further £33m in the Audience of the Future Challenge to support the development of immersive technologies across the board from art and entertainment to shops and the classroom, linked with other initiatives such as KTN's Design Foundations to seed innovation.

The nine creative clusters range across disciplines including videogames, film and TV to live audience immersion, digital placemaking, fashion and data. Twenty-four of the twenty-seven Key Cities have no direct connection with these clusters. Since Key Cities currently represent some 10.4% of the population of England and Wales, it does not follow that this proportion is unfair. But given the importance of culture, skills and creativity in creating opportunity and driving growth, it does point to a gap in the ambition to level up all parts of the country that have felt left behind in the wake of industrial decline and globalisation over four decades.

Not that Key Cities lack creative agglomeration potential beyond the government-funded clusters. Nesta's 2018 ***Creative Nation*** report[61] identified six Key Cities within the UK's top 28 travel-to-work-areas (TTWAs) for fastest economic and jobs growth (seven if we include those parts of Kirklees that are classified in the Leeds TTWA) and five Key Cities in the top 20 for GVA contributed by creative industries.

Creative Nation does sound a warning about the poten-

tial for the creative industries to improve productivity in areas where they lack critical mass. While creative businesses specialise in new ideas which may be replicable and could therefore be highly productive, the process can be labour-intensive and uncertain to deliver the desired outcomes for the creators. That uncertainty may be greater in areas that see little of the benefits of knowledge spill-over and agglomeration.

"Not all cities are created equal and it is not obvious that gains in one place will outweigh losses in others."

Acknowledging the benefits of agglomeration, a 2022 study for the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre[62] highlighted however why this approach is not sufficient:

"…not all areas of the UK are suitable to realise agglomeration economies, and not all cities are created equal in terms of their ability to deliver efficiency gains… a focus on facilitating the shifting of creative businesses, workers and activity to a limited number of settings will inevitably harm the rest of the country."

It is not obvious, the study adds, that gains in one place will outweigh losses in others. Relocating talent from regional theatres to large urban hubs "would create friction with the long-standing public policy objective of seeking to broaden access to culture and creative activity. Thus, despite the clear advantages inherent within a clustering or agglomeration strategy for certain geographical locations, there is a strong argument that it is not suitable for all places and communities across the rest of the UK. Hence, there is a need for policy makers and stakeholders to identify and utilise alternative means to achieve a similar set of objectives."

Community wealth building

The study looks at the potential for boosting the creative industries in Lancashire through targeted local procurement policies by anchor institutions – the so-called "Preston Model" associated with Preston councillors Matthew Brown and Martyn Rawlinson, who worked with the Centre for Local Economic Strategy to provide long-term support for local economic growth through "community wealth building".

Lancashire, the study points out, is not an area identifiable as having agglomeration advantages, consisting of independent urban centres and rural landscapes. Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds are mostly too far away to deliver more than a marginal agglomeration benefit, instead presenting a risk of drawing creative industries and innovation away from the county. Connectivity is hampered by the inconsistent provision of public transport, limited digital infrastructure, and issues arising from the proximity of large cities outside the county.

Lancashire's creative and digital economy represents six percent of the workforce compared to nine percent nationally. Locations of creative businesses vary across the county, but more than two in five are in the areas of Preston, Chorley, and Blackburn with Darwen, suggesting that concentration exists in clusters across the region.

While there were issues in assessing the value of the approach county-wide with the coordinated commissioning model implemented only in Preston, the study was able to draw some wider conclusions, including identifying significant additional revenues for creative businesses and a multiplier effect from the investment of 1.47, concluding that the model should be piloted more widely.

Other recommendations included placing a greater emphasis on individual place characteristics in determining creative sector support; co-creating place-based support networks with local authorities and universities; establishing local funding streams – or incorporating local input into national funding stream decisions – to reflect the distinctiveness of place; making procurement more SME and microbusiness-friendly through local codesign; exploring the potential of a cooperative platforms and coworking spaces to support microclusters; and finally, that "public funding should reflect the importance of place, rather than more narrowly following the core city model, to realise efficiency potential wherever opportunities exist."

Microclusters

The national importance of spreading the love more evenly was underlined by PEC research in 2020[63] showing that in the decade following the financial crisis the concentration of the creative industries in London and the South-East had intensified, while a further study later that year[64] noted that it is the microclusters outside existing creative clusters that carry particular promise.

The study identified 709 microclusters containing more than half of the UK's creative industries businesses and organisations spread widely across the country – "much more so than more geographically aggregated measures of clustering typically suggest."

Being in a microcluster that's outside a creative cluster appears to be associated with substantive benefits. "One of the most striking is growth, with companies in microclusters outside creative clusters being significantly less likely to have experienced a decline in revenue in the previous year, compared with companies outside microclusters but also with companies in microclusters in creative clusters."

They were also "significantly more likely to aspire to high growth in the future… Given that motivation for rapid growth is difficult to encourage, this suggests a strong appetite for growth coming from firms in these microclusters."

They were more likely to see access to skills as a major advantage and to employ graduates with creative arts or business backgrounds. "Similarly to companies in creative clusters, companies in microclusters outside clusters are significantly more likely to view the lifestyle and local amenities as an advantage for their business."

So while the report agreed that companies in the established creative clusters leverage their proximity to drive business, access skills and gain knowledge, it found that microclusters outside creative clusters leverage their proximity in a very similar way and that they are "more likely to have reported growing in the previous 12 months and more likely to have indicated an ambition to grow further."

How is this best supported? Outside London and the South-East, all microclusters companies – both within and outside the established creative clusters – see access to external finance as a barrier to growth. "This finding tentatively suggests," the study concludes, "that there may be untapped growth opportunities within microclusters outside of the creative industries hotspots that are usually the focus of government support."

Place Matters[65] agrees that "the conditions necessary for a successful sector can flourish in unexpected places that may have been traditionally downplayed or overlooked" and warns that "the mismatch between ambition and capacity, exacerbated through a decade of austerity is cited as a major barrier to place-based creative industries development."

Ask not what your city can do for you

While the funds invested by government may not yet have reached the level asked for in the Bazalgette Review, there is no lack of focus on stimulating growth in the creative industries, including using place-based approaches to do so.

The question ***What can place(s) do for the creative industries?*** is important, since growing the creative industries is siginicant to the national economy. Here, however, we ask ***What can creative industries do for place(s)?*** to achieve opportunity across the country that leaves no-one behind.

The evidence we have of the social and economic benefits of culture; the connections between place, skills and opportunity; the data on microclusters outside the established creative clusters; and the encouraging outcomes of Preston-Model commissioning – all suggest this could be a question worthy of further study.

UK Cities of Culture

Opposite

Symphonie Conique, AIRVAG, Lumiere Derry~Londonderry 2013. Produced by Artichoke. Photo by Chris Hill

The experience of the three cities that have held the title of UK City of Culture since 2013 has delivered a range of data and insights to show what the title can bring to a place, and how to make the most of it.

DERRY-LONDONDERRY 2013

Derry City & Strabane is not currently a member of the Key Cities group, but as Northern Ireland's second city with a population of around 150,000 it sits squarely within the profile of urban areas that are the focus of this report. When in 2010 it entered the contest to become the first UK City of Culture, hopes were high that the designation could improve community relations and the image of the city, bring inward investment, increase tourism, improve levels of education and skills and create new jobs.

Nationally and internationally, Derry-Londonderry was associated more with past division and the Troubles than with the future and culture, but by being the first to take on the mantle of UK City of Culture in 2013, close to the second nadir of the post-recession financial crisis, the city found itself pushing a boulder uphill.

Government and funding agencies, full of good intent, had no direct precedent on which to base their investment approach. The organisers lacked the experience of predecessors to help shape deliverable outcomes. The climate for commercial sponsorship was barren. The national and international tourism industry was less buoyant in 2013 than it had been at the time of the bid and the subsequent business case, both of which included overoptimistic projections for visitor numbers.

In the end the City of Culture was delivered for £20.4m against the revised 2012 business case projection of £25.8m, with £12.2m coming from the Northern Ireland Department for Culture, Arts & Leisure, £4.1m from the council and most of the remainder from other public funding sources including the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Arts Council England and the British Council.

Given that backdrop, the legacy for the city is seen as remarkably positive. While just 29 of the 53 projected benefits were evaluated as achieved[66] – and most of those of the 'softer' rather than the hard economic kind – the city did see capital investment associated with the City of Culture of £160m delivering renewal in previously run-down parts of the city, including new venues celebrating the heritage of the city's previously troubled diverse communities. Some three to four hundred new jobs were created.

Most importantly in the eyes of SDLP councillor Martin Reilly, mayor during the City of Culture year, is the changed image of the city, reflected in the visitor numbers that not only went up during the year but have stayed up.

"To me, one of the big things was that last year there were more visitors here than in 2013; that speaks for itself," he said in 2017, adding that "people view us differently. They now see Derry as a place to come and see. In the past, people may not have believed they would be safe coming to Derry."[67]

HULL 2017

Hull built on Derry's experience with a vision to grow capacity, build external collaborations, improve the city's liveability image, grow the economy and benefit local communities – conscious that "many of the most important outcomes … will only be fully assessable three, five or even ten years after the end of 2017." [68]

The evaluation led by the University of Hull measured impacts in five areas: arts and culture, placemaking, the economy, society and wellbeing, and partnerships and development.

The artistic programme of more than 2,800 events, activities, installations and exhibitions drew half its audience from Hull with the remainder split more or less equally between the East Riding of Yorkshire and the rest of the country with a smattering of international visitors. The programme rated highly in terms of audience approval and increased appreciation of heritage.

Museum and gallery visits surged hugely during the year but importantly continued higher than previously. Engagement by people in their fifties and sixties was particularly strong. Negatives were below par engagement by the younger 16-34 age group, by people from minority ethnic backgrounds and, although the programme "successfully engaged Hull residents from all deprivation deciles", this did not extend to the ten percent most deprived.

The legacy in terms of the cultural ecosystem is positive when viewed through the lens of public funding for the arts. Arts Council England's annual investment in Hull via National Portfolio Organisations in the period 2018-2022 was £2.2m for five NPOs, three of which were first allocated funding in 2015 in anticipation of the City of Culture year. The Arts Council's investment has further increased by 35.7% in the latest NPO round for 2023-2026, with annual investment now totalling £3m for eight NPOs.

In the area of placemaking, the organisers saw this as a significant opportunity to explore as it had not been one of the stated aims of Derry four years earlier. Like Derry, Hull had demons of the past to exorcise – in its case living down the dubious distinction of taking the number one spot in Jordison and Kiernan's 2003 guidebook ***Crap Towns: The 50 Worst Places To Live In The UK***. Local pride in Hull was actually high long before the City of Culture, and academic studies highlighted the mismatch. Dr Michael Howcroft effectively posits that pride without agency breeds resentment to explain how an international and cosmopolitan city of culture voted decisively for Brexit the year before Hull became the UK City of Culture.[69] Whether that cure is the best way of delivering agency is perhaps debatable, but both sides can agree it is a powerful argument for municipal devolution.

Hull succeeded in its aim "to improve perceptions of Hull as a place to live, work, study and visit", with fulsome media reach of 37.3bn, increased community pride and a very effective volunteer programme with more than 2,400 volunteers whose assistance was widely appreciated by audiences, and who themselves benefited significantly in confidence and self-esteem.

Regeneris, whose unpublished 2017 report provided some of the foundation for the University of Hull-led evaluation, "noted the BBC's decision to include Hull on TV weather maps for the first time, and that Hull was part of the Northern Powerhouse discussions of a 'Liverpool to Hull corridor' as examples of the city's growing national recognition. They also observed that external arts organisations had been motivated to engage with Hull since the award of City of Culture."

"The theme of the city's notoriety, so significant in 2013 [when Hull was announced as UK CoC], gradually lost importance in the later media articles and almost disappeared in the latest ones."

The year kickstarted a number of ongoing placemaking developments, such as Maritime City and the Humber Energy

Estuary.

As far as the economy is concerned it was noted that Hull faced some of the greatest economic challenges of any city in the UK, with high unemployment, the decline of older industries, and large parts of the urban area rating amongst the most deprived in the country. As a result, "the economic uplift that the UK City of Culture award could bring was always paramount to many."

Siemens had opened a new offshore blade factory in Hull in 2016, but placed future investment on hold following the Brexit vote. Ultimately fears around the company's ongoing commitment were laid to rest with the announcement in August 2021 that the factory would be expanded "by 41,600 square meters, more than doubling the size of the manufacturing facilities. The expansion represents an investment of £186m and is planned to be completed in 2023."[70] The decision was driven by the government's support for offshore wind and commitment to triple the installed capacity this decade, but equally it represents a vote of confidence in Hull as a place for business to invest.

There was some concern expressed that the extent to which artistic programming had been brought in from outside had resulted in "a limited focus on capacity-building for the city's cultural sector". This was reflected in the fact that there was no recorded increase in sector jobs, although in the wider creative industries the number of jobs grew by 15% in the two years from 2015 to 2017.

Evidence of growth in retail was also lacking, but the decline in retail generally was not seen in Hull at that time. Between 2016 and 2018 visitor numbers went up by ten percent, while jobs in the wider visitor economy increased more than a quarter in the six years from 2012.

The social impact of Hull's year as City of Culture seen in the volunteer programme was replicated in schools. The schools programme engaged 5,600 students – predominantly primary as secondary teachers found it harder to build into curriculum schedules. Forty-one percent were assessed as having gained or increased skills, while thirty-seven percent found themselves more engaged than before with creativity and heritage. Some eighteen percent of 16-24 year olds were inspired to go on studying a creative subject.

Resident surveys scored highly for wellbeing during the year but dropped back afterwards. Overall engagement with culture likewise grew and dropped back, but stayed at a higher level than before 2017.

The central partnership that drove the City of Culture, between Hull City Council and Hull UK City of Culture 2017, raised £32.8m – double the original target. Other partnerships that were key to making a success of the year and the legacy included the BBC, the PRS Foundation, Arts Council England, the British Council and Back to Ours, an Arts Council England Creative People and Places project started in 2017.

Looking at what lessons can be learned, the evaluation report felt that it was perhaps "more valuable to talk about lessons learnt from the very specific experiences of Hull as UKCoC 2017 rather than to attempt to create a 'blueprint' or 'model' that would be exported for the future delivery of other culture-led regeneration projects." Nevertheless, the report identified a strong case for investment in culture founded in multiple policy areas, raising a question "whether government (nationally and locally) should be investing in culture in a more horizontally integrated way to achieve multiple outcomes – in fields including education, health, economic development, tourism and social policy."

What was clear is that "work on legacy planning in future CoCs should proceed in parallel with work on the design and implementation of the cultural programme."

COVENTRY 2021

That lesson – and many others – had been taken on board by Coventry, but some things are just not foreseeable.

Both Derry and Hull had significant challenges to address, but they were at least known quantities. The Troubles had plagued much of the previous half century in County Londonderry and even the post-crash recession was in its fifth year when the city celebrated the UK's City of Culture inaugural year. Hull had lived with the condescension of ***The Idler*** magazine's readership – as expressed in its ***Crap*** series of "humour" books – for nearly a decade and a half when its turn came.

Coventry's challenge was to take on the mantle in the face of a pandemic that came out of nowhere and brought the global economy to a standstill in March 2020, with England entering its third national lockdown on 6 January 2021, venues not reopening until May and any semblance of normality absent until 19 July. This led to the decision that Coventry 2021 would start in May 2021 but still run for 12 months. True to its pioneering spirit, the city took the challenge as an opportunity to showcase the power of culture to drive the recovery.

A strategy for measuring performance and evaluating out-

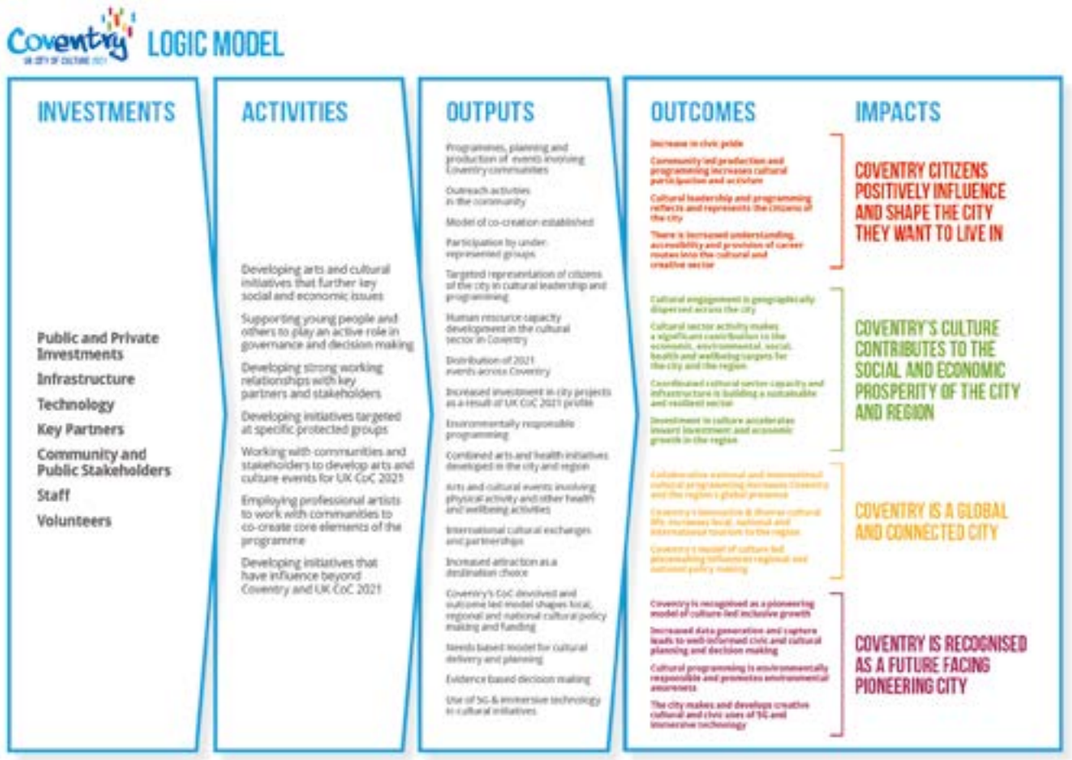
comes had been finalised a year in advance[71] by a development team led by the two universities, Warwick and Coventry, working with the city council and the trust set up to run the year. Responding to four desired impacts set out by the trust – citizens' influence on how the city develops, culture contributing to social and economic prosperity, advancing Coventry as a global and connected city, and highlighting its future-facing and pioneering character – it set out a series of "guiding principles" to achieve robust, transparent, balanced and appropriate evaluation activity including recognition of burden and the incorporation of voices across the full spectrum of stakeholders. The strategy charged the universities with independent monitoring and evaluation of outcomes during and after the year.

The monitoring and evaluation process would take the form of regular reporting during the year, preliminary findings in the first two quarters of 2022, an interim evaluation by the end of 2022 and the final report due in November 2024.

To ensure that the City of Culture year would – and would be seen to – deliver the four desired impacts, the development team created a 'Theory of Change' with a Logic Model that showed how public, private, community and individual investments would feed into the programme activities and their outputs, which in turn would produce 15 measurable outcomes that could be evaluated against the four impacts. Each of the programme activities was fleshed out (How do we "support young people and others to play an active role in governance and decision-making"? By, for example, "actively working with young people to allow them to develop and flourish through arts and culture; supporting a new cohort of diverse artists and cultural leaders; negotiating and co-creating outputs and outcomes"). The intentions for each projected outcome were described and key performance indicators established.

The interim report published in January 2022[72] showed that the trust had been impelled to respond to the pandemic by constantly shifting and adapting the timing, scale, range and nature of the planned activities. Partnership building and co-creation moved online. A full digital programme of activities was launched, many focused on target communities in need. An emergency fund of three hundred thousand pounds was invested a week before the first lockdown to protect commissions, evolve the programme and support livelihoods.

In the home city of The Specials and 2-Tone, the trust also reinforced local Black Lives Matter activism in response to the global outrage following the murder of Floyd George on 25 May, and established Green Futures as a programme theme responding to the climate emergency.



Above

The Logic Model set out in Coventry's Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy.

While the independent economic assessment of the year commissioned by the trust is not due to report finally until 2024, some outcomes were already clear, including that between December 2017 – when the award was announced – and the start of 2021, the City of Culture year, Coventry saw inward "title-related investment" of more than £172m, which in turn led to regeneration activity in excess of half a billion pounds.

While some expectations had to be scaled back – the target of 2.5m additional visitors to Coventry that year was not going to be met given Covid restrictions – the interim evaluation suggests that the programming was successful in driving up participation and engagement with culture in areas where it was historically low, and more than two in every five tickets for CoC events had been issued to lower-income households. At this stage of the year, over 1,100 volunteers ("City Hosts") provided more than 12,000 hours of support. More than 1,500 dancers, musicians, poets and makers drawn from the local community took part in the first six months of the programme. More than a third of the programme had been co-created with local communities, with activities taking place in all 42 neigh-

Opposite

Midsummer Fire Gardens, Coventry UK City of Culture 2021.
Photo: Dylan Parrin

bourhoods in Coventry. The organisers engaged with more than 100 schools in the city.

A marked increase in wellbeing was recorded in participants taking part in projects over multiple weeks. In terms of civic pride and the image of the city, audience surveys showed more than nine in ten respondents had had a good time and rated events as good or very good; over half said their image of the city had improved and three quarters felt increased pride in the city.

The organisers made clear that the purpose of evaluation is to focus on outcomes and impact, not on process and operational details, and a more detailed story of the changes wrought by Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 will emerge over the next two or three years. The economic and social outcomes that can already be seen, however, show the effectiveness of legacy and evaluation planning as an integral part of programme development.

Part Two:
Expert evidence

Universities and urban centres

Stephen Marston
Vice-Chancellor
University of Gloucestershire

The University of Gloucestershire is a member of the Key Cities Innovation Network

The University of Gloucestershire is working with partners to promote cultural development in the city of Gloucester.

The university is proud of its deep roots in the community. An important part of our mission and strategy is to be an "anchor institution", promoting the long-term wellbeing and prosperity of the communities we serve in Gloucester, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire and the surrounding area. This embraces educational, economic, social and also cultural wellbeing.

In 2016, Gloucester city council published a cultural strategy. This recognised that development of the city's cultural offer was an important contributor to economic regeneration and growth, as well as community development. Culture is one of the factors that makes a place a good place to live, work, settle, enjoy, and raise a family. Culturally, Gloucester has long been in the shadow of its near neighbour Cheltenham, which enjoys international recognition for its festivals, architecture, and the range of cultural venues and activities it offers. Gloucester's culture is different - a hugely rich architectural and historical legacy, and a vibrant offer of events and festivals, but a more fragmented, under-promoted, community-based, innovative, diverse and edgy culture.

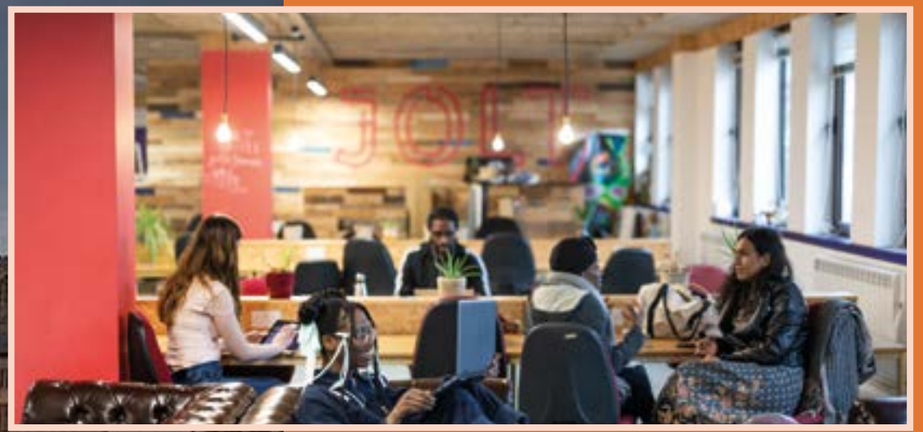
One part of the city strategy was to create an arm's-length Gloucester Culture Trust. This is an independent charity charged with delivering the strategy for the city. The university was one of the founding members of the trust and I am still on its board. We believe the strategy and the trust can be powerful drivers of cultural enhancement, and therefore a powerful mechanism for the university to promote community wellbeing through culture.

We offer a wide range of cultural and arts higher education programmes and research at the university, embracing performing arts, dance and drama, fine arts, illustration, photography, design, architecture, media, animation, computer games design and more. In 2014 the university built new specialist facilities for performing arts at its Oxstalls campus in Gloucester. The same year it also created an award-winning and nationally recognized Growth Hub providing business support services, also based at Oxstalls. To support these teaching and research activities, the university maintains a rich network of partnerships with cultural and arts organisations in the county. Our view is that, by engaging actively to support the Gloucester Culture Trust and strategy, we could pull all these activities and partnerships through into a direct contribution by the university to shaping and building the cultural offer for the city and the county.

In 2017 the Culture Trust successfully won £1.5m of Arts Council grant funding towards a "Great Place" programme of cultural development for the city. This funding marked a step change in the trust's capacity to drive real cultural change across a broad front. The university designed and led one of the seven strands of the programme, which was to create a cultural entrepreneurs hub. The university's concept, drawing on its experience of business incubation and enterprise support in the Growth Hub, was that Gloucester could only grow its own cultural ecosystem, sustainable for the long term, if it started by supporting its own local cultural talent to develop the skills to become successful cultural entrepreneurs, animators, promoters and organisers. The development of cultural performers is clearly also essential, but importing established performers from outside was never going to grow the city's own cultural infrastructure. Developing sustainable cultural programming would depend on supporting talented young people in the city, including the university's own graduates, not just to become great performers but also to create careers and livelihoods from cultural enterprise. Several of the strands of Gloucester's Great Place programme supported talent development in multiple ways, including one strand that formed a partnership with the wonderful Roundhouse in Camden, who generously shared with Gloucester their experience of sparking exceptional cultural creativity in talented young people who might otherwise never have had that opportunity.

"Gloucester could only grow its own cultural ecosystem, sustainable for the long term, if it started by supporting its own local cultural talent."

Over the four years of Great Place, the university worked closely with the trust in making that vision for the cultural en-



Opposite

The new vision for King's Square, phase one of the new King's Quarter, was unveiled in May 2022.

Above

Jolt, a hub for cultural entrepreneurs, is operated by the Gloucester Culture Trust.

trepreneurs hub a reality. It started with a network and mentoring programme, building opportunities for aspiring cultural actors to come together, support each other and share experiences, introducing skills training and enterprise development programmes modelled on the Growth Hub but contextualized for culture. The trust secured from the city council a 20-year lease on a floor in Kings House in the centre of Gloucester as the permanent home for the cultural entrepreneurs hub, managed with great flair and creativity by James Garrod and now re-named Jolt. Kings House fronts onto Kings Square, recently redeveloped by the city council as an outdoor events and performance space. It is adjacent to the old Debenhams department store building, bought in 2021 by the university as the location for its new city campus. It is close to the Guildhall, Gloucester's main cultural venue. Jolt shares Kings House with the Music Works, an innovative and highly regarded charity working to engage disadvantaged young people in music. So Jolt is ideally situated to be a genuine hub for culturally active and ambitious people to develop and turn their ideas for new cultural activity into reality. Hopefully, this will be a lasting legacy of the Great Place programme.

So the university has been, and remains, on a journey with partners to put culture at the heart of the wider regeneration of the city of Gloucester. The city has many challenges, and has not traditionally seen itself as a centre of culture. But the culture is there - vibrant, diverse, rewarding, but under-recognised. The university's hope is that with our partners we will nurture the talent and enterprise that is so evident in the city to create a self-sustaining ecosystem of cultural ambition for the good of the whole community.

In November 2022 the Gloucester Culture Trust was awarded National Portfolio Organisation status by the Arts Council. This will make a huge difference to the trust's capacity to deliver its strategy for the city. Two other Gloucester-based organisations were also awarded NPO status and funding: the Gloucester Guildhall and Strike A Light. This opens up exciting new opportunities to work with them and many other partners in the city and the county to create a really vibrant programme for developing events, talents, performances, enterprises and cultural activities across our whole community.

Cities of Culture: a model of evaluation

Professor Nick Henry
Professor of Economic Geography at Coventry University

Coventry University is a member of the Key Cities Innovation Network

Nick Henry explains how a university-supported place partnership has generated city of culture legacy around research, evaluation and evidence.

Since its inception in 2009, the UK City of Culture programme has grown into a flagship UK competition for place-based cultural investment. With greater recognition of and competition for the title of UK City of Culture has come greater scrutiny of the costs, expected and actual impacts and the legacy left by what is now a maturing government programme.

Answering questions like ***Was the year a success? What have been its impacts? What legacy has been built? What worked and why? What didn't work and why? And was it value for money?*** in often strongly politicised and charged environments, presupposes a substantial infrastructure of (open) data, evidence, and comment to support assessment and judgement.

Through a place-based partnership of the two local universities – Coventry University and the University of Warwick – the Coventry City of Culture Trust and Coventry City Council, a deliberate legacy of Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 (CoC21) has been to seek to build, commission, deliver and learn from a monitoring, evaluation and research programme which provides data, learning and legacy for those that follow.

Similarly, it has been recognised that as 'cultural interventions of scale', Cities of Culture offer substantial sites of cultural research and inquiry. For example, CoC21's vision and aims were to enact a programme of city change through, ultimately, over 700 cultural activities ranging from targeted 'hyperlocal' activities across the city to global exchange projects.

Evaluating CoC21

Following the award announcement, a CoC21 Core Monitoring and Evaluation Group comprising key expert personnel from the partner institutions was constituted in 2018. Meeting at least monthly, often fortnightly, this group continues today. Early work included supporting a CoC21 Theory of Change process with Coventry City of Culture Trust and the generation of an outcomes-based Performance Measurement and Evaluation Strategy (PMES).

The PMES and its evaluation framework has framed an extensive, innovative, multi-disciplinary, longitudinal, multi-method quantitative and qualitative research and evaluation programme including: the creation of internal data collection, monitoring, reporting and evaluation structures of the trust; progress reports; commissioning of economic and social value impact assessments, evaluation and focus studies from external consultancies and cross-university research teams; and extensions of city-wide surveys by the city council and a data profiler. The final commissioned output is due in 2024.

Over this extensive period:

- Coventry University and the University of Warwick have each provided the dedicated 'in-kind' time of a senior university individual expert in the field to provide leadership, stakeholder management, access to broader university expertise and skills, and a source channel of (mostly short-term) funding opportunities such as UK Research Council funds, Higher Education Innovation Funds, and Impact Accelerator Funds. Focused on evaluation, research, and engagement, this commitment has sat alongside and intertwined with other individual institutional place-based and civic anchor investments driven especially by the high profile and celebratory moment of CoC21. Arguably, this combined suite of research, evaluation, teaching, public engagement, and impact activity has included benefiting from UK-wide research impulses in themes such as place and culture, place-based policy, arts-based methods and new methodological forms of (ethics-driven) research.
- Coventry City of Culture Trust has recognised the importance of evaluation and research, investing in internal structures and an evaluation team, and providing dedicated funds to support the delivery of the PMES Strategy.
- Coventry City Council, as part of its broader strategy, business planning, and scrutiny functions, committed the personnel support especially of its innovative Insight Team and their expertise and intelligence on both city statistics generated across policy domains – nationally, regionally and locally – and the delivery of city-wide data collection such as the Coventry Household Survey. The team were supported

Opposite

'Walking Through Coventry Data'. Photo: Si Chun Lam.

by University of Warwick funding for a Data Analyst.

- An ongoing Technical Reference Group (TRG) was convened, chaired by DCMS. The TRG comprises a dozen mainly national stakeholders such as Arts Council England and the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre to provide evaluation guidance and validation and support knowledge exchange. A key development has been how the ongoing CoC21 evaluation has informed the UK City of Culture 2025 competition and DCMS's programme of Areas of Research Interest to support continued development of the national cultural evidence base.

Outputs, Engagement and Exchange

Deliberately designed and funded to seek to meet the substantial array of stakeholder expectations around reporting, evaluation, learning and impact, the evaluation programme has pursued an array of timetabled, timely and diverse outputs.

Stretching over nearly five years, including the pandemic and its impact on the planning, timetable, and activities of CoC21, this has remained an undoubted challenge. Place-based partnership has remained a critical glue in the face of (inevitable) institutional, strategic and policy change, and it has been partially anchored by Coventry's Cultural Strategy 2017–2027, of which bidding for CoC21 was just one, if major, component. Post-2021, the strategy is undergoing a refresh as part of Coventry's Cultural Compact: Culture Change Coventry.

Post-year exchange, engagement and learning has been expanded by two Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) projects as the AHRC has invested to demonstrate how arts and humanities researchers, often working collaboratively with other disciplines, can support place shaping and policy making. These projects have allowed further innovative outputs by the partnership, such as the Coventry Cultural Challenge (a type of cultural solutions hackathon), Walking Through Coventry Data (an immersive data and images experience of the city in its new The Reel Store digital gallery) and a Future Trends Series of roundtables.

More information as well as past and on-going outputs are available on the CoC21 Evaluation homepage at www.coventry21evaluation.info.

Culture and the university

Professor Shirley Congdon
Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bradford

Professor Chris Gaffney
Interim Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

Eleanor Clyde-Evans
Associate Director of Engagement

Dr Karina Croucher
Associate Professor in the School of Archaeological and Forensic Sciences

The University of Bradford is a member of the Key Cities Innovation Network

Samar Shahdad is an exiled Iranian poet whose work explores the themes associated with exile such as language, identity, and belonging. Her poem 'Exile' powerfully evokes the experience of enforced living far away from home and family. It was installed on the railings outside Theatre in the Mill in August 2021.

Read the poem in Farsi and English at www.theatreinthemill.com/exile/

Universities have been important partners for all UK Cities of Culture, and so it is for Bradford 2025. The ways in which universities and their home cities benefit from this relationship are complex, sometimes unexpected, but always rewarding.

The University of Bradford was founded in 1966 and is proud to be located in the heart of the city of Bradford. The white heat of technology was the guiding principle of our first chancellor, Harold Wilson, and the university has embraced cultural engagement and creative innovation from the start.

The artistic landscape of the city has flourished through cross-sector partnerships that are forged to provide active lives in the city, and to celebrate engagement with cultures across it. As part of the university's mission and vision, we wish to unlock the potential of cultural diversity with our core values of excellence, inclusion, innovation and trust. Our strategies are designed to unlock the potential in both the university and the city to achieve social, cultural and economic impact. Creative industries are interwoven into our plans and have flourished in recent years.

Working in and with the city

Like many universities. we have dedicated artistic areas such as the Theatre in The Mill,[73] the Tamsin Little Music Centre and Gallery II exhibition space, which are designed as development spaces for artists and students. But our ambition beyond that is to follow a bolder strategic plan for cultural work by focusing work in, and with, the city of Bradford and the wider region. In the years immediately prior to the pandemic, creating a truly diverse and inclusive cultural atmosphere at a scale that we aspire to was a challenging undertaking. This was made worse by the Covid bubble, which took away the opportunity to hold the sorts of events that inspire the cultural imagination and enable talent to create cultural and economic benefit. We addressed this by undertaking much more collaborative and

co-created work between our academics, students, artists and the wider community, resulting in turn in a more vibrant and animated campus.

Having an active student population in the city that has the greatest proportion of young people in the UK gives us ample opportunity for radical cultural engagement for the benefit of our community. We're not just the University of Bradford but also Bradford's university – an emphasis that has shaped our relationship with a city that is receptive to new ideas and innovative partnerships.

Culture for all

The diversity of our cultural links is evident, ranging as they do from our Café Scientifique exploration of the latest breakthroughs in science at the National Science and Media Museum, through to our partnerships with Bradford City AFC and Football for Peace resulting in the world's first Mesut Özil Development Centre. The aim of this initiative – to use the power of football to promote sustainable living and to make a positive contribution to pressing issues of wellbeing, isolation, inequality, and discrimination, matches our values as the university that established the world's first Peace Studies programme and dovetails with our vision of culture aspirations for all in our city.

"We are the university of and for Bradford, sharing knowledge to strengthen health, wealth and confidence across our communities."

In 2020, the university confirmed its commitment to be a university of and for the city of Bradford. We developed, consulted and then launched a new business and community engagement strategy.[74] This strategy, centred on being pioneering, productive and proud, aims to share knowledge in order to strengthen health, wealth and confidence across the many communities in which our students, staff and alumni participate. We do this with our communities by co-creating solutions to local problems that have international impact.

Broader opportunities

A recent example, led by Dr Sahdia Parveen, is work on the barriers faced by South Asian communities in accessing care pathways for those with dementia. They often experience late or missed diagnosis, reduced access to treatments, or inappropriate support. Dr Parveen has developed a new toolkit that provides accessible and tailored resources, enabling the services to provide more culturally appropriate care.

The relationship with the city of Bradford provides huge synergetic opportunities. The Bradford Literature Festival,[75] for example, focuses on the written and spoken word reflected in diverse art forms such as film, theatre and music. Although the artistic framework for the festival is the historic centre of the city, it is based in the university and we were one of its founding supporters. First held in 2014, by 2022 it had grown to 70,000 attendees in 400 events and with strong values of equality, diversity and inclusion it has become a highly respected international festival. Bradford was the first city in the world to be named a UNESCO City of Film, the headquarters of which is based at the university, bridging local to international partnerships and presenting myriad opportunities for our students and young people across the city. We are also the lead partner for the Bradford Producing Hub, a programme funded by the Arts Council to increase producing capacity in Bradford and beyond. This programme, which has already proven to be a great success, will play a central role in growing the city's capacity for delivering a successful year of cultural activities in 2025, and to sustain its legacy going forward.

Culture and identity

An important facilitator for embedding culture in the university's day-to-day work is our Culture and Identity Research Group, a multi-disciplinary group of researchers with an interest in researching aspects of culture and identity. This group of academics drawn from all faculties (including disciplines such as archaeology and forensics, media, engineering, psychology, sociology, and health), as well as the university's Theatre in the Mill and research support teams, is open to all who have an interest in expanding our cultural offer. This group originated within staff teaching the 'Multidisciplinary approaches to identity' module as part of the MA course in Archaeology and Identity, which is delivered by academics from across the university. The terms culture and identity are kept intentionally broad, to encompass traditional arts and culture (such as per-

Opposite

Theatre in the Mill ambassador Elvis promoting the launch of a new show, 'You heard us'.

Inset: TiM commissioned 509 Arts to develop Decade, a residency in August 2019. In 2029, Al Dix will be 80 years old and things will be different. Decade shares Al's personal journey into old age and follows his attempts to understand, interrogate and document the world as it happens.

formance, media and storytelling) alongside research into topics such as the culture and identity of the NHS. The research group also feeds into the university's mental health and wellbeing workstream on the topic of 'non-medicalised and creative approaches to wellbeing', exploring ways our research into culture and identity benefit wellbeing and challenge health and social inequalities. The Culture and Identity Research Group provides a forum to promote discussion around culture and identity, generating research ideas and collaborations, sharing good practice, generating new projects and providing peer support, as well as driving research around Bradford as UK City of Culture 2025. The University of Bradford is a strategic partner for BD25 and the City of Culture designation will benefit people across the district, including our community of students and staff, giving them access and opportunity to deliver a rich and diverse programme of culture throughout 2025.

Culture is Our Plan (Bradford's strategic cultural plan)[76] and the forthcoming year of culture in 2025 are strong reasons to pursue our ambitions in forging strong collaborations between the city, its cultural spaces and the seldom-heard communities we serve. We are working hard to realise the potential of this with other anchor institutions in the city of Bradford.

As a strategic partner of Bradford 2025 we played a significant supporting role in the bidding process. We are now taking great strides in unlocking support for its next phase which will transform our city, benefit our people and create a new sense of pride.

Wrexham's journey

Professor Maria Hinfelaar
Vice-Chancellor of
the University of
Wrexham Glyndwr

The University of Wrexham Glyndwr is a member of the Key Cities Innovation Network

Wrexham was shortlisted to be named the UK City of Culture 2025, as the only remaining candidate from Wales among a strong field. Even though the bid was ultimately unsuccessful, it proved to be a catalyst for growing civic pride and a strong resolve to bid again in the 2029 round. In this article, Maria Hinfelaar describes the themes and strands of events offered to the community as part of the process, and Wrexham's ambitions towards 2029. She outlines the parameters of a longitudinal study to be carried out by Wrexham Glyndwr University, exploring the potential economic and social impacts of city of culture status.

Wrexham's bid for UK City of Culture 2025 was widely regarded as innovative and refreshing. It was launched as Wrecsam2025, boldly using the Welsh spelling only rather than a bilingual presentation – perhaps unexpected, since Wrexham is not predominantly Welsh-speaking, is located close to England and is part of a cross-border economy. The City of Culture bid factsheet published by Wrexham Council in February 2022 stated:

"Our logo prominently features the Welsh spelling of 'Wrecsam' – we're Welsh, we speak Welsh, and always encourage its use... Our Wrecsam2025 logo 'colour splash' represents coal dust as a nod to our industrial past, while the colours themselves show the vibrancy and diversity of every single one of us who lives, works and plays in Wrexham."

Community and culture

The vision for Wrecsam2025 was based on six themes: being the centre of trade and events in North Wales; the UK Capital of Play; the home of football in Wales; leaders in innovation; Welsh language and heritage; celebrating culture and diversity.

To help shape these abstract concepts, in December 2021 the council announced funding of up to one thousand pounds for community groups or individuals to put on events showcasing Wrexham's community and culture. In parallel, local employers across all sectors in the county region were invited to be ambassadors for the bid by championing it to their customers, staff and online followers.

A digital pack with brand guidelines was provided to participating organisations. Additionally, from among the group of ambassadors a number of stakeholders were appointed to join a steering group and help review the bid ahead of submission. The university sat on this core group, as a natural fit with its civic mission and relevant academic expertise, as well as substantial global academic partnerships which could help enrich cultural connections for the city.

It was clear from the outset that there was genuine enthusiasm for the bid. The call for community-led projects under the six Wrecsam2025 themes led to the award of fifty grants totalling £50,000, while existing regional venues and annual events such as Theatr Clwyd, Ty Pawb, the Focus Wales Music Festival and the Wrexham Food Festival happily embraced the Wrecsam2025 banner.

Even though the rolling programme of activities was somewhat hampered by Covid restrictions in the early part of 2022, it was evident that, as the pandemic eased and people were able to go out more, Wrecsam2025 became a widely understood and appreciated ambition. This gained real momentum, and a growing level of confidence, when the bid reached the shortlist stage in March 2022.

City status

At that time, Wrexham did not yet have city status and an application had been progressed in parallel with the City of Culture bid. Remarkably, that application had proved to be politically contentious and did not have anywhere near the level of community support enjoyed by Wrecsam2025. Ironically, the lack of such status would have been an insurmountable obstacle to submitting a bid in the past, but that requirement was waived by the UK government, so Wrexham was able to compete as

a “county region”. As it turned out, city status was granted as part of the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee celebrations just a few weeks before the outcome of the City of Culture bid was known. This meant that Wrexham would be able to re-enter the 2029 bidding round as a fully-fledged city.

Potential for success

As runners-up, Wrexham received £125,000 seed funding from the UK government to support future work. Feedback provided by the judging panel at both stages of the competition focused on ‘raising the game’ further and on scaling up, and improving readiness to deliver. The panel characterised the bid as ‘heartfelt’ and ‘full of passion’, with Wrexham clearly on a journey. They acknowledged the huge progress that had been made between the longlisting and shortlisting stages, with an authentic vision and voice shared across community groups.

Internationally prominent individuals and organisations such as the charismatic new Hollywood-based owners of Wrexham FC and the Football Association Wales had publicly backed the bid. The rather abstract themes articulated at the beginning had become more specific in the final bid, including key words such as ‘Comedy’, ‘Heritage’ and ‘Play’. The most encouraging comment was that Wrecsam2025 had demonstrated “the potential to offer a successful year of events as City of Culture”. Therefore, a strong consensus to work towards the Wrecsam2029 bid emerged swiftly.

Funded plans were drawn up to continue with a rolling programme of cultural events, effectively creating biennial Capital of Culture ‘seasons’ in 2023, 2025 and 2027 in preparation for the delivery of the UK City of Culture Year in 2029 if the bid is successful. Several high-profile signature events were secured with partnership buy-in from beyond the region, all of which were coherent with the bid themes as originally envisaged. The Football Museum Wales project was launched in Wrexham (for delivery in 2025) and a stage of the professional Cycling Tour Series would be hosted in 2023.

A significant commitment was entered into to bring the Welsh National Eisteddfod to Wrexham in 2025, which typically attracts 150,000 visitors and has an economic impact of six to eight million pounds on the local area, with tourism and hospitality benefiting the most. Additionally, supports for grassroots community arts and culture would be ramped up. These initiatives made the Wrecsam2029 ambition tangible and credible, and would provide evidence that the city was able to scale up its culture, arts and sports scenes so that it would become a visitor destination as well as galvanise its local communities. In line with governance best practice, a process to establish an independent body to deliver the bid at arm’s length from the council was also under way by the end of 2022.

Impact study

Wrexham Glyndwr University developed a research proposal to carry out a longitudinal study to track and review the economic impact and social dividends of both the City of Culture bidding process itself and the potential award for 2029. It is clear that the positive impacts of City of Culture status aspirations, whether or not the future bid was successful, would already be felt as a result of the unprecedented series of events brought to Wrexham. In some cases these events would be coupled with infrastructure improvements as part of the evolving placemaking strategy for the city, as it was seeking to revitalise and regenerate post Covid. It would therefore be crucial to capture these benefits and make them part of the story, rather than wait until the City of Culture year itself and then carry out a conventional post-hoc economic impact assessment. The research would commence with a feasibility study, exploring methodologies previously used through a literature review to determine appropriate data gathering and key information sources such as stakeholder interviews. The study intended to focus on five areas of interest: 1) economic benefit brought to different sectors in Wrexham, e.g. tourism, retail, hospitality, arts and culture enterprises; 2) societal impact and public well-being; 3) partnerships development and engagement; 4) trends and changes over time; 5) probable impact on Wrexham as compared with international case studies.

In a nutshell, the study would capture how the legacy of Wrecsam2029 was starting several years ahead, and would build a longitudinal insight into how it was growing – rather than establish afterwards what the legacy looked like historically. It would help to track the impact of the increasing level of maturity and targeted investment in the city associated with potential City of Culture status, as a collective effort. Such a novel approach to conducting an impact study of the economic and social benefits of city of culture processes and programmes, in real time, would also have the potential to contribute to similar action research projects in other places far away from Wrexham.

This would truly put Wrexham (and indeed, Wrecsam) on the map forever.

The welfare of the people

Sarie Mairs Slee
Head of Partnership,
Salford Culture and Place Partnership

The launch of Salford's Cultural Compact came at a propitious time, Sarie Mairs Slee recalls.

In February 2017, when Salford's leaders faced pivotal decisions about the city's long-term future, four organisations joined in a fledgling partnership for developing a shared vision that was balanced and socially inclusive as well as economically resilient.

Salford City Council, The Lowry, the University of Salford and Arts Council England saw the role that culture played in people's lives, in the well-being and identity of communities, in placemaking activities and in nurturing Salford's diverse heritage. In pursuing a "new and radical approach to culture, the arts, heritage and placemaking" through collaboration, they understood the need for Salford's anchor institutions to work together, to connect with people and communities, and to give effective support to the creative sector in the city.

This shared ambition led to the development of the Salford Culture and Place Partnership, which was launched in January 2019. It was in effect a Cultural Compact which, although it had developed independently, mirrored many of the elements, drivers and aspirations of the Compacts proposed in the 2019 Cultural Cities Enquiry Report. From the outset, however, the Salford partnership's distinctive focus was equally on three areas: culture, creativity and place.

This wider strategic focus also expanded the membership of the Cultural Compact. The four original partners remained, and were joined by the BBC and the Royal Horticultural Society. The BBC of course has its major presence at MediaCity in Salford Quays. The new RHS Garden Bridgewater opened in May 2021. Walk the Plank and Islington Mill, key artist-led organisations in Salford, were invited to join as voices for the needs and aspirations of creatives in the city. Others joining in 2019 included Peel Media, the private sector developers behind Media City, Salford CVS and Salford Community Leisure, further shaping the Cultural Compact's conversation and enhancing its capacity. The partnership continues to bring in new partners, refine, reshape and grow.

With such a diverse, cross-sector partnership – all with strong voices and perspectives – it was not always straightforward to build a shared strategy. Common ground was however found in an unexpected source: Salford's city motto Suprema Lex, rephrasing the words of Cicero, ***Salus populi suprema lex***, which means 'the welfare of the people is the highest law'.

Salford's motto presented a challenge as well as an opportunity. It's not unusual for strategies and policies to advocate positive outcomes for people, but often they rank second below economic outcomes. In other words, money takes priority over people.

Proclaiming that the welfare of the people is our highest law sounded fantastic, but turning it into a shared, city-wide strategy is another matter. It was not without risk. Positioning this statement as the beating heart for culture, creativity and place in Salford required the partnership to place 'people' as the central driver for everything it did strategically. It must be the first, middle and last thought in any project dreamt up or taken on. The partnership would need to hold themselves to account and expect others to do so.

> **"Proclaiming the welfare of the people as our highest law sounded fantastic, but turning it into a shared, city-wide strategy is another matter."**

This was the risk we embraced and, on 12 March 2020, the Salford Culture and Place Partnership launched the Suprema Lex strategy.

The precise date a strategy is launched is not usually very significant. March 2020, however, was a time of unprecedented disruption. Four days after the launch, on Monday 16 March, prime minister Boris Johnson appeared on our television screens and announced that to protect ourselves from the Covid-19 pandemic, all businesses, venues and schools must close by the end of the week. We'd launched Suprema Lex and, almost immediately, the world changed.

It was in this moment of intense disruption that Suprema Lex found its purpose. If a week earlier the idea of prioritising welfare might have looked positive but essentially altruistic, now

Box on the Docks at MediaCity UK, Salford

suddenly it was essential. We focused on the reality that lives and livelihoods were being lost, and garnered our resources to help with both.

Culture, creativity and place were in sudden and serious jeopardy. They were also the fundamental building blocks for all our responses and solutions. New schemes like MediaCity's Box on the Docks scheme, which supported MediaCity's food and beverage outlets with Covid-safe spaces in public, artist-led installations were conceived and launched at an eye-watering pace. Rediscovering Salford, an Arts Council-funded project around creative engagement in parks, gardens and green spaces, pivoted to support the GMCA's Creative Care Kits project, invest in creative engagement resources for Salford's parks, and assist RHS staff to test creative events and exhibitions in its new gardens. Quays Culture's annual Lightwaves festival created Mystery Bird, a travelling light and sound installation that took to the neighbourhoods of Salford and Greater Manchester, exploding the projections and sounds in a luminescent bird cage onto the houses and surrounding buildings before disappearing again. As a values-based strategy, Suprema Lex became a compass to 'wayfind' our way through the pandemic.

It gave the Cultural Compact common purpose, and the partnership infrastructure to plan, react, risk and test at immense speed: a testing by fire that transformed the Salford Culture and Place Partnership, its purpose and its agency. Having co-created a values-based strategy, the partnership knows what it stands for together. Its abilities to take risks, to share and challenge understanding, and to mitigate negative impacts while multiplying positive ones have grown exponentially.

Post-Covid, Suprema Lex continues to grow and deepen in meaning and delivery. Collaboration with Salford city council's public health team started in late 2021 and, as Greater Manchester launches its strategy as the UK's first "creative health city region", Salford is developing the staffing, infrastructure and action plan to become its exemplar, harnessing the concept of 'green and creative care'. The DCMS-funded Stage Directions programme developed a phenomenal offer through Salford's Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP), launching an innovative Creative Careers Festival to improve pathways into creative careers for young people and aspiring creatives across the city and beyond. Utilising the GMCA's new framework, Salford is creating two 'Creative Improvement Districts', building on partnership work between Islington Mill and Salford City Council to secure a £7.5m investment for permanent creative workspace, business support and creative connections in 'The Other City'.

Cities, towns and locales across the UK are focusing on recovery from the pandemic, as well as further tumult around the cost of living crisis and the volatile reality that seems to have become the norm. Through Suprema Lex, the Salford Culture and Place Partnership learned early that economic recovery is inextricably linked with the recovery of people's health, their sense of safety in venues and shared spaces, their sense of purpose and place in ever-changing communities.

Recovery, in all its forms, has people at the centre. So do culture, creativity and place.

Town and country

Ed Matthews-Gentle FRSA
Programme lead,
Creative Lancashire

Strategic lead for Culture &
Creative Industries,
Lancashire County Council

No place is an island (well, except islands, obviously). How do the approaches of towns and cities connect with the wider context of counties, regions and beyond? Three of our great Key Cities – Blackpool, Lancaster and Preston – are in the historic county of Lancashire and the University of Lancaster is a member of the Key Cities Innovation Network.

Creative Lancashire's Ed Matthews-Gentle, who is responsible for overseeing the LEP Cultural Investment Strategy, explores the county context.

Lancashire presents a model for much of Britain beyond the metropolitan hubs, with a rich and diverse geography of small cities, towns, rural hinterlands and coastal communities shaped by a legacy of industrialisation.

The landscape is dramatically impacted by the demise of manufacturing and globalisation over the past fifty years. For large parts of the county, this has resulted in long-term socio-economic decline.

The ambitions of cultural and creative businesses in Lancashire have been further constrained by the structural shortcomings of a post-industrial economy, which is often reflected in the inherent barriers to national funding for regions. The case for levelling up in places such as Lancashire is well understood, where lack of scale is often at odds with their fragmented and disaggregated cultural assets.

Yet with 140 miles of stunning coastline connecting with Merseyside to the south and west, and Cumbria to the north, with expansive rural areas and an extraordinary mix of cities, towns and villages, Lancashire offers precisely the context that can demonstrate the cohesive power of cultural regeneration and reimagining of places – with no preconditions for who should be involved, and no constraints on the level of ambition or aspiration.

Lancashire's boundaries and identities have been endlessly re-shaped, most significantly in 1889, and again in 1974 with the secession of Liverpool and Manchester. To this day, many in places like Bolton, Bury and Rochdale identify more naturally with historic Lancashire than with an urban metropolis. For those on either side of the borders the result can sometimes be a diminished sense of place and a confusing sense of self.

Yet within this crisis of identity lies opportunity.

Lancashire was the birthplace of the industrial revolution that exploited resources. Today, it sits at the threshold of new challenges and opportunities in a high-speed, globalised world, at the dawn of the fourth industrial revolution. With a population of 1.5m people, Lancashire's £34bn economy was in steady and constant growth before the pandemic. It's home to the fourth largest aerospace cluster in the world and to a range of important and emerging sectors from manufacturing and hospitality to cyber, digital and low carbon. It is also a thriving tourism destination.

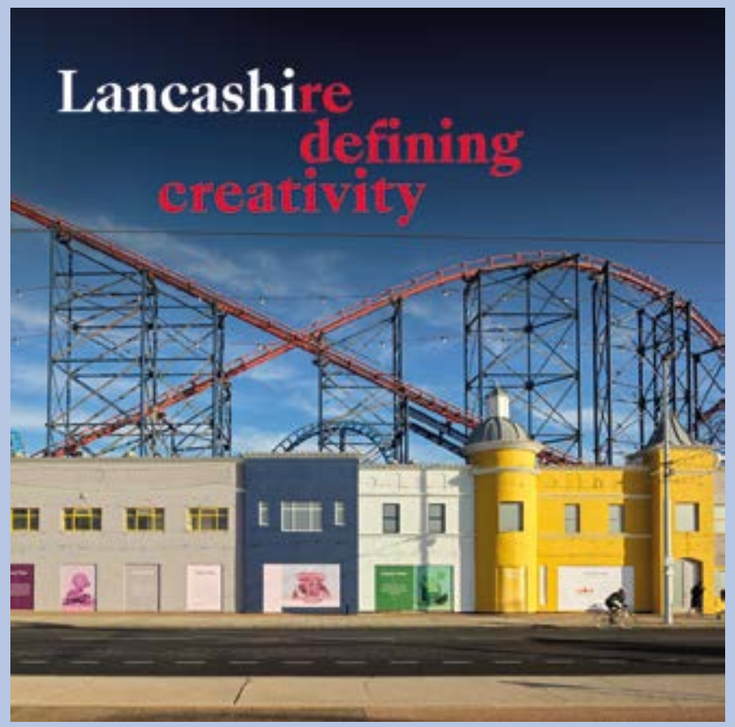
In cyber security, Lancashire is an undisputed national leader with a rich seam of cyber-related research and innovation assets across industry and academia. Samlesbury near Preston was announced in 2021 as the preferred location for the new National Cyber Force Centre, which will help to bring unparalleled opportunities for positive economic and societal impacts.

Among these opportunities is the need to accelerate the process of building scale and resilience in the county's cultural and creative businesses and to create sustainable environments and growth strategies by aggregating existing sector and educational assets.

Beyond the county's 18 NPOs in the 2023-2026 round (at £10.1m a 59.1% increase on the previous round), there are insufficient large cultural organisations which can deliver the scale, reach, agility and quality of cultural experiences enjoyed in other parts of the UK. Smaller cultural organisations can lack the muscle to scale up with minimal risk and the capacity to experiment with new technology and new ways of reaching audiences, or to utilise data and research, and generate innovative funding models. The question for many cultural organisations in Lancashire is how to scale deeper.

Arts Council England currently invests £7 per head annually across Lancashire's 1.5m residents, just over £8 in Lancaster, £6 in Blackpool and about £4.50 in Preston. This compares with our nearest large cities of Liverpool, which receives £35 per head and Manchester (£38). The challenges experienced by Lancashire's cultural sector limit its capacity, resources, ambition and aspiration, not just at a sectoral level, but at the city and county levels too.

Recent research by the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), highlighted how the complexities of the current administrative structure and dynamic between towns and larger urban centres contribute to dispersed creativity:



Painting The Town Project by LeftCoast, Blackpool Pleasure Beach © seanconboy.com

"Lancashire consists of independent urban centres and rural landscapes, spread across a large area with no natural epicentre to concentrate creative outputs around. Connectivity is hampered by the inconsistent provision of public transport, limited digital infrastructure, and issues arising from the proximity of large cities outside the county. Lancashire's diverse range of populations lacks a single cohesive identity, and it does not possess a single unifying source of governance, given the coexistence of district and county councils. All of this provides infrastructural challenges for the creative sector in the region, as there is often little innate drive of movement across the county to any central clearing house of activity. The geography of the region, therefore, presents a host of difficulties facilitating a united cultural identity and the exchange of knowledge, information."[77]

In the context of levelling up and the Covid-19 pandemic, which hit the creative sector particularly hard, the focus now turns to how creative economies can recover and foster growth in regions, towns, and cities. Location is an important determinant for successful and sustainable forms of economic growth. Place-based initiatives are becoming more popular as centrally-distributed funding is under ever-increasing pressure.

In Lancashire, the arts and culture sector fell 26.5% during the pandemic, compared to a 24% fall in economic activity nationally. Despite this, strong partnerships and creative activity exist across the county.

The LEP's Cultural Investment Strategy, titled Remade–2020, sets out an approach for culture to deliver a step change in places through increased connectivity, enhanced capacity, improved crossovers, bolder commissioning, innovative infrastructure and developing compelling cultural narratives.

A better connected cultural and creative sector will establish a framework for the main urban areas, smaller towns and rural areas to work collaboratively on building scale, presence and impact. By working together, the diversity of initiatives across places can more effectively develop a clear offer and role, which resonates locally, nationally and internationally for audiences and markets.

A stronger, more diverse, sustainable and appropriately skilled creative and cultural sector will fuel the next generation of leaders, innovators and culture seekers to deliver positive outcomes for economic and inclusive growth in places, alongside increased convergence and innovation across culture, creativity, research, science, technology and manufacturing.

Investment in enhanced infrastructure is required to develop the local ecosystems of towns and cities to deliver a quality offer to diverse audiences. State-of-the art physical assets distributed more widely through communities, business, higher education, colleges and schools can play a significant part in levelling up culture.

A compelling narrative is key to a sense of place. The distinctiveness of their places, people, environmental ideas, and cultural experiences are what will gain cities, towns and regions national and international recognition.

There is scope for Lancashire to develop its own model for a County Deal, based on the strength of its creative community, its heritage and environmental offer as expressed in new and emerging priority schemes such as the Super Slow Way (SSW) Linear Park. Taking its name from one of Lancashire's two Arts Council-supported Creative People and Places programmes, SSW covers the 22-mile section of the Leeds to Liverpool Canal corridor stretching through East Lancashire from Blackburn in the west, through Hyndburn and Burnley, and ending in Pendle in the east. It seeks to marry physical regeneration to expansive programmes of environmental, cultural, leisure, educational and economic activity in some of Lancashire's most deprived places.

Culture features prominently in local place strategies across the country. Blackburn, one of Arts Council England's Priority Places, is looking to augment investment in key activities such as the National Festival of Making. The related Town Plan[78] highlights the potential to build on its distinctive cultural heritage, including the textile industry, and to address low levels of cultural participation by engaging local communities in new creative opportunities. The implementation of a culture

and heritage-led master plan for Blackburn will focus on the town's physical and social "gateways to making and creativity", taking an asset-based approach to delivering major refurbishment and improvement programmes of arts and heritage venues, along with continued investment into the British Textile Biennial.

Key City Blackpool, with some of the most deprived areas in the UK, is another town designated a Priority Place and high on the Government's levelling up agenda. Opportunities and prospects for residents are also affected by negative perceptions of place. The town has benefited from a £39.5m Town Deal investment including £4.5m to upgrade the famous Illuminations, and new light art installations created with recognised artists and designers to attract 1.75m additional visitors over the next five years. The related Lightpool Festival began in 2016, to celebrate the Illuminations by bringing contemporary artists to Blackpool to be inspired by the town's unique relationship with light. Lightpool is now included in Light up the North Festival Network (LUTN), letting Illuminations shine for longer each year.

A similar investment will be allocated to redeveloping an existing town centre building to create the Edge which will provide 1,295 square metres of high-quality co-working and creative workspace to augment the investment in cultural assets, which include Showtown, Blackpool's new Museum of Fun & Entertainment (opening in 2023), and improvements to the Winter Gardens complex to create a new, purpose-built conference and exhibition facility with direct linkages into the existing Empress Ballroom, Opera House and Empress Building. These interventions and the approach outlined in the emerging culture plan will contribute to improved place-based perceptions and support Blackpool's sustained efforts to become a year-round visitor destination with step-changing benefits for businesses, residents and visitors.

In contrast, Preston's strategic approach builds on social value, community wealth building and the city's strengths: a wealth of organisations with expertise in participatory arts; a range of cultural institutions; and a network of independent artists and creative industries organisations densely spread throughout the city. Preston Council and these stakeholders are committed to a renewed proposition for culture set out in Something's Brewing, Preston's 12-year Cultural Strategy, which demonstrates an authentic understanding of context and socially engaged arts practice.

Elsewhere, Lancashire's cities and town are developing their own plans responding to their local context and priorities. Culture features prominently in Levelling-Up Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund propositions for Pendle and Hyndburn, where a newly-formed Culture & Heritage Investment Board provides governance and capacity to engage with funders and partners. Lancaster's emerging strategy includes elements of system design informed by circular economy principles.

Lancaster's emerging strategy recognises that the greatest strength of its cultural economy is its people. Across arts, culture, and heritage more generally, there is a depth of talent providing cultural, arts, and economic benefits.

Its direction of travel is however shaped to a greater degree by its tourist opportunity – specifically as a gateway to Cumbria and the wider north. The Bay Cultural Compact established in 2019 by South Lakeland District Council, Lancaster City Council and Barrow Borough Council was created to enable the respective places to collaborate across boundaries to boost future creativity, investment, innovation, jobs and prosperity in the Morecambe Bay area. It builds on the region's combined strengths in energy, advanced manufacturing, digital technologies, life sciences, health innovation, higher education, culture and the visitor economy, by encouraging public and private sector investment to bid collectively to develop potentially transformational assets including the Eden North Project and Lancaster Canal Quarter.

Cultural Compacts were conceived as an approach to harness the power of culture to be transformational in urban places. We are keen to see if the concept can also generate similar outcomes in a semi-rural context. It has in fact led to larger combined bids to Arts Council England and others for more dynamic and ambitious projects with the ability to scale-up positive impact in places.

Culture may be defined differently in different places, but for towns and cities in Lancashire, its importance in making diverse and distinct places more attractive for residents, visitors, workers and investors is understood from the coast to the hills. At a time of economic pressures and uncertainty, culture may not be the magic pill to solve every problem, but it's a great place to start.

SAACH performing at Kirklees Year of Music launch event. Photo: Kirklees Council.

Engaging through sound and spectacle

Orlando Gough
Composer

Orlando Gough is a composer of operas and choral works known for composing music for theatre productions (such as 2022's *Much Ado About Nothing* at The Globe) and large-scale spectacles that often involve massed choirs.

Orlando's 2005 work at Stuttgart's *Theater der Welt* festival was performed by 16 choirs on 12 boats. Most recently he created a choral interpretation of Kylie Minogue's *Can't Get You Out Of My Head*, performed outdoors by the Baroque Collective in Lewes, East Sussex, in September 2022.

This is his account of the development of a new project, *HERD*, a large-scale soundscape and installation that will take place as part of Kirklees Year of Music 2023.

I was introduced to Kirklees Year of Music by the cultural producer William Galinsky, who acted as director for the overall programme in its initial stages and who had been excited by ***Ready to Drop***, a soundscape I had made in Brighton in 2021 with Artichoke, a production company I regularly work with. (You may know them from ***The Sultan's Elephant***, then the largest piece of free outdoor theatre ever seen in London, in which an enormous animatronic elephant progressed through the centre of the capital in 2006, and their many subsequent productions, including Antony Gormley's ***One & Other*** commission for the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square (2009), ***PROCESSIONS***, the nationwide celebration of 100 years of women voting, part of 14-18 NOW, and ***Lumiere***, the UK's light art biennial, which has taken place in Durham since 2009).

The initial thinking was that we could create a large-scale sound installation as the opening event of the festival on three sites around Kirklees – not just the regional centre in Huddersfield, but possibly also Batley and Dewsbury, which can sometimes be overlooked. On further consideration, an opener so early in the year would be nigh on impossible to do outdoors, necessary for the scale and engagement the project is envisaging. The main event – combining sculptures, a sound instal-

lation, and a euphoric finale event in the centre of Huddersfield – will now take place in July.

Several site visits and countless conversations later our idea has begun to take shape. Building on Kirklees' proud heritage of sheep farming and the wool trade, we have decided to make around 30 mechanical sheep sculptures of widely varying sizes, some just slightly bigger than real sheep, the largest six metres tall, all with in-built loudspeakers. We will position them initially at the outskirts of Kirklees, and gradually herd them into Huddersfield via Batley and Dewsbury as well as Marsden, Slaithwaite, Meltham and many other places over a period of a week. The project will be called ***HERD***.

"Culture has no borders... already the project is connecting musical communities in the region."

The idea is that the soundscape played by the sheep sculptures will evolve through the week from rural, through industrial (with particular reference to the textile industry), to urban – matching the progress of the sheep as they are moved from place to place. In each place, the sculptures will form a sound installation, which will reflect their surroundings. On the final day, the sheep sculptures will be installed in the centre of Huddersfield for a euphoric finale: a collective dream of the future – the future of Kirklees, the future of sheep, the future of the planet.

The soundscape will be created from all the cultures present in this diverse place, from choirs, brass bands, bhangra bands, qawwali groups, Jamaican sound system DJs, beatboxers, heavy metal bands.

So far, we have made several recces to find suitable sites and meet potential collaborators to help us connect into the music of Kirklees.

The project has been greeted with enthusiasm by the creatives we contacted. Kirklees Council officials were initially harder to convince, asking important questions about how we would be able to deliver on a long list of objectives such as inclusivity, diversity, lifelong learning, social cohesion and legacy.

As a composer, I find it hard to think in terms of "delivering on objectives". I can only try and make the best event I possibly can – and to be honest, I'm not sure I can ever make promises about the effects of any project I play a part in creating. However, Artichoke as the producers, have a long and strong track record of delivering on precisely these objectives, and I'm delighted that the project has been greenlit.

I am daunted by the scale and ambition of this project, but am greatly enjoying working on it, confident about Artichoke's ability to deliver at scale. Culture has no borders and local communities benefit from exposure to ideas and approaches from elsewhere, as much as we do working with them. We are detecting interesting currents everywhere we look and already the project is helping to facilitate connections between musical communities in the region that don't normally have any contact with each other. Artichoke's Learning & Participation team is working with local children and young people in schools across Kirklees, in poetry workshops which will contribute to the lyrics as part of the soundscape.

We've learned so much about cultural life in the region and the magnificent tradition of amateur musicianship in the area. And the project planning is picking up pace. The next few weeks and months are going to be a whirlwind of encounters, galvanising excitement in the local community and generating engagement across Kirklees. We have chosen our sites, from beautiful countryside places in the Pennines to gritty urban locations. We're working with a brilliant maker, Dave Young, who is designing and constructing the sheep with heritage craft practitioners, and with two sound specialists, John Del'Nero and Sebastian Frost.

The project includes the development of at-risk heritage skills reaching hundreds of local school children, from felting and rag-rugging, to being part of a traditional 'Tommy Talker' group. And hopefully as part of Kirklees Year of Music, it will help attract tourism, boost the local economy and raise awareness about the Kirklees area and its rich heritage.

Talking to Edwin Baker, the leader of the Huddersfield Gospel Choir, the other day, he commented that "most people in Huddersfield have probably never even seen a sheep."

It's funny how arts and culture can find unexpected ways of connecting people with their heritage, and we're set to see Kirklees Year of Music create a whole new shared heritage for that part of the world.

HERD is devised and directed by Orlando Gough, working with Charlie Morrissey, Dave Young, Sebastian Frost, and John Del'Nero, in collaboration with Hardeep Sahota, Mandeep Samra and the communities of Kirklees. www.herd-kirklees.co.uk

Lumo Light Festival (Lumovalofestivaali) in Oulu, 2018.

Oulu, with 200,000 inhabitants the most populous city in northern Finland and the 2026 European Capital of Culture, is one of the cities exploring cultural collaborations with We Live Here.

Networks beyond regions

Tim Harrson
Founder/Director
We Live Here

How can the arts serve as a catalyst for conversations between local communities, nationally and internationally, about the environmental challenges that face our planet?

This question inspired us to develop We Live Here, a new nationwide and international arts commissioning programme that will explore the relationships between communities and the natural environments around them. At a time of ecological crisis, We Live Here is rooted in personal and local reflections on far-reaching, global issues. It asks how we should respond, individually and collectively, to the degradation of our natural habitats, the loss of biodiversity and the threat of climate change.

We Live Here will be delivered in partnership with six arts organisations from across England, four of them located in Key Cities. They are Lancaster Arts, Freedom Festival (Hull), Norfolk & Norwich Festival, Metal Southend, Inbetween Time (Bristol) and Activate (Dorset). These organisations have long been at the forefront of contemporary arts practice, championing approaches that nurture and celebrate the agency of local people. Individuals, groups and organisations are valued as instigators, collaborators, creators and performers as well as providers of in-depth knowledge and powerful personal narratives. They all share a commitment to exploring the role the arts can play in the climate emergency, through the practices they employ to deliver their programmes, and through the themes those programmes address.

Over the next two years, the programme will work with artists from the UK, the Netherlands and Finland to create new public realm projects. The works will respond to local geographies, geologies, weather systems, floras and faunas, and reflect on the human frameworks of habitation, ownership, industry, leisure, representation and conservation in these places. We Live Here will investigate the frictions between social, cultural, economic and environmental agendas and connect communities that face similar sets of conditions, experiences and threats to local ecologies. Through the creation and discussion of these artworks, the programme will enable people

living in different places to share their local stories and experiences, bringing deeper understanding and new perspectives on their own landscapes and seeking out new approaches to shared challenges.

Interwoven with concern about the environment are questions about who controls and has access to our natural landscapes. Who has shaped our experience and narratives of natural landscapes in the past? How might they be shaped differently in the future? There is a widespread sense that access to nature, to rural landscapes and places of beauty is exclusive and rooted in historical inequalities. In her book ***I Belong Here***, Manchester-born Anita Sethi argues that all should have access to, and connection with our shared natural landscapes. She quotes Sir David Attenborough: 'No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced.'

The pull of larger cities can attract funding, resources and attention. The We Live Here consortium members are drawn from smaller regional cities and towns, places that are sometimes prone to feeling overlooked. The smaller cities and towns of the UK are hugely diverse in their physical environments, their economic and social conditions, and their levels of cultural provision. Many however face similar social challenges, associated with underinvestment, economic decline and limited resources. They often serve and have close connections with extensive rural catchment areas. They exist in close proximity to agricultural landscapes, National Parks, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and popular destinations for tourists seeking a fix of fresh air and natural beauty.

Few landscapes in the UK are fully 'natural' in the sense of being free of human interference, but it's useful to remember that we too are part of nature. The landscapes we occupy are subject, like all landscapes, to the constant interactions of environmental conditions and multiple species, of which we are one. We Live Here will be embedded in the places where collisions and accommodations between humans and other species occur, where conflicting agendas vie for position. Our regional cities and smaller towns are at the forefront of these interactions, zones in which future relationships between people and nature are being negotiated right now.

As we were laying the foundations for We Live Here, I've had the chance to explore numerous landscapes on the doorsteps of partner organisations. Talking to wardens, ecologists, activists and local experts, I saw local interaction between human and environmental concerns up close. I explored Fairfield, a nature reserve that reaches into the heart of the city of Lancaster, run by a team of volunteers who strike a balance between the working, agricultural demands of the land and its ecological purpose. I heard of a woodland, a favourite haunt of dogwalkers and blackberry pickers, that's mysteriously fenced off by obscure overseas corporations. A short drive from Southend-on-Sea, I visited the RSPB nature reserve of Canvey Wick, built on the derelict foundations of an oil refinery that was never built. It is now home to some of the rarest invertebrates in the UK. In North Norfolk, surrounded by nature reserves, caravan parks and popular beaches, we see huge disparities in wealth and living conditions. We see migrations of birds from the arctic circle, of the wealthy fleeing the city to their second homes and of workers upon whose labour local agricultural systems are built.

The catchment areas of consortium members feature vast swathes of tidal mud: the estuary landscapes of the Thames, the Humber, the Severn, Morecambe Bay, The Wash and Poole Harbour tell of layered histories of industry, migration, nature conservation and tourism, often close together. These are zones of continual transition and transformation, where we can observe major changes of land use and demographic shifts, changing attitudes, and now as the impact of climate change heaves into view, changes in the levels of the sea. These are intensely local concerns affecting the lives, identities and experiences of individuals and communities. They are also concerns shared by other communities elsewhere in the country, and beyond. In many cases, the roots of the questions are truly global. What might we learn if people and communities that live with these frictions, across the UK and in other countries, could share their experiences and reflect together on the feelings engendered by historical, current and future changes in our relationships to the landscapes we see around us?

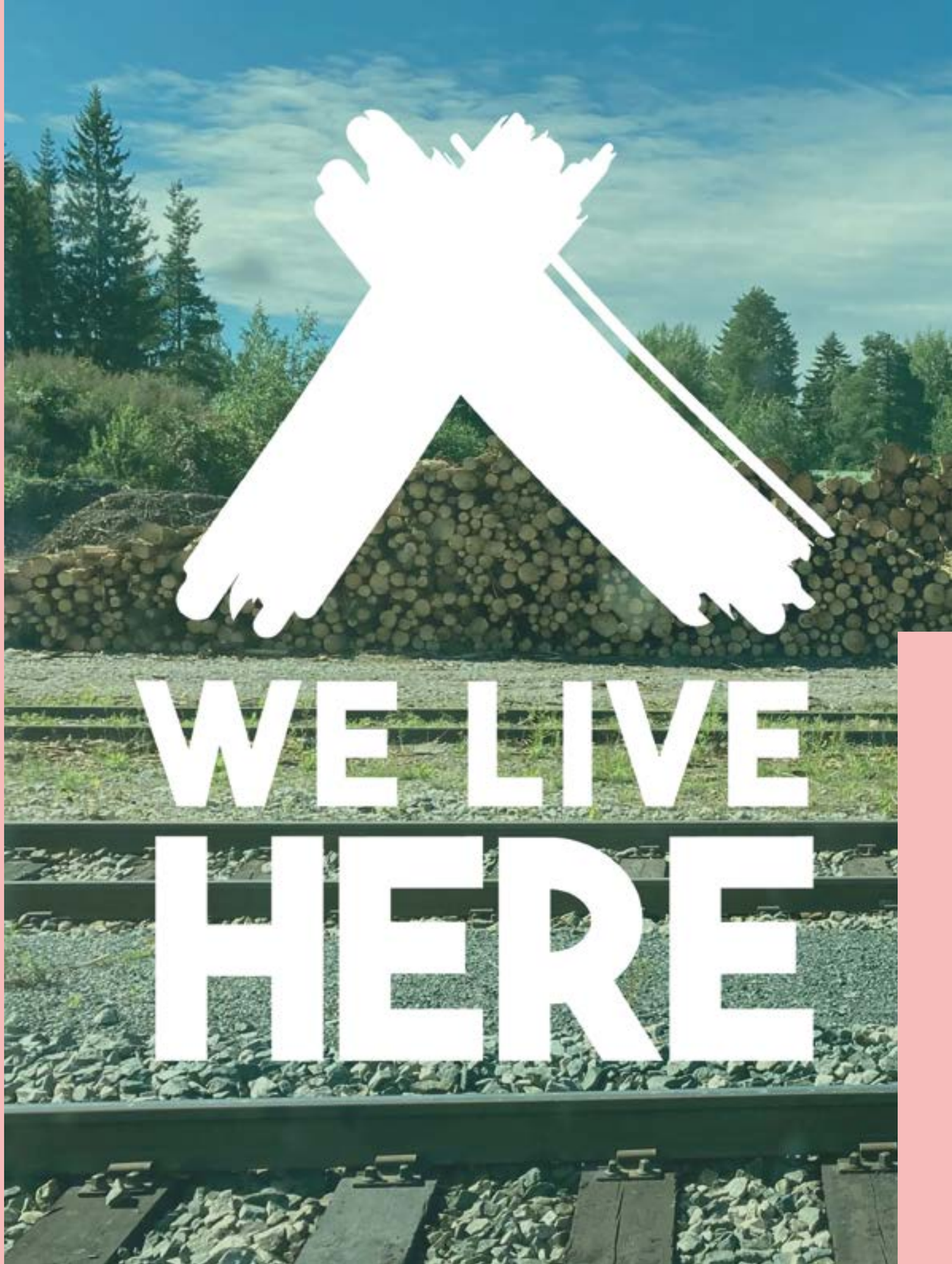
As different models of participatory practice become more widespread, the lines between commissioning and presentation become blurry. Touring projects are often reframed with new participants in each city, refreshing an existing work and rooting it in perspectives from the new context. The We Live Here projects will respond to shared conditions, landscapes and issues that exist in multiple locations, with iterations developed in parallel over the course of each project. Local conversations will feed into wider discussions with participants taking part in the same project elsewhere.

Amid the horrors of the past few years, we have discovered that we can connect and work together without driving, or flying, to be in each other's presence. Sometimes it is important

to be there, to breathe the air, smell the earth, talk face-to-face and experience all the things that can't be seen on the screen. But in the participatory processes we develop with artists from the UK and internationally through We Live Here, we want to maximise our new openness to online communications, and find solutions where digital poverty and other factors make this a challenge. As well as reducing the carbon footprint and the overall environmental impact of the project, such approaches will enable us to connect distant localities, combining local and global perspectives.

We Live Here will build conversations between locations in the UK and in other places where people may have experienced similar conditions differently, and where alternative cultural and political responses may have been found. The first step will be working with artists from Finland and the Netherlands. The aim is to develop collaborations between places with shared ecological conditions and concerns and in the longer term, to drive a global conversation. As well as working with artists, we plan to connect cultural organisations, municipalities, academic institutions, communities and organisations that protect and increase our understanding of the natural world, through artistic projects that offer a shared, non-hierarchical space for open-ended thinking, talking and imagining. There is no better place to start exploring new models of collaboration between the UK and Europe than in our regional towns and cities. The arts can offer a space for re-imagining, and what we need more than anything right now, locally and globally, is the ability to reimagine our future relationship with the natural world.

The Research & Development phase of We Live Here was funded by Arts Council England, The Finnish Institute and Performing Arts Fund NL.



Connecting estuary communities

Thea Behrman
Senior project manager Metal Southend & Estuary Festival and co-director, Agency for Creative Production

Thea reviews three initiatives through which art and culture are driving change across the Thames Estuary region extending through South Essex and North Kent.

The Estuary festival – with Key Cities Medway and Southend as major centres – has shown how a large-scale multi-arts programme can rejuvenate places, forge new connections and change perceptions. The Agency for Creative Production shows the legacy of such cultural programming in skills development and creating opportunities for local people. And long-term local recovery across South Essex is being spearheaded by arts organisation Metal, based in Southend, within its More than a Place cultural development work.

There are strong creative currents in the Thames Estuary. Along its banks self-organised collectives, creatives, young people and cultural organisations bubble with ingenious spirit, underscored by the desire to rewrite future possibilities. Artists, thinkers, makers and doers are drawn to make their creative life here, finding poetic inspiration in the silty mud flats.

Situated at the mouth and throat of the Thames, this a region that has been historically characterised as being in service to London and the wider world, yet there are initiatives under way that are shifting perceptions and reasserting value on the creative talent that is already here, forging stronger connections to embed bold approaches and the cultural infrastructure needed to inspire agency, wellbeing and belonging for those who live here.

ESTUARY FESTIVAL

Estuary festival is an ambitious, highly visible and transformational celebration of place, embracing the South Essex and North Kent coastlines as well as the river itself. Conceived and initiated by arts organisation Metal under the direction of Colette Bailey, the first two editions of Estuary festival occurred in

Lore of the Wild *storywalk by Sophie Austin and Bernadette Russell co-commissioned by Estuary 2021 has become a permanent artwork at Lesnes Abbey Woods, with additional wayfinding posts and volunteer training to lead guided walks.*

Sinking Alloyances and Planetary Burial by The Underground Division, installation exploring the capability of estuary environments to capture and store carbon, commissioned by Estuary 2021 and presented at Wat Tyler Country Park in Basildon.

2016 and 2021, with the next iteration planned for 2025. Estuary 2021 was one of a series of projects supported by Creative Estuary, an initiative to forge a new future founded on creative energy and innovation along the length of the Thames Estuary, supported by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport through the Cultural Development Fund administered by Arts Council England.

By exploring the estuary landscape and the rich, often overlooked stories of its communities, Estuary festival spotlights the region to change and challenge perceptions. Rooted in place, it produces and presents work in non-conventional places – parks, pubs, piers, and other surprising venues. Beyond the presentation of artworks, Estuary festival demonstrates how a festival model can pioneer new ways of working, making connections across places and between people divided by geographic and social barriers. By working across a cycle of four or five years, the festival works deeply with local arts organisations, artists and community groups to establish shared themes, ideas and opportunities.

Held at over 94 locations in the landscape with 66 partner venues and 265 artists, Estuary 2021 attracted 208,764 visits – yet its impact has a greater resonance beyond 'just' a festival. Estuary 2021 developed new cultural infrastructure – redundant buildings were restored for future cultural and civic use, and new collaborations were established creating 58 full- and part-time jobs; 68 volunteers were involved and 248 students through partnerships with eight universities. Knowledge is exchanged to inform the vision and ambitions for what can be achieved next across the estuary.

New spaces for culture

At Wat Tyler Country Park in Basildon a number of spaces were redeveloped and used to show artworks for the festival. Dutch Barn, an open structure, was divided into a series of three spaces to show multiple artworks – the new space is being retained to enable future civic and arts programming. The Eco Gallery, a shipping container clad with wood and green roof was originally a toilet block that had been out of use for many years, was renovated and converted into a gallery space that can be used for future exhibitions and events. Other buildings opened up to the public for the first time for the festival included a listed 16th-century cottage, a bird hide not regularly used for bird watching and a World War II pillbox used for a sound installation.

AGENCY FOR CREATIVE PRODUCTION

Agency for Creative Production, a new social enterprise, grew from the team at Metal who were involved in the multi-arts festival Village Green from 2008-2021 in Southend. One of the festival's primary strengths was its ability to enable young people to develop new creative skills. By providing 'hands-on' real life experiences, it opened up new career pathways in the creative industries for local young people who came to the festival as volunteers.

Agency for Creative Production responds directly to a combination of needs identified by industry, education, young people and audiences. The live events industry is a growing sector, yet it lacks a pipeline of diverse, locally-grown talent with the relevant skills. At the same time, young people are often unaware of the many careers that are supported through the live events sector. Further and higher education institutions recognise the need to embed industry experience within academic courses, yet often lack suitable partners to facilitate this experience. Local audiences actively seek more live events,

yet there is a lack of events companies in the region to fulfil this growing demand.

Agency for Creative Production puts young people at the centre, supporting them to create programmes based around their own creative interests, alongside opportunities for local events professionals to upskill, gain specialist qualifications and new paid employment.

In partnership with local further education partner USP College, Agency for Creative Production has launched a new Level 4 Professional Diploma in Creative Enterprise accredited by UAL (University of the Arts London), combining valuable industry experience with classroom learning. Agency for Creative Production has received vital investment from Creative Estuary through its Re:Generation 2031 programme, whose aims are to develop the next generation of cultural and creative leaders, by cultivating sector-led skills-focused opportunities in North Kent and South Essex. In time, the vision is that Agency for Creative Production will enable a growth in live events across the region initiated by a new generation of skilled, locally-based creative professionals.

Empowering young people

Ten young people from across South Essex came together and devised WYRD ESSEX, a 'subcultural' market and live music event with support from the Metal team and guest artists, as part of the Agency for Creative Production's pilot programme in summer 2022. WYRD ESSEX was entirely curated by the young people and consisted of a daytime market with local artists and makers, followed by a gig showcasing local musicians and bands. One of the young people said of their experience: "I really enjoyed this project and I hope others do in future. The highlight of the course for me was having an important role and responsibility as well as performing in the event itself."

Agency for Creative Production participants Charlie and Ruby. Photo: Trawler & Co

MORE THAN A PLACE

Embedding cultural leadership

In 2021, Metal was commissioned by the Association of South Essex Local Authorities to research the needs, challenges and opportunities within the creative sector across the region. Predominantly sole traders and micro SMEs, 68% of survey respondents were freelance, reflecting the changing nature of the creative economy in South Essex and across the country.

Metal is currently developing a culture strategy for South Essex that connects to wider strategies related to civic planning and placemaking, drawing on the strengths of the existing sector and its abilities to address wider objectives including health, wellbeing, and community cohesion. By working directly on the ground, we are bringing diverse creative practitioners together to share approaches and ideas, many meeting for the first time. This is already resulting in new collaborations, sharing of resources and proliferating new visions for the future of their place to inform social and economic prosperity of the region.

Throughout the research process creatives have highlighted a lack of structural support in place to enable them to grow, including flexible, affordable spaces fit for the creative industries with security of tenure and knowledge exchange to strengthen support systems.

A FUTURE OF GREATER CONNECTION

The projects described here set out some of the strong foundations already in place in the Thames Estuary region, delivering 'Let's Create' ambitions by sparking agency, connecting people and ideas across boundaries. Though these projects have provided many successes, sustained investment will ensure that initiatives coalesce to create benefits that are greater than the sum of their parts. Building a strategic approach that ensures culture is at the heart of the vision for the Thames Estuary will be key to sustaining the gains that have already been made in supporting healthy, happy and thriving creative communities.

And Towns

Professor Nicky Marsh
Southampton Institute for Arts and Humanities
University of Southampton

As principal investigator of two AHRC-funded place-based research programmes coordinated by the Southampton Institute for Arts and Humanities and known collectively as 'And Towns'[79], Nicky Marsh has led diverse and multidisciplinary teams of academics in exploring the needs and cultural ecosystems of towns and smaller cities as they emerged from the pandemic. Here she reports on the insights gained to date.

In our first And Towns project, 'Towns and the Cultural Economies of Recovery', we explored the government's Towns Fund, in which culture proved to be central to national investment.

Information gained under a recent Freedom of Information request suggested that of the Levelling Up Bids that were successful in getting funding, approximately 46 percent focused on regeneration and town centres, 26 percent on transport, and 26 percent on culture (Cultural Placemaking 2021). Yet our research has revealed that what culture means in these contexts is complex, under-researched, and that towns themselves often lack capacities in key areas.

In our second project, 'Feeling Towns: the role of place and identity in local governance', we asked how pride – one of the 12 missions identified in the 2022 Levelling Up White Paper – was understood and was starting to be measured by local authorities as well as arts and heritage organisations.

We worked closely with local authorities (Darlington, Southampton) as they delivered, and sought, levelling up funds; with cultural and community organisations (from innovative pop up galleries, like Toma in Southend, to established cultural providers such as Rural Media and Ledbury Poetry Festival in Hereford); and with key national organisations including Historic England and Arts Council England.

Both projects draw on the disciplinary approaches of researchers working across arts, humanities and the social sciences to help us understand how towns used, deployed, and imagined culture as part of a strategy for both social and economic regeneration.

Slide from the Salty Southend Art Pub Quiz by Emma Edmondson and Lu Williams, June 2022. And Towns, SIAH, University of Southampton

Our methodological range was therefore broad, involving quantitative work and, especially, creative qualitative approaches. Along with surveys and semi-structured interviews, our methodologies included creative-practitioner-led workshops (making maps with visual artists, creating poems and books with poets, producing sound texts with sound artists) and a range of creative focus groups (using interactive quizzes, emoji-mapping, timeline drawings, photo elicitation and more).

The toolkits we have developed allow the researcher to remain alert to (and to support) non-traditional, relational assets such as experience, networks, ideas, innovation and creativity.

In our work with communities and practitioners we gave particular attention to:

- the central importance of hyperlocal in understanding place-based policy and attachment to place
- emotional governance & effect (e.g. pride, self-perception, story-telling and narrative) as factors in how decisions are made in small communities and also in the levelling up agenda itself
- the effects of the absence of longitudinal research and long-term forward planning
- the complex heterogeneity of towns, especially with regard to their regional interconnectivity, their relationship with national strategies and with anchor organisations such as

local authorities, Arts Council England and cultural entrepreneurs
- the need for creative models of community consultation that are sensitive to the imperative for equality, diversity and inclusion
- the effects of austerity on the ability of local authorities to plan and implement cultural regeneration programmes (including their capacity to conduct research, write bids and evaluate outcomes).

In the course of our work we made a series of key findings and recommendations:

Equality, diversity and inclusion

Our research suggested that cultural decision making in towns is not representative of a wide or inclusive demographic. We recommend sharing models for practice-based research to enable creative and participatory decision-making and governance.

Medium-term planning

A central issue for many of the towns we surveyed was that the short timeframes for applying for funding assumed the existence of shovel-ready plans and/or privileged glass and steel capital investment. This makes it difficult to develop a full understanding of community needs and how they can best be supported. We suggest that medium-term co-production with towns on self-evaluation, planning and imagining futures could alleviate this and prepare them for future opportunities.

Meaningful community engagement

Towns approached community engagement in very different ways. We recommend sharing models that can better connect diverse communities, encourage meaningful civic participation and build community cohesion.

Evaluation and research

The need for new kinds of interdisciplinary and creative evaluation methods and new models for longitudinal research was apparent in nearly every area we examined.

Towns ecosystems

The interconnectedness of less mobile communities is complex and deeply embedded. This often raises issues about volunteers, belonging, social authority, norms and contested collective memories that are yet to be fully understood.

The language(s) for pride

We discovered that pride means very different things in different communities. Local pride can be rooted in a wide range of cultural assets, from fish and chip shops to historic buildings. It can be rooted in history and narrative, or in accessible green spaces. But pride can also be about people and personal things – people talk about their families as much as their towns when they're asked what makes them proud of a place.

"People talk about their families as much as their towns when asked what makes them proud of a place."

Pride is complex and shifting

We found that pride requires a complex language and that this is not captured by some of the policy assumptions and proxies. Pride doesn't always correlate, for example, with how long one has lived in a place – rather, it is about how much one wants to be in a place. We also found that some of the proxies for pride – such as cultural engagement, satisfaction with high streets, satisfaction with housing, engaging in volunteering – are effective, but that pride is also emotional, relational and about visibility and recognition.

Local vs national metrics

We found that metrics and evidence for place-based development are most valuable if they are as locally-focused and granular as possible. However, national funding agencies and government bodies require generalised data which can be aggregated and modelled across regions. We are proposing the need for new research to help to bridge this disconnection with a view to imagining and developing novel and more flexible idioms for translating between local and national objectives and indices.

Unlocking the potential of clusters

Dr Josh Siepel
SPRU, University of Sussex Business School
and Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre

In this article, Dr Josh Siepel, the Creative Clusters, Innovation and Access to Finance Research Lead at the PEC, examines hyperlocal creative activity and its potential for driving growth outside the major hubs.

In the past twenty years, 'creative clusters' have received a lot of attention and investment as a means of regenerating local areas, from Nesta's 2013 ***Manifesto for the Creative Economy*** to the 2017 Bazalgette Review of the creative industries and the government's Levelling Up White Paper of 2022, all of which pointed to the potential of creative clusters in supporting local areas.

Through our work with the AHRC Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre [PEC], we have been trying to better understand the nature and potential of these creative clusters. In particular, we have been keen to better understand how clusters in places like the Key Cities differ from those clusters elsewhere in the UK.

To address this question, our Creative Radar project[80] took a different approach from previous mapping efforts by trying to identify smaller hubs of creative activity – the towns, neighbourhoods and even streets where creative activity is clustered. Using data scraped from company websites we identified 709 creative 'microclusters' which were located in every part of the UK, from Penzance to Inverness and from Aberystwyth to Scarborough. Our analysis identified at least one microcluster in each of the Key Cities, with many having more than one (for instance we identified four distinct microclusters in the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole region). This mapping exercise demonstrated the extent to which creative clusters run the length and breadth of the UK.

Once we identified these microclusters, we began to explore whether, and how, these microclusters were different in different places. What we found was fascinating: companies in microclusters outside the most established clusters were more likely to look, and act, like companies in the larger, established clusters. This suggests that microclusters – wherever they are – can provide some of the benefits associated with being in larger clusters. Moreover, these companies had a track record of growth and were more likely to want to grow than their peers within larger cities, although they were also more likely to view finance as a barrier to growth. Our findings showed that businesses in microclusters have the growth potential, but what can be done to unlock it, and what is the role of culture in supporting these microclusters?

Supporting local microclusters

Our research shows unambiguously that creative microclusters tend to be located within and alongside cultural organisations. This is important, as it points to the importance of culture as a corollary for regeneration. There are a number of ways that this may happen: through transformative visions from local authorities, through the role of anchor institutions and through the range of other place-based benefits that come from culture.

"Local authorities that are ambitious about the creative and cultural sectors can use them as the basis for regeneration."

There is evidence that local authorities which are bold and ambitious about the role that creative and cultural sectors can play in regenerating local places can use these sectors as the basis for local regeneration. Importantly, these solutions need to reflect, and come from, local communities. If the aim is to do something for a place, it should be of the place.

The other expert evidence pieces in this report point to the range of initiatives started by Key Cities to support their local clusters. These initiatives require big thinking, but also bringing along all parts of a community. Local authorities are well-placed to do this, and to support creative and cultural organisations in placemaking, through mechanisms such as offering former retail spaces for very low 'peppercorn' rents to grassroots and community-led arts organisations. There is also a very important coordination and brokering role that local authorities are in a unique position to provide that can help to ensure the success of microclusters.

Anchor institutions, particularly cultural institutions, also have an important role to play in driving the growth of creative microclusters. Research by the PEC has shown that anchor cultural institutions have an important role in placemaking and branding, and have the potential for closer coordination and targeted support to integration among supply chains. Research for the PEC from the University of Central Lancashire on the Preston Model of community wealth building through developing local supply chains[81] found that an initial injection of £1m into Lancashire's creative sector resulted in an economic boost to the county of £1.47m. The potential of this approach could substantially help to build and strengthen local microclusters, as businesses in microclusters are particularly likely to rely on local customers.

The presence of the creative and cultural sectors is also associated with a range of other factors associated with regeneration, including improving health and wellbeing, reducing crime, building a local sense of community, and strengthening sustainability and resilience. A local, neighbourhood-based approach building microclusters has the benefit of improving quality of life as well as attracting and improving retention of creative workers.

Microclusters across the UK. Purple: Inside Established creative cluster (areas of high concentration of creative businesses and that had been showing recent growth) Orange:Outside Established cluster (areas of low concentration of creative businesses and that had low growth levels) (Creative Industries PEC)

Building microclusters for the future

A microcluster-focused approach is not necessarily a panacea. PEC research by Professor Bruce Tether[82] has shown that even in established clusters there is less activity in more deprived areas than in affluent ones. This points to a challenge in ensuring that, for instance, the tremendous success of the creative cluster in one area spreads equitably to surrounding areas – an example seen in Salford, where the Salford Quays media cluster remains successful, while deprivation in some other areas of Salford remains high. The balance between regeneration and gentrification points to a broader challenge for these sectors in ensuring that the growth and regeneration stemming from creative and cultural areas is inclusive and takes in a range of voices, perspectives and backgrounds. There is a gap, per other PEC research[83], of more than 250,000 people from working class backgrounds in the creative and cultural workforce. Addressing this, and ensuring that everyone benefits from these microclusters, is a challenge that includes national government, local authorities, cultural organisations and educational institutions, but a range of initiatives – such as those highlighted elsewhere in this report – show that measures can be taken to ensure the success of creative microclusters is shared more widely through the community.

Our work has shown that creative microclusters have the potential to play a transformative role in driving cultural and creative-led regeneration. Unlocking this will require recognition of this potential followed by investment. Recent investments such as the Towns Fund, the DCMS Create Growth Programme and Arts Council England's Cultural Development Fund have acknowledged the potential for growth outside the UK's largest creative clusters. These, as well as capital investment schemes, have potential to help drive growth, but a greater challenge is posed by the lack of core funding for arts and culture in local authorities. Reductions in operational funding for cultural and arts spending among local authorities through austerity have limited the capacity of authorities to use culture to help with the placemaking agenda.

Despite these challenges, recognising that these microclusters exist across the UK, and are thriving, allows us to break down the preconception that creative clusters are only found in a handful of large cities. Indeed, the prospect of creative and culture-led regeneration has the potential to be a force for generating cities and towns that are more prosperous, happier and fairer places.

Part Three:
Data

Culture and Place Data

“Mid-sized cities” has never been a sufficient definition of the Key Cities network, given that one is the fifth largest local authority in the country and more than a quarter sit comfortably within the population range of the Core Cities group.

Its defining characteristic is the diversity and range of municipal urban areas all over the country – places with populations ranging between 100,000 and 600,000 including rural, urban, coastal communities, county towns and provincial centres. Some are member authorities in mayoral combined authorities, some partnering with neighbours to drive impact, some regional capitals of rural areas. So Key Cities does embrace “middle urban Britain”, offering a useful data lens for many other authorities who share similar characteristics.

“The data allows local authorities and the sector to compare and contrast, and offers pointers to the potential for future investment.”

Arts Council England, from its own operations and working with partners, collects extensive data about its programmes and about how people engage with arts and culture in places throughout England. For this report we have worked with the Arts Council to look at data through a Key Cities lens to create a pen portrait of culture in that middle urban Britain.

Arts and culture are devolved matters controlled by the Arts Council of Wales (ACW), Creative Scotland (CS) and Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) in their respective countries, each with different programmes and criteria. We have worked with ACW to identify broadly comparable data for the Welsh Key Cities in their own national context, and with CS on more general data relating to members of the Scottish Cities Alliance, which are broadly analogous with the Key Cities population profile. It is less straightforward to draw direct parallels with Northern Ireland, which is worthy of separate study, so the scope of this report is limited to Great Britain – although we do look at the important legacy of Derry as the first UK City of Culture in 2013 (see page 72).

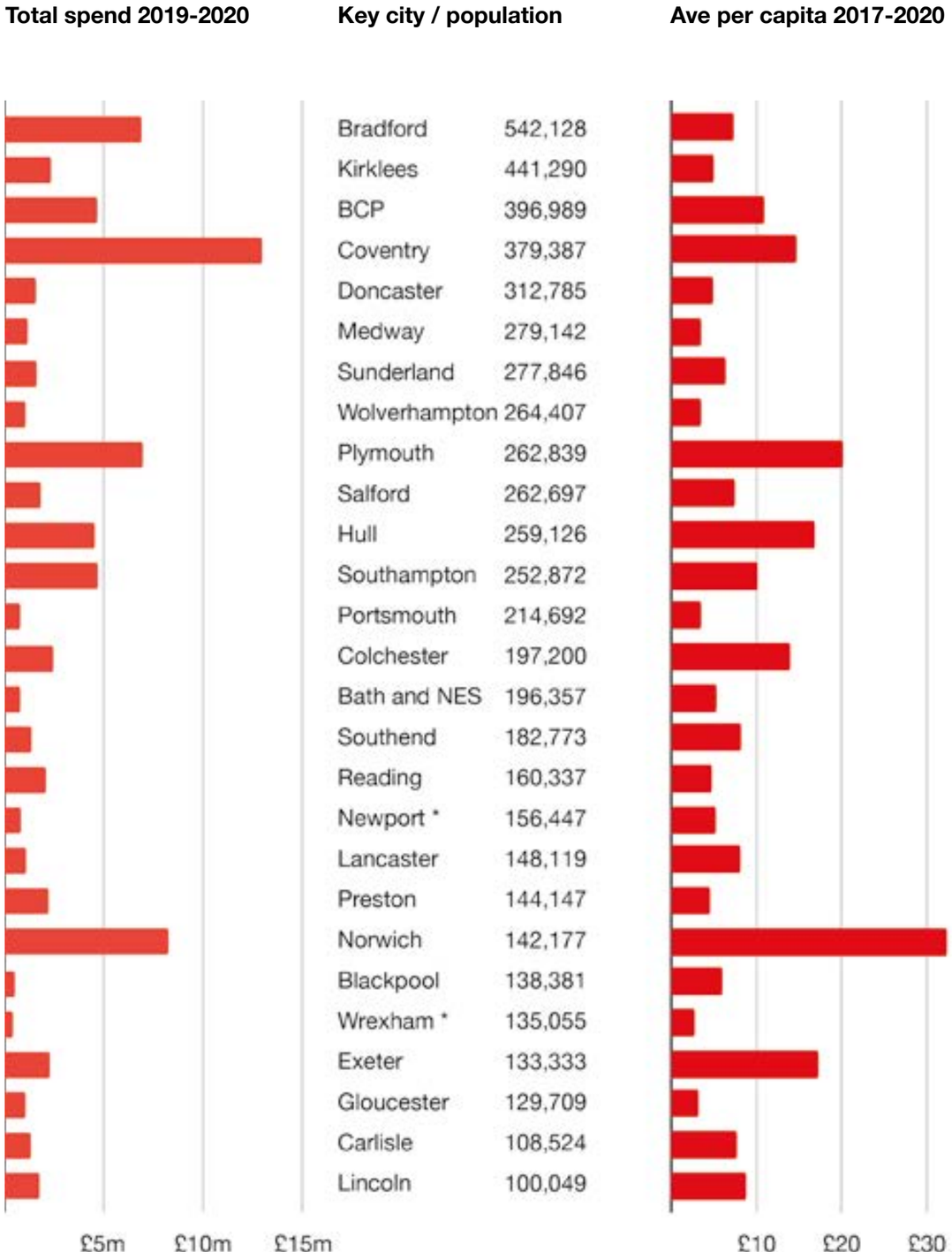
We have looked at data about the cultural life in places, and about the financial investments Arts Council England has made – including the support given to cultural organisations during the two years of the Covid pandemic. Cultural organisations, local authorities, anchor institutions and stakeholders can use this data to gain insights and underpin their approach. Where do I stand in this ranking? What does it say about my place and our strategy? How important is this measure to our approach? What other places are we comparable to? Looking at our own strengths and capacity, what opportunities does the data suggest? Presenting data across all the Key Cities – and sometimes beyond – gives everyone an opportunity to look at whether they’re missing a trick compared to others who seem to be in a very similar situation, and potentially also to see patterns and scope for collaboration with organisations and places in a completely different part of the country. The data allows local authorities and the cultural sector in Key Cities and comparable towns and cities to compare and contrast, and offers pointers to the Arts Council and others about the potential for future investment.

Arts Council investment

It is not surprising that a list of the total funds invested by the Arts Councils in England and Wales in each of the Key Cities produces a different ranking than the average money invested per head of the population (Fig. 7), but the two categories offer distinct and equally valid perspectives on fairness and effectiveness when it comes to public funding.

Only three cities (Coventry, Norwich and Plymouth) make it into the top six recipients in both categories. Ranking the cities by population shows a clear correlation between the total and per capita investments, but there are notable exceptions: Plymouth, Norwich and Exeter all with a greater proportional increase in per capita investment compared with Coventry prior to its term as UK City of Culture, for example. Is this because the wider region served by the cultural offer in these cities is proportionally more significant than in Coventry, where there are many other offers nearby in the region? That might suggest a similar boost for Carlisle, but there are numerous oth-

ARTS COUNCIL INVESTMENT



Opposite

*Fig 7. Arts Council investment in Key Cities ranked by population: total invested in the year 2019-2020, and average per head of the population over the three years 2017-2020. (Arts Council England, *Arts Council of Wales. Populations: ONS mid-2020)*

er factors at play. Certainly the wider geographic area served by cultural organisations such as NPOs is an important factor when looking at disparities between neighbouring and otherwise comparable places.

Cultural investment in a place requires a judgment that it can deliver the benefits sought and this depends on a range of factors including local infrastructure, vision, leadership and capacity to respond. People who live in a highly deprived area may well, as other data in this report suggests, benefit from access to culture, but if those factors are absent locally it is not simply a matter of the quantum of investment. Other programmes come into play to start building a cultural ecosystem over time, such as Arts Council England's Priority Places, Levelling Up for Culture Places and Creative People and Places.

National Portfolio Organisations

The narrative following the delayed announcement of the new settlement for Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) has been dominated by the government's instruction to steer funding away from London. A similar disparity exists in Wales, where the national average invested by the Arts Council of Wales per head of the population over the three years between 2017 and 2020 of £13.08 compares with Newport's £5.25 and Wrexham's £2.84. A significant reason is that many cultural organisations serving the whole of Wales are based in Cardiff. Similar arguments have been made about London-based NPOs, that redirecting funds away from the capital could be considered levelling down and not up.

Some Key Cities have benefited from the relocation of activities previously based in the capital – most notably when the BBC moved to Salford – and the imperative for organisations with national reach to be sited in London is doubtless decreasing, but each case should be considered on its merits. The Key Cities view is that investment should be used to address disparities based on need, allowing decisions to be made locally with long-term dependable funding to produce sustainable improvement. Some areas of London rank with neighbourhoods in Key Cities as among the most deprived in the country: evidence-based funding with transparent criteria is preferable to top down political directives.

That said, the outcome of the new NPO settlement for places like the Key Cities is overwhelmingly positive, with an overall increase of 24.6% in the annual cash sums invested across the 25 Key Cities in England in 2023-2026 compared with the previous period (Table 1). Seven cities – Bath and North East

NATIONAL PORTFOLIO ORGANISATIONS

Comparing the new settlement with the previous cycle

	18-22	23-26	2018-2922	2023-2026	%	=
Bath & NES	1	1	£90,522	£201,020	122.1	↑
BCP	7	5	£253,114	£771,856	204.9	↑
Blackpool	2	3	£3,752,719	£3,931,769	4.8	↑
Bradford	11	12	£1,772,211	£3,352,434	89.2	↑
Carlisle	2	2	£1,216,474	£1,238,857	1.8	↑
Colchester	4	5	£1,981,850	£2,303,417	16.2	↑
Coventry	5	9	£2,086,077	£3,739,460	79.3	↑
Doncaster	5	3	£794,881	£561,017	-29.4	↓
Exeter	7	5	£1,516,472	£1,263,824	-16.7	↓
Gloucester	2	4	£85,000	£899,534	958.3	↑
Hull	5	8	£2,252,435	£3,055,831	35.7	↑
Kirklees	5	8	£532,490	£1,178,440	121.3	↑
Lancaster	5	4	£532,490	£664,864	18.6	↑
Lincoln	2	3	£318,605	£635,910	99.6	↑
Medway	1	6	£245,000	£1,303,884	432.2	↑
Norwich	5	6	£3,724,273	£3,975,487	6.7	↑
Plymouth	11	8	£3,992,356	£4,113,239	3.0	↑
Portsmouth	2	2	£362,067	£421,668	16.5	↑
Preston	2	1	£1,560,323	£229,140	-85.3	↓
Reading	3	4	£429,999	£644,811	50.0	↑
Salford	2	4	£1,005,657	£1,323,161	31.6	↑
Southampton	7	9	£3,434,206	£3,885,691	13.1	↑
Southend	2	2	£1,251,762	£794,908	-36.5	↓
Sunderland	1	3	£500,000	£1,073,836	114.8	↑
Wolverhampton	3	5	£457,824	£1,029,081	124.8	↑
Key Cities Total	**102**	**122**	**£34,176,813**	**£42,593,139**	**24.6**	↑

Note: Some NPOs have relocated between funding rounds. NPO funding is included in the city totals above only for the round where NPOs were located in the relevant city at the time of application.

Opposite

Table 1. Comparing Arts Council England investment in Key Cities via National Portfolio Organisations in 2023-2026 with the previous cycle. Columns 1 and 2: Number of NPOs. Columns 3 and 4: annual investment figures. Columns 5 and 6: percentage and absolute increase/decrease. (Arts Council England)

Somerset, Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole, Gloucester, Kirklees, Medway, Sunderland and Wolverhampton – saw their annual NPO investment more than double. Within the group there are some big losers – Preston down 85.3%, Southend 36.5%, Doncaster 29.4% – but in each case there is a specific reason accounting for the drop: Curious Minds relocating from Preston to Wigan, the Society of Chief Librarians moving to Islington from Southend, and Jazz North leaving Doncaster for Calderdale. Exeter dropped by 16.7% because Arts & Health South West ceased being funded as an NPO.

This highlights the caution that must be exercised when looking at this data. The NPO data view by local authority is drawn from the application postcode, which is not always the same as where most of an NPO's activities take place. Curious Minds moving its administrative office to Wigan may not signify a reduction in its activities in Preston. Equally, the percentage rise or fall is relative to the level of previous investment. The biggest NPO winner in this round is Gloucester with a 958.3% jump in funding. Within the city of Gloucester it really is that significant, acquiring a new NPO to turbocharge its strategy of reimagining the city centre through culture (see Stephen Marston, p. 84), but in the previous round the city was receiving only £85,000 a year and even now at 16th it remains in the bottom half of the table of recipients. Nevertheless, this data alongside the other data sets offers a meaningful view of the cultural offer and capacities across the Key Cities and similar urban areas.

There is no comparable information for the Key Cities in Wales which is about to carry out a fresh investment review. The last such review took place in 2015, when 67 companies were chosen to receive a share of £28.5m in funding as Arts Portfolio Wales Organisations (APWs). Cardiff – with 26 APWs and several National Companies – ranks first. Newport with three APWs ranks 11th of Wales' 22 local authorities and Wrexham, with none, is in 16th place.

In the past, organisations in Wales received funding for five years, but following a public consultation, a new model with a simplified application process has been adopted. Instead of the traditional five-year funding arrangement, successful applicants will receive three-year funding, with the option of an additional three years based on performance.

The Investment Review will centre on six principles that all funding organisations will need to demonstrate their commitment to when they apply: Creativity, Widening Engagement,

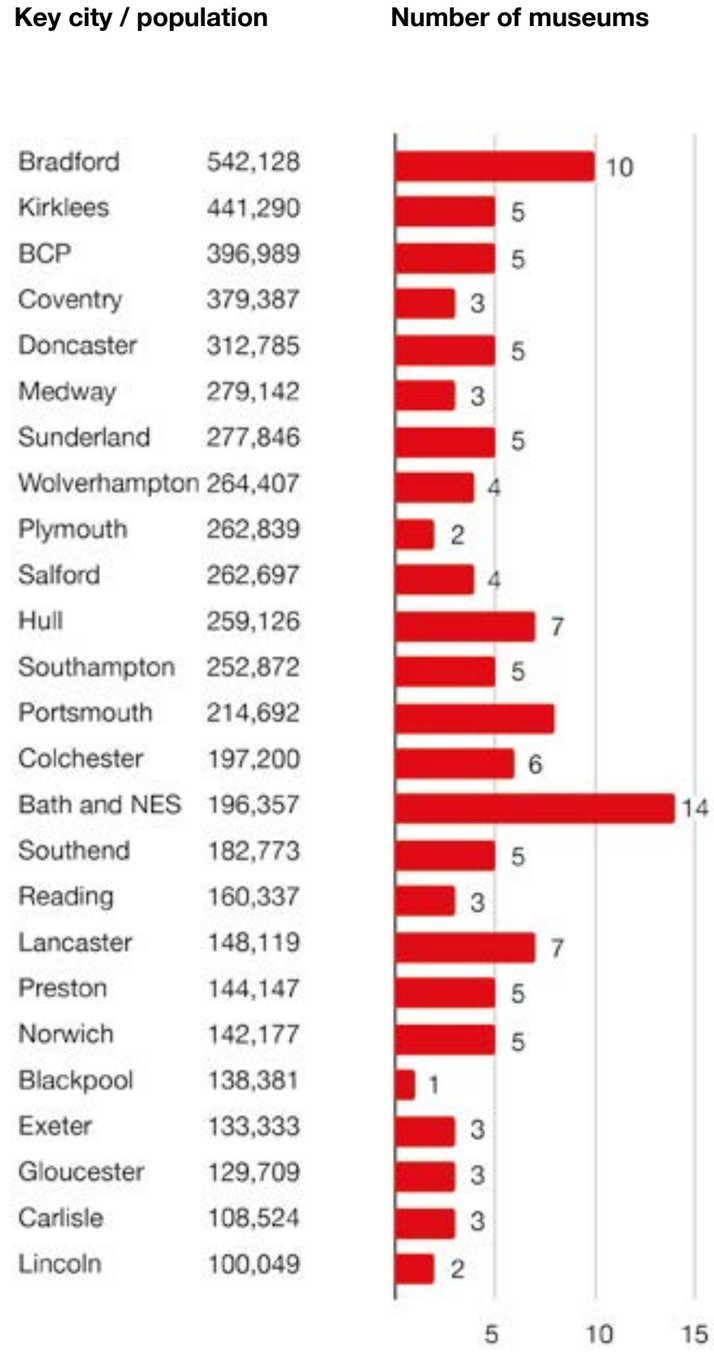
Welsh Language, Climate justice, Nurturing talent, and Transformation. The Arts Council of Wales Investment Review 2023 opened for applications on 9 January and closes on 31 March and the guidance notes have recently been issued.[84]

The numbers of Arts Council England-accredited museums (Fig. 8) do not signify levels of financial investment, nor – since accreditation happens on a rolling basis – does this allow comparison between funding periods, but viewing the numbers in each city ranked by population does offer another useful guide to the strength of local cultural ecosystems, and a comparison between apparently strong or weak provision for the population. With the usual caveats that places may serve or benefit from their neighbours, we can see that Bath and North East Somerset has the most powerful offer of the Key Cities in number of accredited museums, whereas Coventry, Plymouth, Medway and Blackpool present relatively poorly in this category. Bradford's 10 museums form an important plank in its platform for UK City of Culture 2025.

There is no comparable central accreditation system in Wales.

ACCREDITED MUSEUMS

Fig 8. Number of Museums accredited by Arts Council England in Key Cities in England ranked by population. (Arts Council England. Population: ONS mid-2020)



Scotland

We must be cautious about drawing parallels with Scotland on at least two counts. First, that the social and economic geography as between significant urban and remote rural areas is very different to that in England and Wales. Second, that the remit of Creative Scotland, formed in 2010 as successor to both the Arts Council of Scotland and Scottish Screen, differs from that of its English and Welsh counterparts, incorporating not only arts and culture, but also screen and the creative industries.

In one area that features prominently in this report – the agency of the creative industries in culture-led regeneration – the Scottish model offers lessons and advantages, being able to offer a holistic cross-sector approach to Dundee as a centre of cultural placemaking as well as a UNESCO City of Design, for example.

Notwithstanding the many differences, there is value in looking at Creative Scotland funding for the member cities of the Scottish Cities Alliance – eight cities which broadly sit within the population profile of the Key Cities network: Aberdeen, Dundee, Dunfermline, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, Perth and Stirling.

The Scottish experience mirrors that of England and Wales in the concentration of national cultural organisations in the capital – though it may be more accurate in Scotland's case to point to the two metropolitan centres of Edinburgh and Glasgow which together, with 21% of the national population, receive 59% of Creative Scotland's project awards and 69% of the funds allocated to Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs), the Scottish equivalent of NPOs.

The position of Dunfermline as the outlier among Scottish cities, with next to no direct investment in the Creative Scotland figures, is witness to the dangers of direct comparison, as the project award funding per head of the population for Fife, the county that includes Dunfermline, is at £6 slightly higher than that in Perth. Across the border – albeit comparing Codling apples with Jedburgh pears – that would sit between Blackpool and Bath.

Leaving Dunfermline aside, the combined average funding in each city per head of the population – including both project awards and RFO funding – ranges from £5.75 in Perth to £23 in Dundee, £32 in Glasgow and £53 in Edinburgh. This compares with £5.25 in Newport, £20 in Plymouth and £32 in Norwich.

CREATIVE SCOTLAND INVESTMENT

Fig 9. Creative Scotland investment in SCA cities ranked by population: Combined total project and RFO spending and average per head of the population in the two years 2018-2020. (Creative Scotland. Populations: ONS mid-2020)

Uncertainty about public funding for culture is a pressing issue in Scotland, as it has been in England and Wales. The last RFO settlement was for the period 2018-2021. This was extended in response to the Covid pandemic until the end of March 2024, and it is hoped may be further extended until 2025 while the organisation completes a review of its framework for future funding in the context of significant challenges from costs and uncertainties around budgets. Regular updates and guidance are issued on the Creative Scotland website.[88]

In Scotland as in the other home nations, there is significant potential for collaboration in knowledge exchange, data sharing and impact evaluation to help make the case for maintaining public funding – in the devolved nation context as well as across the United Kingdom.

Table 2. Number of awards made to Key Cities under the Culture Recovery Fund during the pandemic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 in five categories: (1) Continuity support, (2) Grants, (3) the Capital Kickstart programme, (4) Emergency Resource support, and (5) the Emergency Grassroots Music Venues fund.
(Arts Council England)

	Total	1	2	3	4	5
Bath & NES	33	5	23	0	4	1
BCP	26	5	19	0	1	1
Blackpool	19	0	13	0	6	0
Bradford	38	6	32	0	0	0
Carlisle	5	1	3	0	0	1
Colchester	20	1	17	2	0	0
Coventry	44	6	30	2	6	0
Doncaster	6	1	5	0	0	0
Exeter	32	5	25	0	2	0
Gloucester	8	2	4	0	2	0
Hull	23	3	19	0	0	1
Kirklees	26	2	21	0	3	0
Lancaster	13	2	8	0	1	2
Lincoln	24	4	18	0	2	0
Medway	14	3	9	0	2	0
Norwich	40	4	29	1	6	0
Plymouth	19	3	13	2	0	1
Portsmouth	20	4	14	0	2	0
Preston	13	2	10	0	1	0
Reading	18	2	14	0	1	1
Salford	27	4	22	0	1	0
Southampton	36	5	26	0	4	1
Southend	12	1	9	0	2	0
Sunderland	22	4	15	1	2	0
Wolverhampton	21	3	15	1	0	2

Below

Table 3. Number of awards made to Key Cities in Wales under the Culture Recovery Fund during the pandemic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 in six categories: (1 and 6) Covid Recovery Fund (Revenue) - two rounds, (2) Stabilisation Fund for Individuals, (3) Stabilisation Fund for Organisations, (4) Urgent Response Fund for Individuals, and (5) Cultural Recovery Fund (Capital).
(Arts Council of Wales)

	Total	1	2	3	4	5	6
Newport	40	5	9	6	10	3	7
Wrexham	23	2	3	4	10	1	3

The Covid-19 pandemic

The restrictions associated with Covid-19 represented a grave threat to the cultural sector in all places even as its importance to mental health, wellbeing and simple human contact was more starkly evident than ever.

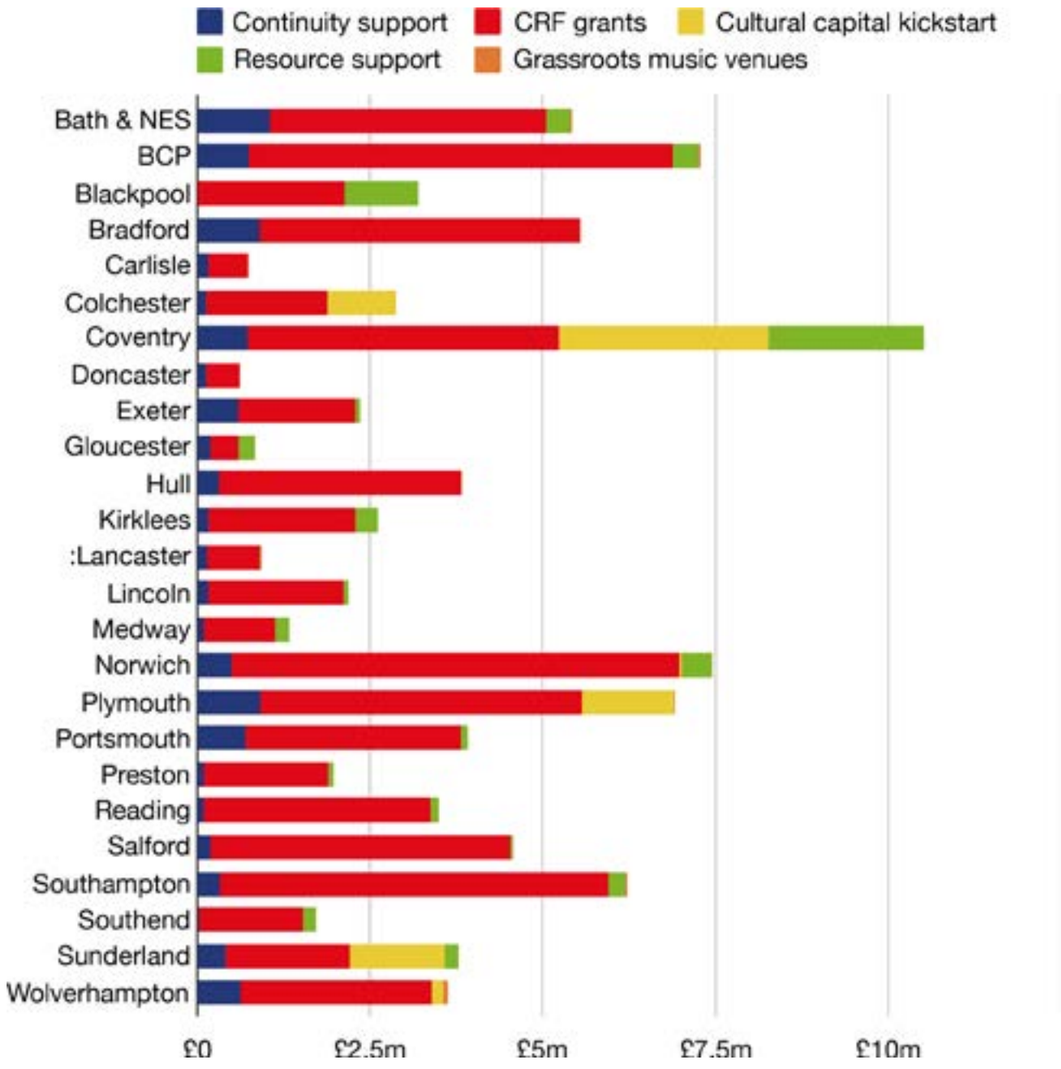
Arts Council England, its parallel organisations in the home nations and the other arms-length funding bodies such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund played a critical role in supporting the sector, including by channeling emergency funds from the government to preserve the nation's cultural capacity and infrastructure. Local authorities and the sector funding bodies were central to understanding local need and risk, informing policy decisions made by ministers and officials and securing the best possible outcomes at local level.

The data about support given through the various programmes in the Culture Recovery Fund (CRF), while depicting an exceptional and time-limited situation, offers important wider insights not only into the long tail of economic recovery from Covid but also the strength, resilience and weaknesses of the sector in different parts of the country. Looking at the number of awards made (Tables 2 and 3) and the quantum of money paid out (Figs. 10 and 11), it is not surprising that Coventry – UK City of Culture during the height of the pandemic – topped the rankings in both categories. Cities that attracted proportionally high emergency support include Bath and North East Somerset, Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole, Norwich, Plymouth and Southampton, while the help extended to Bradford was relatively meagre for its size.

What does it mean that a place attracted a high level of support? It may indicate high risk arising from low levels of resilience, but the more significant implication overall is that CRF support points to local strength: all cultural organisations were exposed to high risk, but these places have the capacity and the organisations that need preserving with a good chance of making it through. The CRF data offers a metric of demand with a good spread across the country, so it offers a fairly robust insight.

Looking at the data from the Arts Council of Wales, Newport, with CRF grants totalling £928,307, sits between Lancaster (£932,713) and Gloucester (£828,620), while Wrexham (total £350,340) received least Arts Council Cultural Recovery Fund support of the 27 Key Cities. This picture is of course historical and there are interesting current parallels between the approach taken by Wrexham and Gloucester to culture-led reimagining of the city centre in partnership with the universi-

PUBLIC FUNDING DURING COVID



Opposite above

Fig 10. Financial support given to Key Cities in England through the Culture Recovery Fund during the pandemic years 2020-2022. (Arts Council England)

Opposite below

Fig 11. Financial support given to Key Cities in Wales through the Culture Recovery Fund during the pandemic years 2020-2022. (Arts Council of Wales)

Above

Fig 12. Arts Council funding in Key Cities through the Capital Investment Programme 2021-2023. (Arts Council England)

ties there, both members of the Key Cities Innovation Network. Combined with an ambition to become UK City of Culture 2029, there is a clear desire that this strategic foregrounding of culture in the city's place strategy will lead to a similar uplift in Wrexham's performance in future data sets (see Professor Maria Hinfelaar, p. 98).

The Capital Investment Programme, established by Arts Council England in 2021, supports cultural organisations to adjust buildings and equipment so that they can operate safely post-pandemic and improve access, seize on technological opportunities, and reduce environmental impact. Looking at funds invested by Arts Council England through this fund (Fig. 12), the big recipients are Medway, Colchester and Reading. What this data illlustrates in this relatively limited programme is that these places have important investable infrastructure: organisations that needed and were worthy of investment at that time. Preston, which as we saw in the NPO data suffered a significant drop in funding in the latest round, still has important investable infrastructure.

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

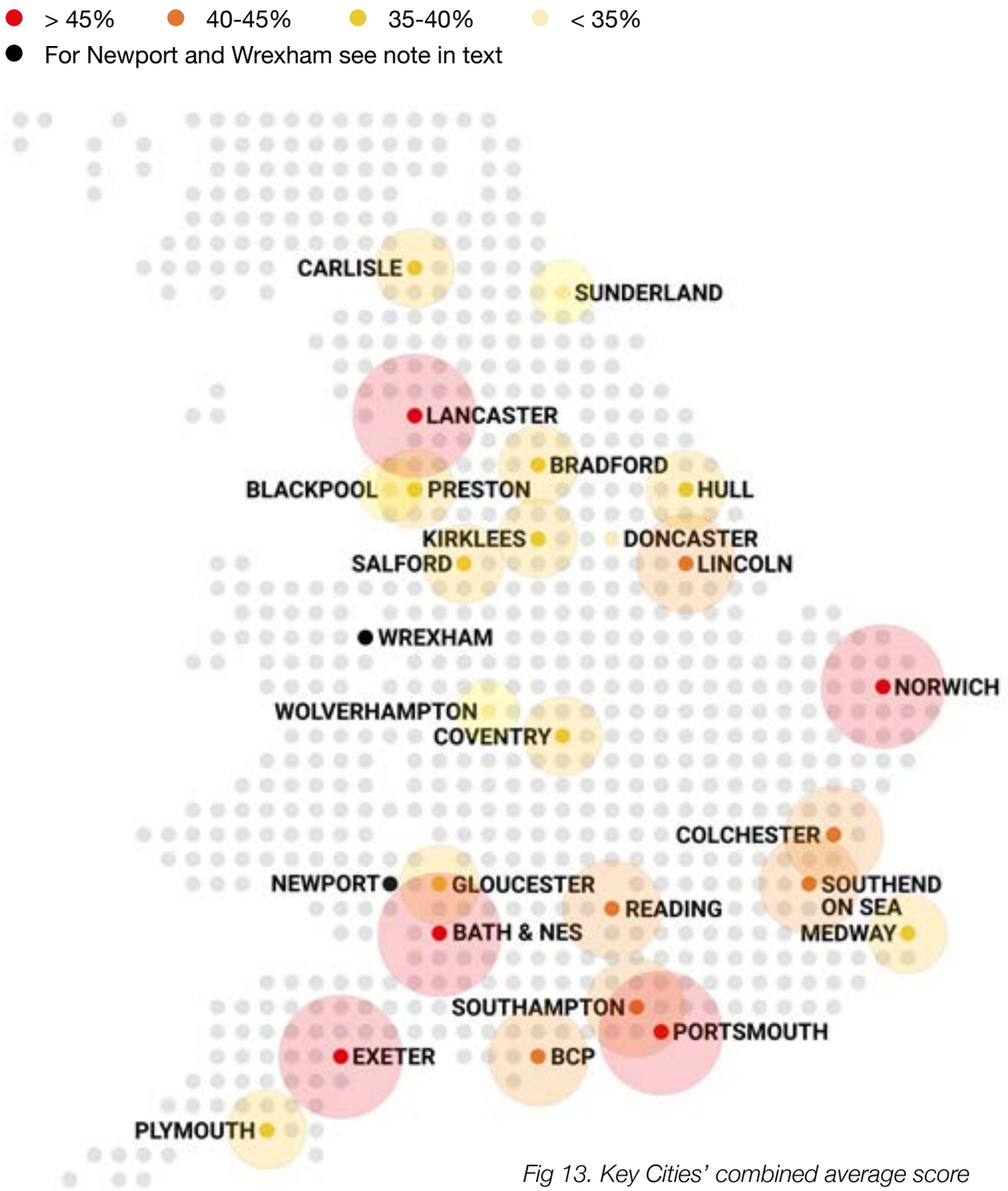


Fig 13. Key Cities' combined average score for engaging with culture 2015-2019. (Active Lives Survey, Sports England / Arts Council England)

Cultural life

Arts Council England works with Sport England, which runs the annual Active Lives survey, to gain an understanding of levels of cultural engagement. The Key Cities cultural engagement heatmap (Fig. 13) shows the performance of each Key City in England in terms of the combined average Active Lives score across all four activities over the four-year period. This shows Lancaster, Norwich, Bath and North East Somerset, Portsmouth and Exeter as the top performers with over 45%; Sunderland, Blackpool, Doncaster and Wolverhampton at the other end of the scale below 35%, and all others in between.

There is no directly comparable engagement data for Wales, although the latest National Survey data for Wales shows that 72% of residents in Wrexham and 77% in Newport attended an arts event in the year 2019/20.

We have looked in detail at four types of activity – taking part in a creative activity / attending a creative event or performance (Fig. 14); museum or gallery visits / library visits (Fig. 15) – year by year from 2015 to 2019, the most recent years not distorted by Covid lockdowns.

This data complements that about the numbers of accredited museums and national portfolio organisations in each place to offer insights into the link between capacity and cultural life. What patterns can be discerned? Overall, visits to performances and galleries rank higher across the board than taking part in creative activities, and library visits are marginally least popular. With the caveat that the Active Lives Survey is based on relatively modest samples and year-on-year variations should therefore be treated with caution, cities can see in this data if their engagement registered rises or falls over the four-year period, whether their own pattern is the same across all activities and if there are pattern-breaking peaks or troughs that may link to known local factors. They can consider what they have in common with others who show similar engagement levels and patterns.

Is there a reason Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole registered an unusually high engagement score for live performance in 2016-2017? Blackpool's performance is similar to comparable northern places, but what explains its low ranking in museum and gallery visits? Looking back at local provision, Bath & North East Somerset has the greatest number of accredited museums in the network and Blackpool the fewest (Fig. 8). With the opening of Showtime in Blackpool in 2023, can we expect to see that metric change?

We know that the position of libraries in the cultural firma-

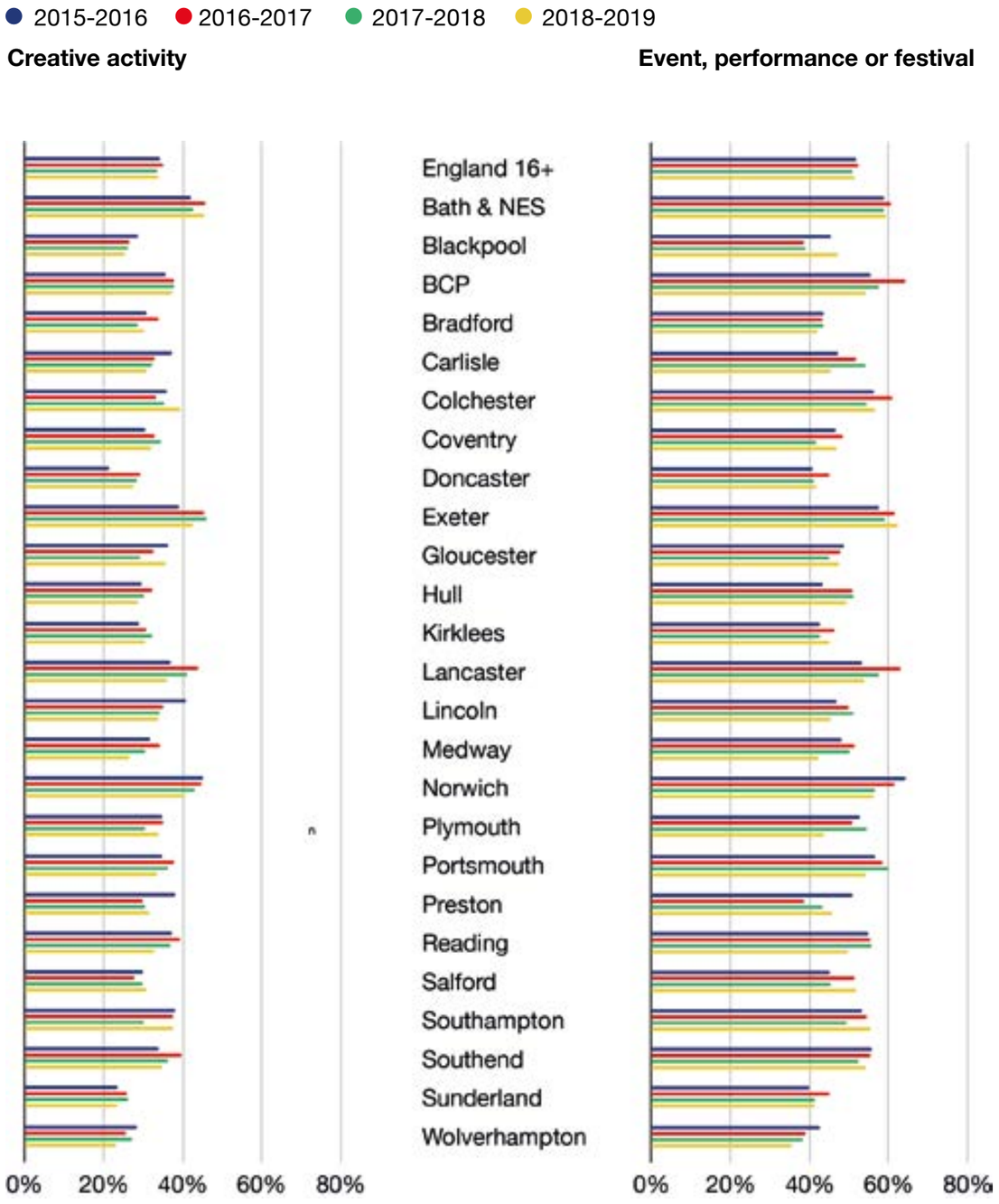


Fig 14. Percentage of the population who have undertaken a creative activity or craft (left) or attended an event, performance or festival (right) over the four years before Covid (2015-2019). (Active Lives Survey, Sport England / Arts Council England)

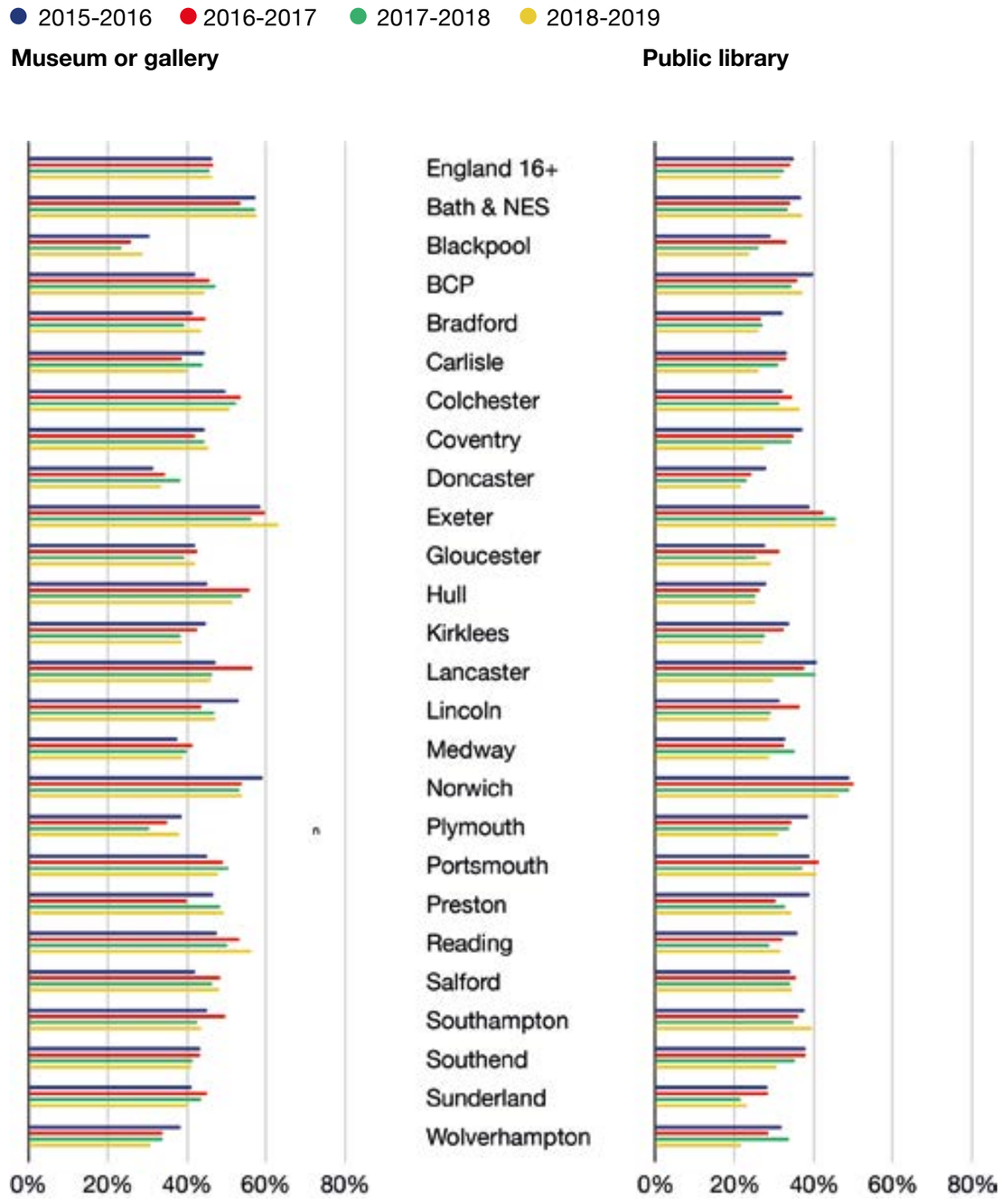


Fig 15. Percentage of the population who have visited a museum or gallery (left) or used a public library service (right) over the four years before Covid (2015-2019). (Active Lives Survey, Sport England / Arts Ciouncil England)

ment has been transformed by the likes of Google and Amazon, with an undeniable drop in attendance and engagement over the last 15-20 years. Yet these figures show that between a quarter and a third of people in these locations make regular use of a free public library service, with libraries responding to need and developing their services from lending books to small business advice, literacy schemes, projects for children and young people, public and civic information. High quality library services – both within local authority provision such as Norfolk's library service, and spun off into the social enterprise sector such as Devon's Libraries Unlimited – are reflected in local engagement data for Norwich and Exeter respectively. What this data shows overall is that there are groups of people for whom the free public library is an essential service.

It is instructive to combine the Active Lives data with the ONS Index of Multiple Deprivation scores (Fig. 16) to confirm what we have seen elsewhere (pp. 35-36 and Fig. 1) about the connection between deprivation and cultural engagement. This data confirms that undeniable link.

Why is there less engagement with culture in a place? It could just be that there are fewer places to go, or that local customs and behaviour patterns are set differently. So while

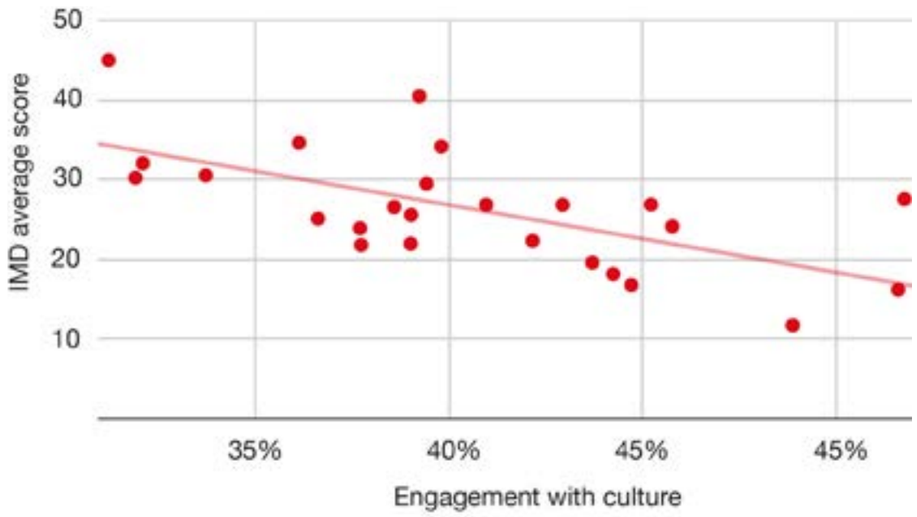


Fig 16. Key Cities' average score in the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation set against average % engaging with culture 2015-2019 shows a pattern indicating that higher levels of engagement are associated with lower deprivation scores. (ONS and Sports England / Arts Council England Active Lives.)

Figs 17-24 (pp 158-161).
17: Average annual Arts Council investment in Priority Places per head of the population 2017-2020.
18: Percentage engaged three times or more p.a. with arts or museums 2015-2017.
19: Percentage of the population in the lower two deciles of the Index of Multiple Deprivation.
20: Percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.
21: Percentage of pupils with special educational needs.
22: Red Cross vulnerability score.
23: Percentage impacted by disability or long-term health condition.
24: Percentage of the population from ethnic minority.
(Arts Council England)

this does not demonstrate that cultural investment will reduce deprivation, there is a strong indication that building a cultural ecosystem in more deprived places over time – for example through programmes such as Priority Places, Levelling Up for Culture Places and Creative People and Places – will have an impact in that direction not only through availability and access but also through the other attributes delivered by the cultural sector such as skills, jobs and innovation.

Priority Places

In this context it is worth looking at Arts Council England's programme of 54 Priority Places, embracing six Key Cities – Blackpool, Gloucester, Kirklees, Medway, Portsmouth and Wolverhampton – which are also the only Key Cities in the wider Levelling Up for Culture scheme.

We have looked at where these Key Cities sit within the wider Priority Places group in three key attributes – the level of Arts Council investment through the scheme (Fig. 17); engagement with culture (Fig. 18); and local ethnic diversity (Fig. 24), and five deprivation indices – IMD score (Fig. 19); percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals (Fig. 20); percentage with special educational needs (Fig. 21); Red Cross vulnerability score (Fig. 22); and percentage impacted by disability or long-term health condition (Fig. 23). We've also directly compared the six Key Cities with each other in the same categories (Fig. 25). We are looking at where cities stand out and what the reasons for that might be. In terms of investment, Blackpool is one of the highest per capita recipients and it has very low engagement. It is the lowest of all Key Cities in ethnic diversity and scores highly across all five deprivation indices.

Blackpool is a proud seaside town that according to Historic England has "Outstanding Universal Value" as the world's first working-class seaside resort, a heritage that has enduring appeal in popular culture. In addition to its status as a Priority Place it is home to the LeftCoast Creative People and Places programme, Grundy Art Gallery and the new Showtown museum of fun and entertainment, which opens its doors in 2023. Blackpool's Action Plan for culture (see p. 56) includes establishing a local culture partnership and the town could be viewed as a textbook example of patient ecosystem building, founded on local character and strengths, in response to significant deprivation challenges.

Fig.17
Investment

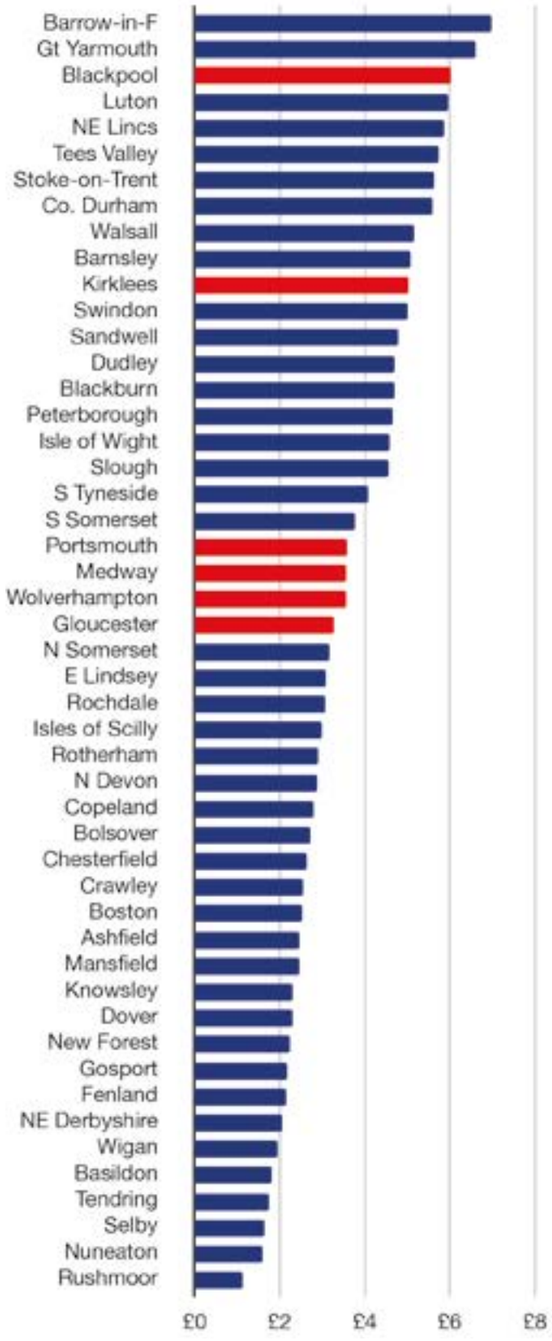


Fig.18
Engagement with culture

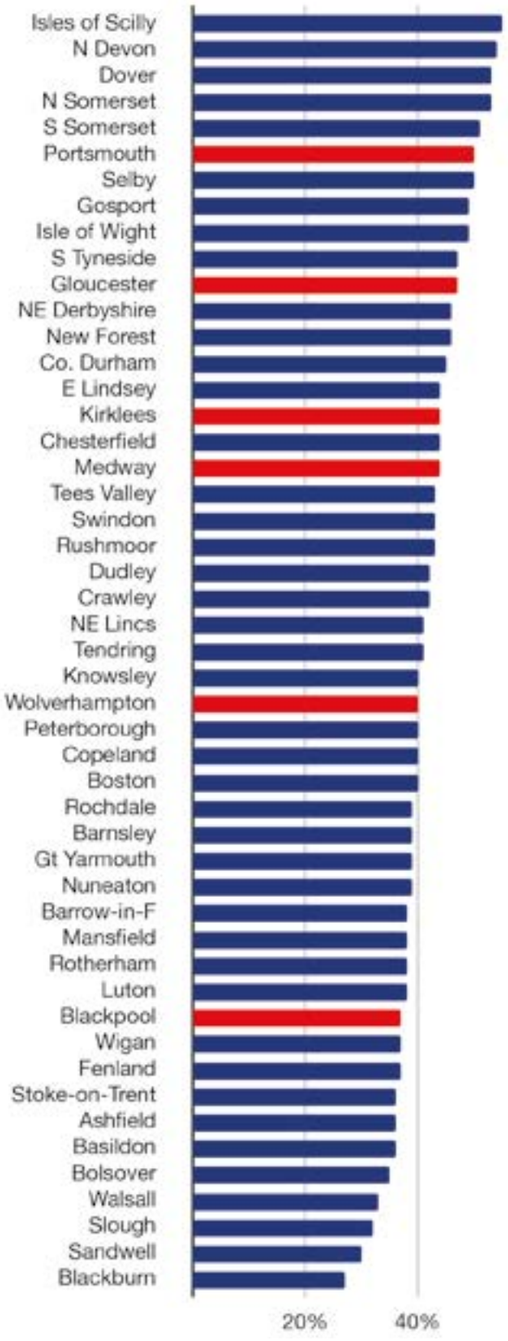


Fig.19
Deprivation

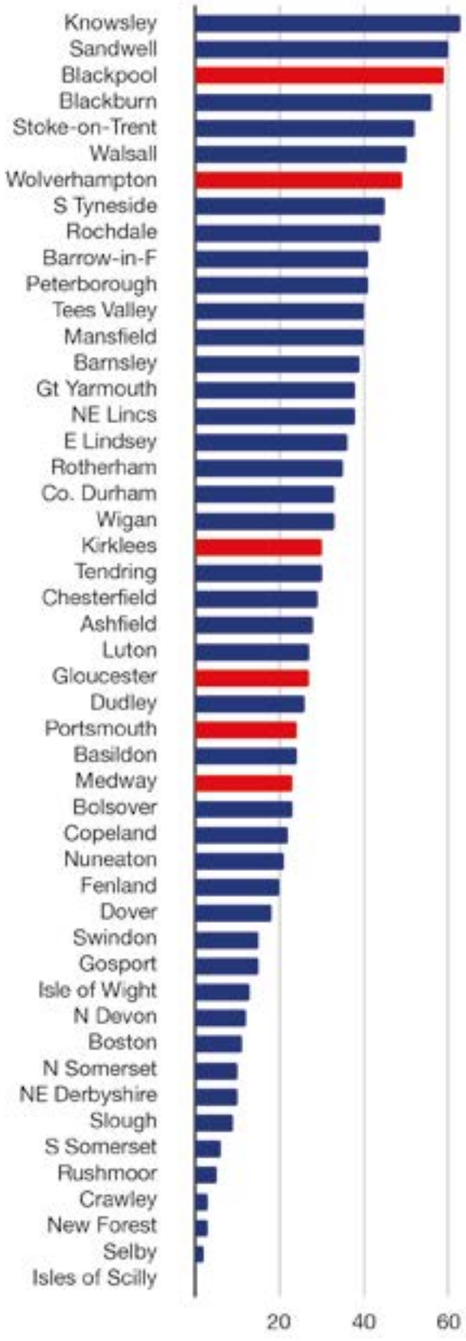


Fig.20
Free school meals

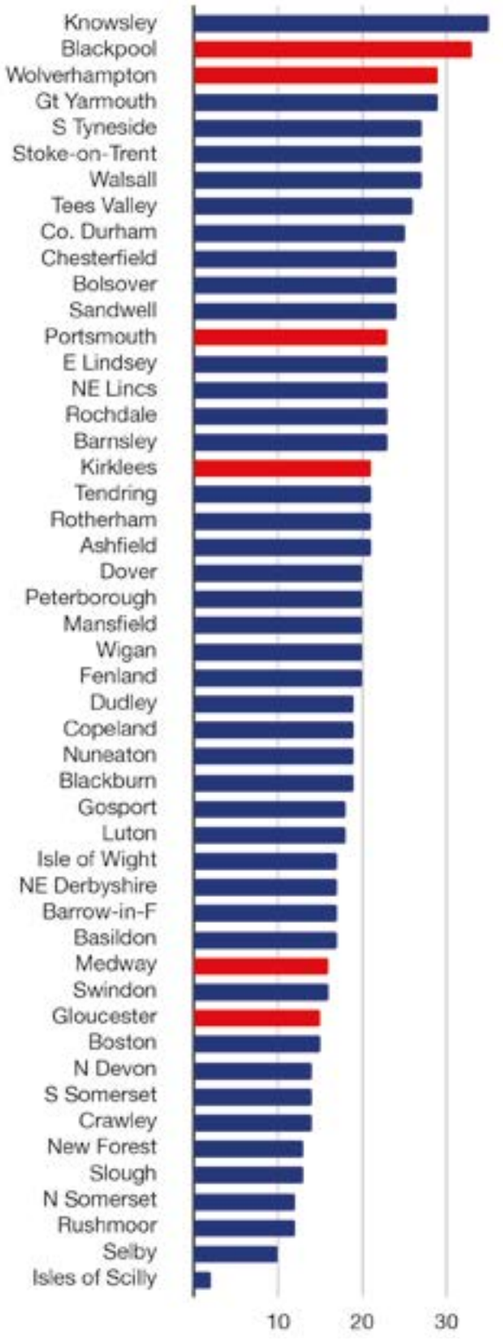


Fig.21
Special educational needs

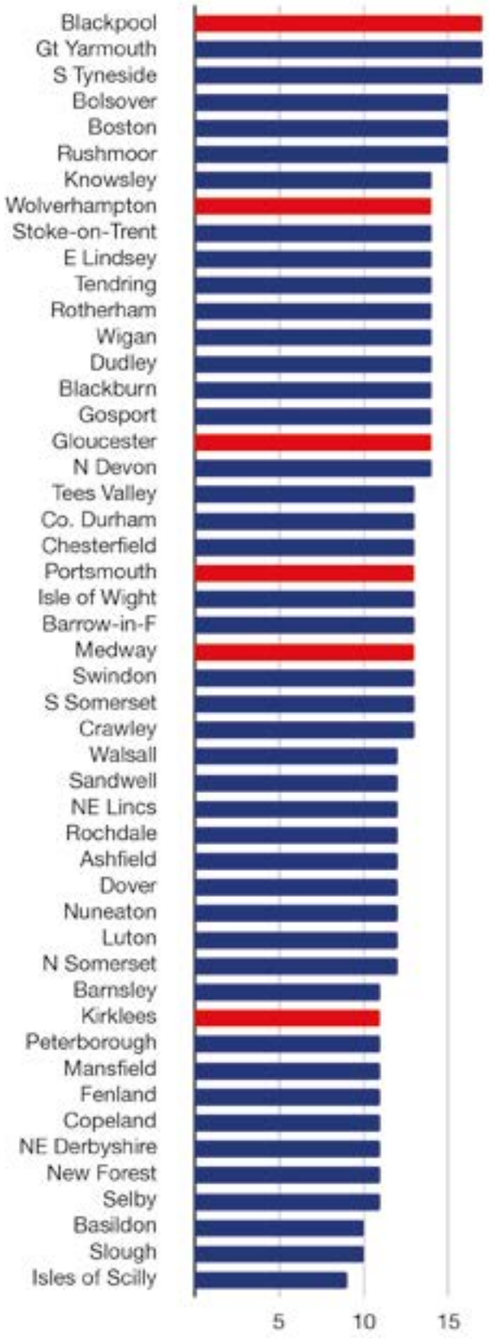


Fig.22
Vulnerability

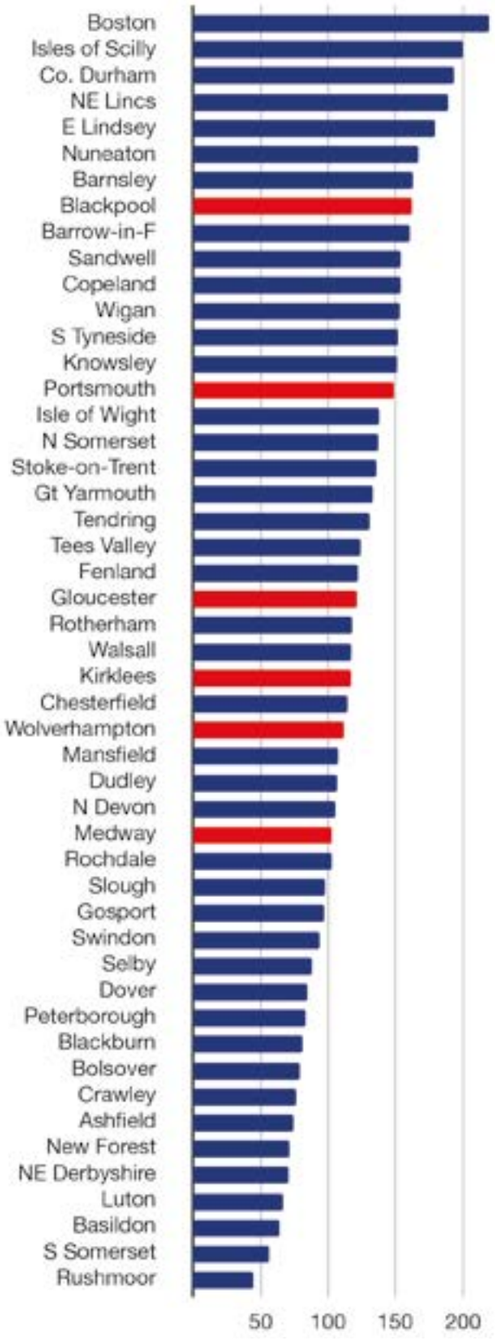


Fig.23
Disability

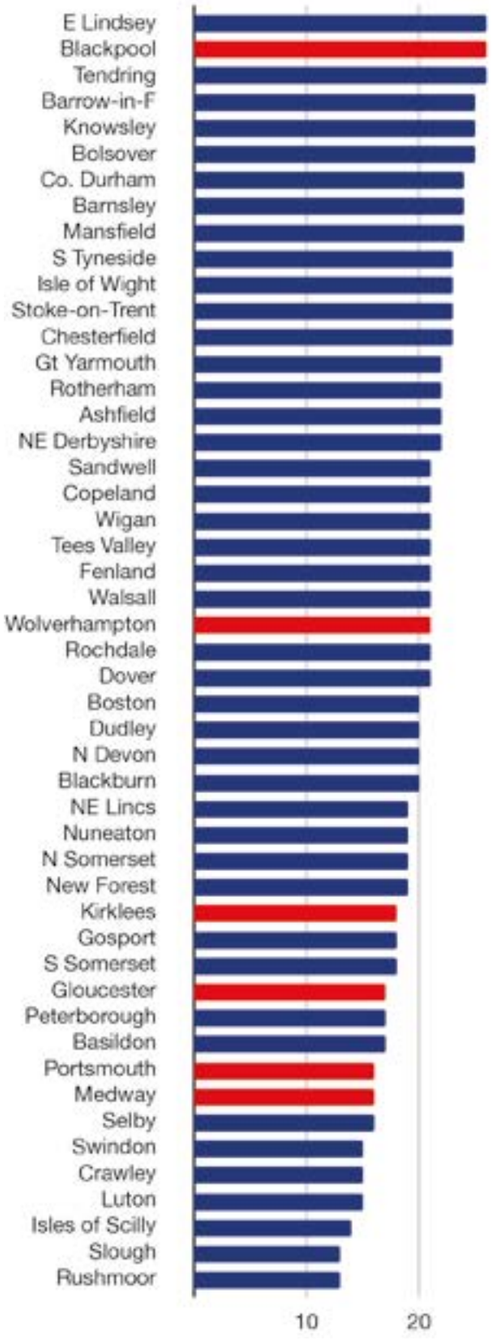
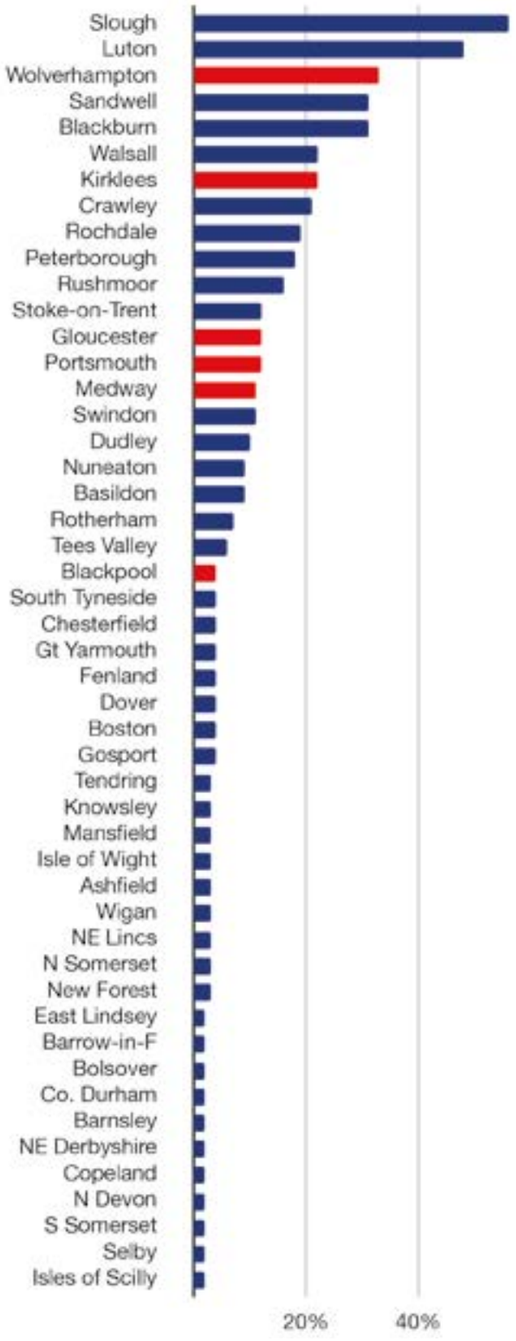


Fig.24
Ethnic minorities



KEY CITIES PRIORITY PLACES COMPARED

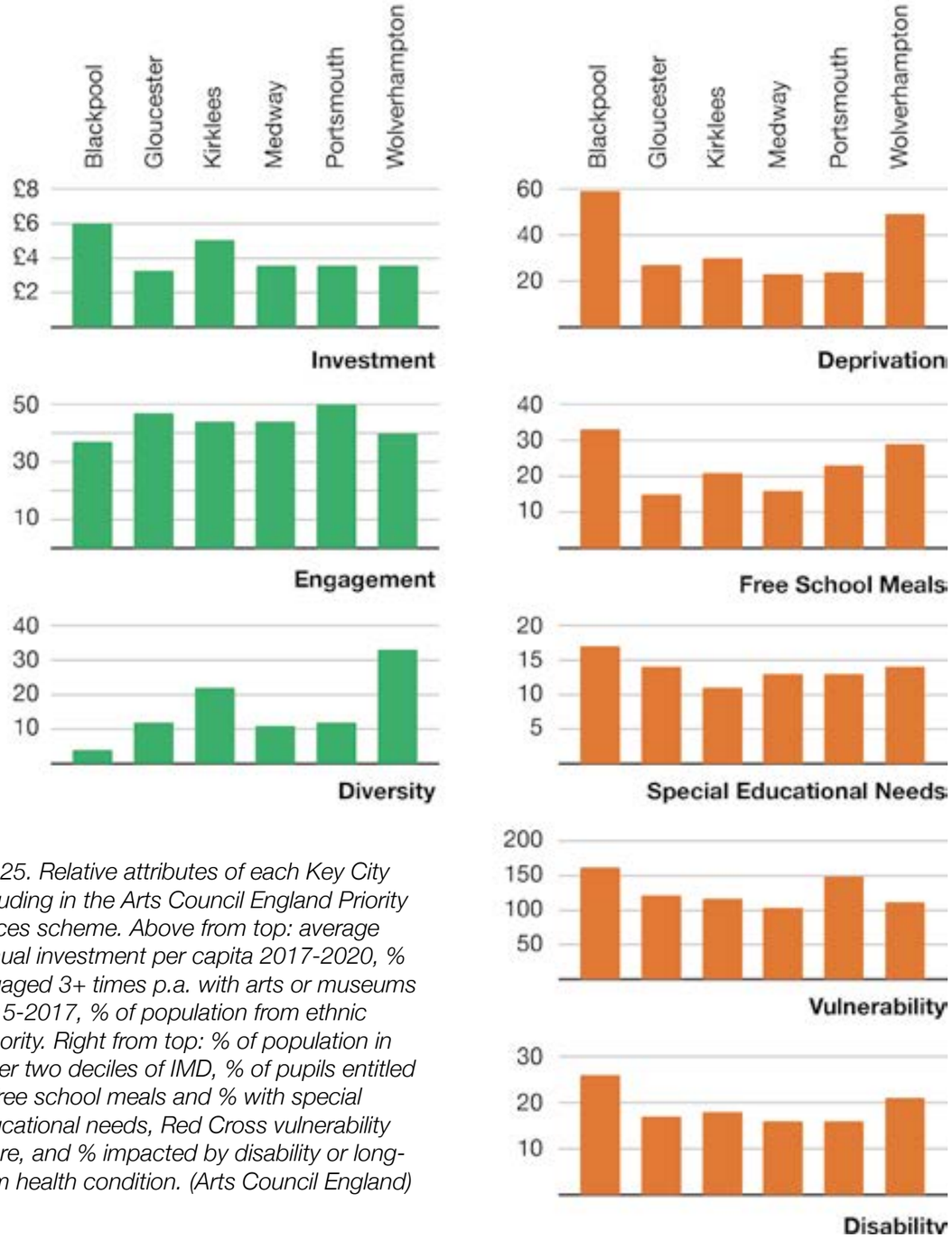


Fig 25. Relative attributes of each Key City including in the Arts Council England Priority Places scheme. Above from top: average annual investment per capita 2017-2020, % engaged 3+ times p.a. with arts or museums 2015-2017, % of population from ethnic minority. Right from top: % of population in lower two deciles of IMD, % of pupils entitled to free school meals and % with special educational needs, Red Cross vulnerability score, and % impacted by disability or long-term health condition. (Arts Council England)

Creative People and Places

Through its Creative People and Places programme, Arts Council England funds 39 projects across England to transform access to arts and culture in places where engagement is significantly below the national average. In the four years since 2018, this includes an investment of just over £7m in CPP projects across eight Key Cities (Fig. 26).

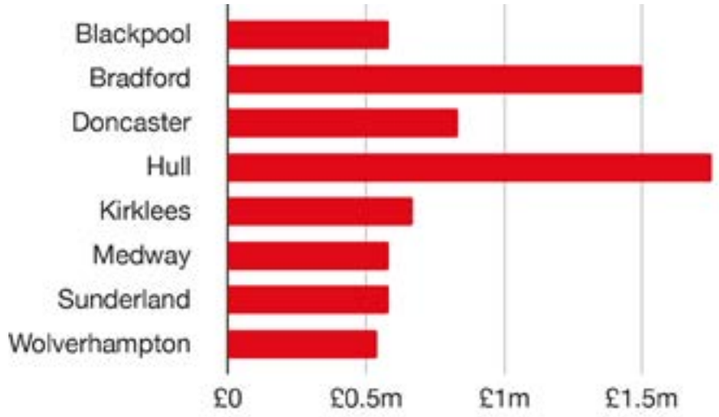


Fig 26. Arts Council England investment in Creative People and Places projects in Key Cities, pro-rated for the period 2018-2022.
(Arts Council England)

The Key Cities CPP data refers to the operational area in which the project takes place, not the applcation postcode.

The Key Cities CPP projects are:

Blackpool | Left Coast

Steered by Blackpool Coastal Housing, Blackpool Council, local cultural partners, participant volunteers and community grass roots organisations, LeftCoast is a creative People and places project that delivers highly-engaging and socially-useful arts and cultural projects in Blackpool.

It discovers and celebrates the everyday wisdom found in the lived experience of the town's residents and sensitively elevates the collective skills and ideas of the people who live there through creative and purposeful endeavours.

www.leftcoast.org.uk

Bradford | The Leap

The consortium behind The Leap Creative People and Places project was the first to be led by an NHS Trust, underscoring the significant connection between cultural engagement and

wellbeing.

The Leap's mission is to change the nature of arts and culture from top-down to community-led: it aims to empower people and artists in Bradford and Keighley to shape and lead the arts and cultural offer in their District and its impacts to date include providing £345,126 in funding for local programmes, £500,126 for community-led arts and culture projects, and £102,066 for artist-led projects.

www.the-leap.org.uk

Doncaster | Right Up Our Street

Operated by a partnership that includes darts (Doncaster Community Arts), Doncaster Culture & Leisure Trust (DCLT), Doncaster Voluntary Arts Network (DVAN), The Fairness and Inclusion Forum, Doncaster City Council and St. Leger Homes, Right Up Our Street is all about people across Doncaster choosing, making, seeing and sharing great art – from the visual arts, music and theatre right through to dance, radio, poetry and more.

The output combines large-scale spectacles, borough-wide events and in-depth, participant-specific projects delivered both in person and digitally.

www.rightupourstreet.org.uk

Hull | Back To Ours

Led by a partnership between the Goodwin Development Trust, the University of Hull, Freedom Festival Arts Trust, Hull UK City of Culture 2017, and Hull Culture and Leisure (Libraries Service), Back To Ours was produced as part of Hull UK City of Culture 2017 and went on to be launched as Hull's Creative People and Places Project in April 2018.

It aims to deliver arts and cultural experiences that are open to all, support the commissioning, production, creation and touring of new, original and inspirational work, engage local people as audiences, participants, creators and commissioners, bring the arts to life in familiar settings, use community assets such as high streets, schools, community centres, clubs, shopping centres and pubs, and work with creative partners across the city.

www.backtoours.co.uk

Kirklees | Creative Scene

Operated by Brigantia, an organisation that supports change through arts and culture, and with partners including Batley Festival, Spark Skills, Heckmondwike Community Alliance, 6million+ and Kirklees Council, Creative Scene wants to make a lasting change in the way local communities take part in, make and experience art and culture by producing inspiring and accessible creative activities and events in the places where people live, shop, work, socialise and play.

www.creativescene.org.uk

Ideas Test | Medway

Ideas Test works to create a vibrant arts ecology in Swale and Medway that involves the full diversity of local communities and brings new opportunities to celebrate the area.

In its mission to enable and support communities to live more creative lives, it works to encourage partnerships and networks that support community cohesion and creative development, enhance the quality of people's lives with commissioning and co-creation to celebrate the area's rich diversity and history, remove barriers to participation for everyone, and develop the creative workforce and potential of individuals.

www.ideastest.org.uk

The Cultural Spring | Sunderland

Backed by a consortium led by the University of Sunderland, The Cultural Spring has worked across 26 ward areas in South Tyneside and Sunderland since 2014 to engage the community in the arts. The aim is to leave a lasting legacy of communities interested in the arts, increasing participation in arts and culture, enabling more art and creativity, helping communities to set up and run sustainable events and workshops independently as well as reflecting on and sharing learning from the project.

Programmes include workshops run by professional artists, subsidised tickets to encourage attendance at arts and cultural events, funding to make events more accessible for hard-to-reach audiences, funding for community art projects, and engaging the community in research and development.

www.theculturalspring.org

Creative Black Country | Wolverhampton

Creative Black Country aims to make the most of local talent across the whole Black Country region – Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton, working with people to discover, explore and grow an exciting and meaningful programme of arts activity. A core consortium of six local organisations brings together the community and voluntary sector and the expertise of professional arts producers with a long-standing commitment to the Black Country's creative and cultural ecology and a depth and breadth of knowledge of leading contemporary arts practice.

CBC has catalysed and supported a wide range of projects since 2014 and offers grants of up to £2,000 for creatives to test out ideas with their local community, or to deliver a full "creative connection commission".

Dawinder Bansal: Jambo Cinema at Offsite 9 in Wolverhampton commissioned by Creative Black Country (2021).

CPP impacts and learnings

A 2020 study by Vivien Niblett[85] looked at five CPP projects to evaluate "spillover" benefits beyond arts and culture. Though none of the five operate within Key Cities, the study does offer insights into the overall effectivenes of the programme. noting increased local and external visitors among the benefits of placemaking in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, a revitalised urban centre in Hounslow, increased community engagement with the arts in County Durham, increased creative enterprise and local pride in Luton.and leveraged investment for local busineses in Boston and South Holland.

Mark Robinson in his 10-year review of the programme last year[86] pointed to research that "83% of [CPP] audiences had not regularly engaged with the arts before," adding "if Creative People and Places shows anything, it shows that the historic patterns are not inevitable – if work is relevant to people, and they feel like it includes them in some way."

The review reinforces the learnings from the Cultural Compacts evaluation (see p. 20) in saying that "cross-sectoral collaboration yields benefits in terms of positively influencing local 'ecosystems' by bringing different perspectives together." Robinson points out that consortia have been central to the programme, although "simply having a consortium structure does not equal power sharing". "Listening to communities generates more engagement than trying to persuade them", he says. "It is important to not create new, exclusive 'in-groups'."

The make-up of pre-Covid CPP audiences noted by Mark Robinson continued in 2020-2021, when the Audience Agency reported that among CPP participants "8% more are from lower and medium engaged than amongst English households (generally),"[87] and noting that families with stretched resources, single people living in low-cost accommodation and elderly people reliant on support were all over-represented within the programme compared with national averages.

Part Four:
Conclusion

Every place is a place of culture

Wildlife gathering Gosford Park. Coventry City of Culture 2021.

This tapestry of stories and data from places all over the country shows how our shared heritage and our diversity enrich our places and the lives of our people.

What can we see? We see that culturally engaged communities do better. That culture opens up new skills and career paths. That it can help to lift up places that are in decline. We see that celebrating culture brings people together and creates a positive legacy of social and economic benefit.

The growing awareness that Place holds the key to so many policy aims means little unless we act on it. Inclusive growth or levelling up: we all want everyone everywhere to have a fair chance. But that's easier said than done when some communities suffer from deep-rooted health inequalities and low life expectancy, with little for young people to do or look forward to, in remote locations with poor transport or digital connectivity.

We see that funding is crucial but not simplistic. The ability of one place to compete successfully for investment based on its capacity to deliver does not invalidate the need of another place that lacks it. If there are winners and losers, we must look at where it leaves those who lost out. But funding does not automatically translate into capacity, engagement and regeneration.

Cities and towns understand how culture instils common purpose, supports communities and can revitalise urban centres. Within their means, they do what they can to help themselves – through council services, direct support, convening local partnerships and working with stakeholders on regeneration. They promote skills and jobs through networks with training providers and employers. They explore innovation in finance through a coordinated approach to local procurement. They collaborate with each other to support best practice and develop better data and this work will continue.

Private sector investment also plays an important part – but it is not taking the place of steadily eroding council funding, nor can it do the job of making sure that everyone everywhere gets a fair chance, so the efforts of our cities and towns, our anchor institutions and the sector deserve every support.

Creative People and Places, Priority Places and Levelling Up for Culture Places are programmes designed to help build capacity where it is needed. The evidence around creative microclusters shows the potential of enterprise in this and points to a greater opportunity for the country of bringing these together to leverage the power of culture and place.

Everywhere.

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About Key Cities

Key Cities is a diverse, national network of cities and towns that represents urban living in the UK and has the range, expertise and agility to deliver innovative solutions for the challenges we face.

Urban living in the UK

With 27 urban authorities of all shapes and sizes in different parts of the country, Key Cities is the cross-party network that reflects and represents urban living in the UK. A diverse and national network formed in 2013, it provides an authoritative voice and alliance of shared interests right across the country.

Delivering benefits for people

Key Cities works with other cities, towns and organisations across local government and beyond to deliver prosperity, protect the environment and raise standards of living across the UK.

Unlocking potential

Key Cities can help the government deliver on its policy aims. The network is central to the levelling up and devolution agendas. Key Cities' work in platforming and connecting the diverse voices of urban UK can help to unlock successful devolution and a productive, balanced economy for all parts of the country.

In touch

The members of the Key Cities network are significant urban entities with integrated municipal government, in close touch with the lived experience of their populations.

Influential

Key Cities is connected. The network has strong engagement with government ministers and departments, and runs a successful all-party parliamentary group. The Key Cities APPG, briefings, events and research initiatives help drive the national policy agenda on cities.

Future urban centres

The Key Cities network is the engine room of post-Covid recovery. Our members include some of the fastest-growing local economies in the UK. Key Cities is an active champion for the future of urban centres. We produce ideas, research and engagement to drive prosperity and a good standard of living and environment for all.

Innovation

With the range, expertise and agility to deliver innovative solutions, Key Cities can help resolve urban challenges. The range of sizes, the governance of member cities, the collaborative approach and the shared innovation assets all add up to a network that is both nimble and ideal for scalable innovation. The group works closely with the Key Cities Innovation Network – currently the universities of Bath, Bradford, Coventry, East Anglia, Gloucestershire, Lancaster, Salford, South Wales, Sunderland and Wrexham Glyndwr – to drive place-based urban innovation.

Visibility

Through our media engagement and partnerships we make sure our views are heard by government, industry and important stakeholders. We actively promote our policies and our member cities through earned media opportunities such as news articles and op-eds, and on our own platforms via the website, blog and social media channels.

To find out more please contact the secretariat
secretariat@keycities.uk

Media enquiries please contact
keycities@ing-media.com

www.keycities.uk