

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK & CULTURE COMMONS

Surveying the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem in the West Midlands

A new wave in research-informed policymaking

RESEARCH PAPER

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local cultural
decision making**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify the salient features, innovations and critical points of interest in the cultural sector of the West Midlands region – informing policy discussions on the prospects for a greater devolution of cultural decision making to 'the local'. This study asserts that a new wave of research-informed policymaking in the West Midlands, while not systematic nor conclusive, provides significant insights into the role of knowledge and knowledge-production for policymaking – creating a 'knowledge infrastructure'. This study is therefore organised according to what it identifies as the eight dimensions of this policy infrastructure, proposing further research into the role of knowledge production in policy germination, formation and governance for the region, and by extension, other regions in the UK.

Keywords

West Midlands region; Coventry; UK City of Culture; partnerships; cultural policy research; knowledge infrastructure.

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Executive Summary

- This report offers an overview of cultural policy and research in the West Midlands, focusing on Coventry but also referring to Birmingham and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). It seeks to identify key innovations that could point towards potentially significant pathways for further cultural devolution.
- WMCA has demonstrated significant innovations in policy research – constructing a ‘knowledge infrastructure’ of research production, research tools and media, professional capabilities and local institutional collaboration. The report proposes that the case of the West Midlands serves as an example of knowledge-informed policymaking, offering significant insights that support a potential model for devolved cultural policy and governance.
- Knowledge-informed cultural policymaking is an opportunity for local authorities to establish sustainable partnerships with universities, devise methodologically innovative frameworks of research, and scale-up the ambition, aspiration and capacity for cultural production in medium-size cities.
- The report constructs a representation of the cultural sector in Coventry and identifies how the Coventry Cultural Strategy and UK City of Culture 2020-21 have generated a transformative understanding of the role of culture (and its ‘public’) in local development.
- The centrality of local authorities (the City Council as an enduring fulcrum of effective governance and sustainable developmental change) is underlined by this study. Both Coventry and the WMCA have demonstrated an enhanced facility for place-based collaboration, partnership delivery frameworks, and place-based vision and aspiration.
- The role of public information, consultation and collaboration, open access data and digital research platforms have been consolidated and a new means of empowering local actors and agencies.
- The tourism industry and the visitor economy, major civic events and an active participatory public currently demonstrate significant value for a strategic drive for further devolved local development.

Please Note:

- 1) this study was conducted while Andy Street (Conservative Party) was Metro Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority. On 2 May 2024, Street lost the local mayoral election to Richard Parker (Labour Party). While a change of direction may

be immanent, changes in political leadership does not have an immediate bearing on the content and conclusions of this study.

- 2) The notion of 'knowledge infrastructure' is proposed as a dimension of an 'ecosystem', and relevant to the need for evidence-based policymaking. The concept of 'ecosystem' as a policy term is not in itself a subject of this study; rather, this report focusses on 'knowledge' in its various forms, and why knowledge should be considered a significant component of cultural policy and policymaking. This may seem obvious, but considering how knowledge is expressed and articulated will alert one to the fact that Knowledge is not a single and self-evident phenomenon. Knowledge is often comprised of circulating images, information and representations of culture, policies and policy initiatives, organizations, institutions, branded projects and specific schemes – of which can embody significant knowledge (or memory, which is a form of knowledge). This study focuses on Coventry and Birmingham and by default excludes other significant developments in this expansive region. The approach of this study is also 'critical' – in that it assessing knowledge in the context of the socio-historical conditions of its development, as well as how it is used or may be used to enhance the capabilities required for effective local cultural decision making.

Acronyms

ACE - Arts Council England

CCC - Coventry City Council

LA - Local Authority

DCMS - Department for Culture, Media and Sport

LEP - Local enterprise partnership

NDPB - Non Departmental Public Body

WCC - Warwickshire County Council

WMCA - West Midlands Combined Authority

1: The Region - empowering the local

The West Midlands Combined Authority (established 2016) is a governance innovation in political devolution with a budget of c. £1.3 billion. As a geographic expansion of the English metropolitan county of the 'West Midlands', it now spans 80 miles, 7 cities, and the historic counties of Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, and Worcestershire. Politically, it does not present itself as a federal level of government, or a representative of national government, but as coordinator and strategic body of a region, whose LAs participate in committee membership on regional strategy. Its website states that "Combined Authorities exist to grow economies in their regions... West Midlands Combined Authority was created to deliver an ambitious plan to drive inclusive economic growth in the region... We are not a council... We're led by the Mayor of the West Midlands. We work together to move powers to the West Midlands' elected politicians, who know this region best." The official rhetoric of the WMCA maintains a sense of growth-based economics, but its policy and strategy development is aiming more at rapid development and capacity-building across a diverse area - respecting regional diversity. There is, however, a 'natural' order of hierarchy demonstrated at committee level in terms of demographic mass and the economic dominance of cities of Birmingham then Coventry, followed by the other cities, towns, districts and parishes.

The regional authority established a position of policy expertise in cultural policy, a Cultural Leadership Board (initiated in 2019), along with a Cultural Officer's Group (made up of senior cultural officers from the LAs, constituent and non-constituent local authorities, and the LEPs). This latter innovation dissolved, but the Cultural Leadership Board pioneered a 'West Midlands Cultural Sector Research Project' (referenced below). From 2020, this project featured the production of a number of significant policy research tools and datasets, empowering local policymaking and encouraging advocacy. The membership of the 2020 research project oversight indicates the initial agencies involved in this formative research supporting regional cultural governance and networking (the LEPs have reached the end of their tenure):

- Coventry City of Culture Trust
- Birmingham City Council
- Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership
- West Midlands Growth Company
- Coventry & Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership
- Arts Council England
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport

In addition to this membership arrangement were the following:

- (a) large event-based public organisations (Coventry UK City of Culture 2021; the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games)

- (b) urban development agencies (Birmingham Heartlands Development Corporation)
- (c) consultancies (Culture Central)
- (d) arts centres (Midlands Arts Centre)

The WMCA project's research achievement features the mapping innovation of the 'Cultural Infrastructure Map', followed by the 'Place-Profiler' (a digital innovation with its immediate origin in Coventry, cited below). They both facilitate a 'geo-social' approach to data gathering in support of cultural policy making: the analytical focus is on the 'relation' between people in specific places accessing public services and the layering of different spectra of data. It defines 'culture' principally in terms of a public service (part of the institutional infrastructure of public service provision). The WMCA's Cultural Infrastructure Map shows more than 2,350 cultural and creative spaces across the 19 local authorities, added to which are 10,500 heritage sites and buildings. Technically, the map interface sits within the larger West Midlands Place Profiler Dashboard – offering full demographic data for the region. It is open access and user-friendly for the non-professional researcher or administrator and offers a fast means of comparison and correlation.

The interest in 'mapping' is representative of a generalised political awareness of inequality in the distribution of public services, inequity in the access to public assets, and the general decline in assumptions on 'public culture' or the commons of culture of whom every citizen could assume they were a part. It is also a methodology development in cultural policy research: the GLA London (Mayor of London) devised the first 'cultural mapping' project in 2019 – as a Cultural Infrastructure Map that 'plots the location of cultural infrastructure and enables the user to view it alongside useful contextual data, like transport networks and population growth' – and other public data sources. There are numerous other examples, a principal value of which is that they can use, cross-reference, or share, policy data with other LA planning activities (e.g. infrastructure delivery, urban design and transportation-based infrastructure planning).

Critical Points

The WMCA has swiftly developed an unobtrusive strategy-focussed regional authority, which takes cultural policy and leadership seriously as it does the autonomy of LAs and historical place-based culture across this broad region. Its governance approach aims to be collaborative, and its cultural policy facility has generated innovative research, taking methodology and data seriously.

Infrastructure mapping and place-profiling are significant policy research innovations and present a range of accessible online tools that integrate data on demography and geography. These allow researchers, artists, community groups and organizations a source of credible data to use in their work, funding applications and project planning. We may therefore extrapolate from this that an 'Infrastructure' approach to cultural policymaking recognises the following:

- (a) Planning, urban design, physical facilities, open space, are all dimensions of the built environment that define and shape cultural production.
- (b) The cultural geography of organisations and institutions has a direct bearing on resource distribution, access and participation, the recognition of common heritage, assets, and a public realm of common responsibility.
- (c) Culture is intrinsically connected to the economics of education, employment, and tourism.
- (d) Culture is a factor in the agency of a place – its national recognition, strength of institution-building, political cooperation and participation, innovation as normative in approaching challenges, international interconnections and a global consciousness (of the forces shaping the world outside).

From a cultural policy research vantage point, these extrapolations, in turn, suggest inherent limitations with an infrastructure mapping approach to policy research. Culture is defined largely in terms of people in relation to organizations, facilities, institutions, halls and venues (even if the focus is demography or sociological, the sources of data are invariably organisation-based). This raises questions on representation and the interpretation of data (scale; distribution; accessibility and engagement; capacity and skills; economic basis and sustainability). And further, there is an internal methodological impulse in infrastructure mapping to harmonise or integrate a range of data – which may be more accurately represented as layers, or different dimensions of cultural life that indicate antagonism, contradiction or competition. Mapping may take into account, but cannot fully represent, the non-organisation-based creative dimension of social life, ‘consumer’ experience, young people and sub-cultural, community or informal (and ‘street’) culture, or even the cultural role of non-cultural institutions (unions, associations, political groups, community centres, local and often overlooked vocational colleges).

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2: Local Authorities as principal representatives of local culture

Both Birmingham and Coventry have distinctive histories, reputations, and traditions of urban development and policymaking. They have also attempted various unsuccessful 'city branding' schemes, none of which seem to have endured. Nonetheless, following the successful and internationally broadcast 2022 Commonwealth Games, Birmingham created a brand mantra – 'Be Bold, Be Birmingham' – Coventry, until recently, was represented by a symbol of the Phoenix, designed for Coventry Cathedral built after World War Two bombing; it now favours a schematic rendering of the medieval symbol of Lady Godiva, alternating between various straplines, one of which is the historic Cathedral-based 'City of Peace and Reconciliation'. Given the historical demographics, the subject of 'diversity' is thematically central to LA representations of the social and cultural aims of both cities, and both have demonstrated great success in the peaceful coexistence and cooperation between a large traditional working-class population, a huge mobile student population, and a large ethnic minority and successive incoming immigrant populations.

Birmingham, as a city of almost 1.2 million people, is heavily characterised by its institutions and arts organisations of national standing: Birmingham City Council's 'Culture, arts and heritage' policy field includes cultural policy expertise, and a city Cultural Strategy, but is also characterised by distinctive advances unique to the city. This includes Birmingham Royal Ballet, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Birmingham Opera, and major institutions like Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. It has nationally recognised cultural districts – Digbeth Creative Quarter, and the Jewellery Quarter – and its policy schemes – the ACE-based Birmingham Cultural Compact, Film Birmingham, the Creative future strategy, the Cultural strategy, Heritage strategy and Public art strategy – are notable. Each of these areas are testament to a local investment in strategy building that is specific to the unique cultural history and aspirations of the city. It throws into relief how the WMCA policy research is not in itself invested in the increase in 'cultural production' or the place-based implementation of cultural policy per se, but in data, resourcing and political support for capacity-building in governance but is invested in research data and informed policy making, and a more strategic approach to resourcing and capacity-building for multi-scalar governance. Before the advent of the WMCA, cultural production in the region was significant, and organisationally, arts management and institutional development is of a high standard; and yet the region never attained to the level of 'reputational capital' of Manchester or even Bristol. The need identified by WMCA' cultural policy research, is the kinds of strategic governance that builds profile, aspiration, cohesiveness and informs social reproduction (a developing, educated and productive society).

There is little similarity in each regional LA's representation of 'culture' or cultural policy – exemplified in the difference between the cities of Birmingham and Coventry city council's respective cultural delivery agencies. Birmingham City Council's 'Culture, arts and

heritage' is represented as a policy delivery section, not a separate agency, as in Coventry, which is a series of organisations or partnership-based projects. Coventry's cultural assets operate under a devolved governance system of three distinct organizations (albeit where the operational structure of the city's cultural governance is not immediately apparent):

- (i): Historic Coventry Trust remains a social enterprise charity that is a 'entrepreneurial heritage development trust' and strategic partner of the city.
- (ii): Culture Coventry Trust (CCT) is a charitable trust, and has devolved executive oversight for the city's Herbert museum and art gallery, Transportation Museum, and Lunt Fortress heritage site. [has no independent website]
- (iii): CV Life has governance oversight for the individual venues and places of both the Culture Coventry Trust (CCT) and the Coventry Sports Foundation (CSF).

Coventry's recent cultural policy development began with the new Cultural Strategy for the city in 2016 - intentionally devised to involve a multi-partnership approach to delivery (i.e. 'owned' by 'the city' in an attempt at participatory strategy delivery, where the previous LEP designed strategy had been left largely unfulfilled). As a strategy, its objectives were largely fulfilled in the first four years of its implementation because of the rapid cultural investment demanded by the UK City of Culture (awarded in December 2017). The Strategy is not only collaborative but iterative – subject to a 'refresh' in 2022, then again in April 2024. The 'refresh' allows an evaluation, a re-arrangement of collaborative participation, further public information and events. Since the City of Culture, a collaborative cultural governance framework has emerged called 'Coventry Culture Works', along with a huge new cultural facility, Coventry Cultural Gateway (both discussed further below).

The initial Strategy development from 2016 involved a research team essentially involving the City Council partnering with the two universities. This was a City Council initiative, one impetus being the lack of research and evaluation facility in the City Council itself. One exercise in the strategy research was an infrastructure overview, conducted in narrative form – inserted into the 'Baseline' study. It was the first attempt to 'map' or define the city's culture as a cohesive dimension of the city. The city strategy became one component of the successful bid for the UK City of Culture (the year 2020-21 - delayed and then extended because of Covid): as a delivery mechanism, the City Council established the now dissolved City of Culture Trust as manager of the City of Culture year, then a three year 'legacy' project and the delivery of the city's medium-term strategy goals. Public debate, particularly by artists and independent groups, voiced dissatisfaction with the devolution of City Council responsibilities for cultural policy and management. But management and financial questions swiftly emerged, and the Trust entered administration in February 2022.

Notwithstanding the Trust's ill-fated development, the UK City of Culture 'legacy' aim necessitated a City Council initiative, which emerged in the form of 'Culture Change Coventry' (which also coincided with the first Cultural Strategy refresh). During this time, there was an attempt at joining the ACE Cultural Compact scheme, which swiftly receded;

then in 2023, the Council first used the term 'cultural governance' for the first time, as the Culture Change initiative was superseded by the current governance framework of 'Coventry Culture Works' – a partnership and 'collaboration of the willing' (as one participant put it). This includes a joint investment from Coventry City Council, Coventry University and the University of Warwick in a new position of 'Head of Culture and Creative Economy', alongside the Council's on-going investment in the community and variety theatre-based Albany Theatre, and the new huge facility called the 'City Centre Cultural Gateway'. The capital project of the Gateway was an unexpected opportunity as IKEA announced the closure of their Coventry store early 2020. The Cultural Gateway is based on an innovative financial arrangement with the British Council and Arts Council England for a permanent art collections storage facility, in turn providing an arts venue and educational centre (the strategic programme of which is yet to be seen – operational date is 2026, but not specified). Accompanying this is also a new small fund grants programme for local artists and projects, following from effective models of small project grants across the city awarded by both universities as part of the City of Culture programme.

Birmingham has maintained its Cultural Compact (since 2019), and this currently functions as the city's place-based coordinated strategy for organisations and stakeholders invested in cultural development. The city's three universities are only tangentially involved in urban cultural development. In Coventry, however, a collaborative research team was to play a central role in Coventry's cultural policy evolution. The two universities also have very different cultural role in the city. University of Warwick were to play a role in Coventry's Compact, but from that truncated experience emerged a new strategic development in the form of 'Warwick's Culture – a new Cultural Strategy'. This involves a commitment to investment, sustainability and developing partnerships in the city, supported by recent institutional innovations, such as the Warwick Institute of Engagement. The University will also continue to support a wide range of small funded collaborative research projects between academics and the city's artists and cultural workers, and also its traditional and extensive community, schools and Widening Participation work.

Coventry University occupies a quarter of the city's urban centre, and has always been involved in the city's professional, social and cultural life. However, like most universities, 'involvement' in urban development and economy was limited to specific projects or initiatives without a long-term strategic commitment. Currently, however, Coventry University is committed to the delivery of the city's new Gateway. It will be used by the city's large student population (around 50,000, including the three colleges as well as universities) and (after a wide public consultation) the public – containing a gallery, café, library, exhibition space, and dance studio.

The City is currently promoting the new Culture Works Governance Model of a future cultural governance in the city. Yet while participatory and partner-based strategy delivery positively draws on well-resourced institutions, organisations and businesses across the city, the receding capabilities of the City for undertaking municipal policy research, planning and leadership, is increasingly apparent. The promoted governance model only

illustrates the spheres of participation and not the governance process itself (which remains opaque).

The prospect of favourable cultural outcomes in Coventry's near future, is in no small part on account of (a) the persistent commitment to the original City Cultural Strategy – that is, in not allowing the Strategy to be eclipsed by the City of Culture and its huge programme of events and legacy aspirations; and (b) the leadership of Prof. Jonothon Neelands of Warwick University and Prof. Nick Henry of Coventry and their research team-building (in collaboration with the Coventry City Council Insights unit). The Cultural Strategy – as a 'research' based project – was used as the basis of the initial UK City of Culture bidding process, but was also used as a strategic framework in defining the initial aims for the appointed City of Culture Trust agency. The City Strategy research team became the Core Monitoring and Evaluation Team (M&E) of the City of Culture, and the City of Culture year (2020-21) became a highly productive platform for the creation and publication of a huge and significant range of policy research and culturally innovative work [cited below] that complimented, if not established, the Strategy as a principal frame of reference. Moreover, the success of a multi-partner place-based research project (in knowledge exchange methods, pioneering data-driven methods, public consultation, online webinars and events, city development debates and social inclusion efforts, among many other valuable activities), have made for an exemplary track record in new approaches to cultural agenda-setting, problem identification and evidence-gathering among other achievements.

Coventry's exemplary research products represent the extent to which 'local' institutional resources can generate substantive knowledge and manage significant knowledge production (that is national in its potential value):

- (i) The City Place Profiler (2018) – a digital infrastructure mapping interface.
- (ii) A Joint Cultural Needs Assessment model (2020) – which plays a central role in the above; a cultural adaptation of the national JSNA framework for public service delivery in health and wellbeing.
- (iii) A Coventry City of Culture Evaluation model (2022) – a novel series of criteria and evaluative measures, where a range of structural social, urban and economic factors are integral to a new and dynamic understanding of place-based cultural production.

The creative communication initiatives around the monitoring and evaluation process was considerable; and the current Culture Works governance model is rehearsing an 'ecosystem' approach, which has roots in the collaborative knowledge production of the Cultural Strategy research team. It promises to demonstrate the use of pooled or existing resources in the city (i.e. where a qualitative increase in cultural development might not be entirely dependent on City Council revenues or government funding increases).

Critical Points

The new Coventry Cultural Gateway essentially provides all the ‘missing’ components of the city’s cultural infrastructure – in terms of both facilities, an iconic cultural institution, the presence of nationally significant agencies (British Council; ACE) and, in policy terms, a significant strategic long-term investment commitment by both a university and a city council. The WMCA website cites a scale of £150 million pound investment for this as a key part of its regional investment portfolio. The Gateway also provides a catalyst mechanism for creating an actual ecosystem approach to cultural development in the city, and a scale of development that affirms the principal role of an LA in local infrastructure-led progress.

The research effort in Coventry invested much intellectual energy into innovating methodology and place-based engagement activities (that informed the methodology). It constructed a collaborative team that ‘triangulated’ the City Council with the two universities, and delivered the kinds of research that was useful to local policymakers. The Coventry City of Culture’s strategic work was effective, in part, as the city Cultural Strategy framework was robust and a research team could define a framework of evaluation at the outset: consequently, the Strategy informed the City of Culture Trust’s formulation of strategic objectives and their ‘Coventry Model’ of delivery and evaluation.

Coventry’s research effort was influential in the WMCA’s own research evolution, and was a preliminary reference point for Arts Council England’s Impact and Insight and its new data portal. It demonstrated the facility, within even a small city, for new knowledge-driving practical models of place-based development, activating the social, cultural and institutional resources that are so often concealed.

There remains a huge question mark with regard sustainability and resilience within Coventry’s emerging cultural governance – in terms of its decision-making and decision makers, liabilities and responsibilities, processes and procedures, all of which remain only partially intelligible. The collapse of the City of Culture Trust in 2023 remains a testament to the dangers of a transparency deficit, or a lack of a robust model of sustainable governance and professional accountability.

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Evaluation model (2022)	https://coventry21evaluation.info/future-insights/insights/cities-of-culture-a-model-of-evaluation/

3: Information and Local Voice

'Public Information' is now diverse and remains central to good governance. The purpose of this section is to consider information and its accessibility within the West Midlands region. The information referred to here is the 'non-specialist' and largely non-statistical information, serving a 'general public' by informing, providing announcements and news, stimulating interest, participation and discussion. The research project of the City's Cultural Strategy involved some fresh empirical research on the city, and played a role in defining public perceptions and setting an horizon of expectation – information can define a normative dimension in a city's culture (what 'should' take place; what kind of culture 'should' the city be aiming for and enjoying, and so forth). This fresh research was presented within the Cultural Strategy in 'info-graphic' form, depicting in a vivid and direct way the city's demographics, its young population (one of the 'youngest' in the UK), and how this information can provide the necessary rationale and motivation for a new and innovative set of cultural policy aims..

Both Birmingham and Coventry city councils have new data portals for the city – but while some cultural data can be disaggregated from other social and economic data, 'culture' is not itself a category of data that is provided by the portals. Likewise, the large city planning frameworks – Birmingham's Big City Plan, and Coventry's One Coventry Plan – while conveying a vision and priority statement for the city's place-based development, the role of culture only features if internal to either the urban infrastructure or essential public services (which it currently is not). Coventry's One Coventry Plan followed extensive consultation with city residents. It has elements of social, civic and urban policy, with sections on services, climate, economic prosperity and city management, but again, Culture is not a distinct category.

The Visitor Economy is one area in which culture is visually well represented, albeit in terms of a leisure destination, general place of interest and entertainment. The national 'VisitBritain' (a NDPB funded by DCMS) and its semi-autonomous advisory sections (VisitEngland, etc.) have evolved specific strategic competencies in brand and e-marketing, and this in turn encourages LAs towards a strong emphasis on place-based culture in coordination with leisure, hospitality and other local services. The 'Visit Birmingham and West Midlands' website illustrates the prominent role culture plays in tourism marketing, and 'Visit Coventry' similarly; Warwickshire has its own website coverage as a region (funded by WCC). While Coventry's tourism development is directed by the CCC co-funded regional project (limited in time) called 'Destination Coventry'; Birmingham's tourism is directed by the 'West Midlands Growth Company' arm of the WMCA, and is more expansive (where business and tourism are visibly interconnected). Visit Birmingham also offers resources, such as maps and guides (e.g. 'Walk Run Cycle Birmingham' – free-to-download app of self-guided walking, running and cycling routes) and also promotional guidance for the travel industry (locations, facilities and amenities, coordinates and connections, etc.), and a useful 'Toolkit' of images and data, media centre, and publications.

The Destination Coventry project (collaboration with Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, 2020-22), also developed a similar interconnection between tourism and business visitors, and today offers a range of services relating to media and advertising, trade fairs and exhibitions, group and business travel, networking, conferences, and many other areas. It promotes Coventry's official Visitor Guide 'Explore Coventry', in which culture and heritage are promoted, and undertakes promotion but also facilitates city organisations in promoting themselves or events via a range of means, including the Tourism Exchange Great Britain (TXGB) digital platform.

Information on the city's culture is also promoted through city historical associations (some university academic-led, some amateur historian-run, some advocacy-based, and some just general interest groups). Two primary examples are the charitable, member-led Birmingham Civic Society and Historic Coventry. Many other civic organisations could be cited, such as the Birmingham Big Art Project, which generates commissions and contributions to the city's public art, and Artspace Coventry, which develops studio and project facilities for artists in the city.

While the Chambers of Commerce in both cities are active and progressive in promoting inward investment, business expansion and internationalisation, culture tends only to be referenced in relation to an increase in government funding or the impact of a 'mega event'. One opportunity afforded by the Coventry City of Culture was to make connection with regional business and local industry. The role of business and industry in the culture of both cities, it seems, is limited to sponsorship activity.

Critical Points

The relation between culture and information tends to be either by necessity or ad hoc, and is not subject to much visible strategy thinking. Public information, in theory, plays a major role in defining a local public sphere in a city, enfranchising citizens in debate and discussion on local issues and more generally promoting transparency. The historic decline in local media and city newspapers have hindered this. Informing people of news, changes, governance decisions, activities or projects can enhance trust, belonging and pride in a place, but also, signals a sense of access to the outer realms of city governance and opportunities for participation. But the level of detail required on a city's culture is an open question.

It is apparent with both city portals that 'representation' of the city's culture is partial, or assumed to be adequately represented elsewhere. This is, in part, as cultural research has been forthcoming independently in both cities, but historically it is also the case that research on culture has never been an area of investment. The Localism Act 2011 facilitated a trend in attempting to integrate social, community, urban and economic data and recognise them all as essential dimensions of local development. Yet, such an 'integration' can be unwieldy, and culture is often squeezed out even further. This conundrum is internal to culture itself, of course, where culture has evolved historically as 'autonomous' from social and economic life (if today is continually attempting to engage

with the social and economic). There is no question that LAs face an historical paucity of data on culture, and a lack of policy facility for (or even interest in) integrating cultural policy into other areas of public policy.

There are other factors: (a) cultural policy research, the arts, heritage and creative industries, have all hugely expanded their facility for strategic research and professional practice in social engagement, communication, education and diversity; and (b) post-2011 policy 'localism' drew on a set of competencies that had been evolving since the urban regeneration of the 1980s, the regional development agencies (RDAs), the renewed interest in urban design, public buildings and spaces, architecture and civic culture (from 1998 with the Urban Task Force, then from 2002 with the Office of Deputy Prime Minister's partnership with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment or CABE). This legacy remains, but often not active.

Finally, with enhanced place marketing intelligence, data streams from airlines, travel agencies and the hospitality sector, LAs can now obtain a diversity of information on visitors and tourism – and tourism and leisure organizations have developed advanced communication skills in representing place-based features and providing all kinds of public information on specific cities. This involves chambers of commerce and business and corporate visitors, particularly trade, training and professional conferencing events. Stimulated by this, individual cultural organisations and institutions have evolved capabilities in publicity and promotion and are often information disseminators themselves – however, missing all too often is the kind of research intelligence most effectively produced by a governing authority – (a) information on the scale and composition of a city or place's cultural sector as a whole, and (b) on the way a cultural sector is contributing to society and economy (i.e. to spheres outside the cultural sphere).

<i>References</i>	
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Destination Coventry	https://destinationcoventry.co.uk/
Historic Coventry	https://www.historiccoventry.co.uk/
Birmingham Civic Society	https://www.birminghamcivicsociety.org.uk/
Birmingham Big Art Project	https://birminghambigartproject.org.uk/about/
Chamber of Commerce	https://www.cw-chamber.co.uk/about-us/a-city-of-culture-a-centre-of-commerce/

4: Data Sources and Resources

Distinct from 'Public information' (above) is the role of specialised data, statistics and the types of 'undigested' information or research material required by policymakers.

Birmingham and Coventry are not institutionally connected in how they have evolved in their use of information, data and data management – their data portals were developed separately. Both portals allow public access to nationally certified data (census statistics; FOI; environmental and public service provision data) as well as the City Council's own collated historical and comparative data on the city. Both cities have 'Open Data' commitments (now a national statutory necessity).

For Birmingham, the main portal is the Birmingham Observatory, along with the Observatory's City Council Data Factory dimension (servicing the Observatory): there are over 140 data sets on communities, health, social, young people, and a range of other subjects – but only 1 pertaining to culture (on Libraries). As with Coventry's City portal, data contributions are invited from any individual or agency inside or outside of the city.

Coventry city council, unique among LAs, has a known history of consistent data collation (since the 1980s), and maintains an interest in how cultural research correlates with demographic and social statistics, particularly on:

- ticketing and exit-survey data
- sentiment surveys, Coventry household survey and participation data
- ticketing data and residents' cultural participation
- attitudes to Covid-19 and attendance at events

Coventry's portal facility appears in the form of four websites, 'Open Data', 'Local Information and Statistics', 'Facts about Coventry' and the 'Citywide Intelligence Hub'. The Open Data site represents all organisational and transactional activity of the Council as public service, governance and manager of local resources, and, it serves to disclose all statistical information use, collated or archived by the Council for its operational requirements. 'Local Information and Statistics' is a range of national, city and localised intelligence, from JSNA, census to Coventry's employment and urban economy. This tends to overlap with 'Facts about Coventry', the city's social media, news headlines, e-bulletins and announcements and urban geography approach to demographic and economic data. Then there is granular data, analyses and insights, visualisation and comparative statistics tools of The Coventry Citywide Intelligence Hub – a business intelligence dashboard that provides up-to-date metrics about Coventry, comparing and contrasting, and correlating different sources, across different locations, between different time periods. Like Birmingham, Coventry has a 'Digital Strategy' and data management framework. 'Digital Coventry' is the LA project framework for developing digital tools for public management beyond regulation and compliance into new forms of policy research.

In partnership with the City Council Data Insights team, the Monitoring and Evaluation team of the Coventry City of Culture (between 2020-2022) generated a wide range of

projects centred around 'cultural data' and its uses. One such project centred around creative approaches to data access and big data, and was called 'The Coventry Cultural Challenge'. Held at Coventry University's Jaguar Centre, it attracted a wide range of Coventry young people, who formed interdisciplinary teams and with unprecedented access to local big data were instructed to design and developed creative proposals to 'make life better in Coventry'. In February 2022, the Coventry City of Culture Trust released the analytical report, 'What Data Tells Us About Coventry', in which culture is included among other social policies areas. The innovative immersive art gallery, the Reel Store, was an international innovation in digital art and creative communication. It was launched with a City of Culture data-themed exhibition 'Walking through Coventry Data' (December 2022). It regrettably dissolved with the administrative collapse of City of Culture Trust in February 2023.

For the WMCA, the cultural infrastructure mapping and the Place Profiler are huge supplements against the data deficit in the mainstream city council data presentation and policy research. These are data research tools as well as data presentation [see Section 3 above]. In terms of research data, the WMCA 2020 collaborative 'Cultural Sector Research Project' generated significant cultural research beyond the infrastructure map product, in the areas of:

- (i) a cultural sector survey and case study;
- (ii) audiences;
- (iii) social and cultural value.

In the minds of many public officials, it seems that information and data are often conflated, and only recently has 'information science' and 'data science' been taken seriously in public administration (in terms of methodology, analysis, presentation, access and governance). Exemplary in working through this complex of issues within the context of public policy is Birmingham Observatory's extended projects and evolving 'Data Constitution'.

Critical Points

The production of data and its use as both public information and evidence-based policymaking has advanced swiftly in the last five years. Both Birmingham and Coventry's data portals are impressive and offer data tools that stimulate the use of data by citizens and civil groups as well as contributions of data to the portal.

As the WMCA demonstrate, while arts organisations and cultural institutes collate and process data, they are limited in both. The lack of 'regional data governance' is an issue that often emerges in conversations with both public officials and academics. There are obvious areas of data-absence and expertise in managing this data for policy development; there remains inconsistent data available on the following:

- The cultural labour force, professionals and specialists, interns and trainees, freelancers and volunteers
- Supply chains and value chains (local, regional, national and international).
- Micro-enterprises, creative SMEs, business networking
Internationalisation; the role of the Chamber of Commerce; city-based international organisations (e.g. aid organisations; religious charities), international cultural relations (universities; cathedrals; United Nations Association, and so forth).
- The social and economic role of individual institutions (historic institutions, as compared to cultural organisations)
- Cultural Leadership
- Socio-cultural mobility - culture as catalyst in children, youth, minority or newcomer acculturation, motivation, experience and capability development

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WMA cultural sector survey and case study	https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/fwue1xwn/wmca-cluster-analysis-report.pdf
WMCA Audiences study	https://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/culture-and-digital/culture/west-midlands-cultural-sector-research-project/
WMCA Social and Cultural Value study	https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/o5mfd0dj/economic-report-web.pdf
Coventry Citywide Intelligence Hub	https://www.coventry.gov.uk/facts-coventry/citywide-intelligence-hub
Coventry Cultural Strategy (empirical research)	https://culturechange.coventry.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/11/Cov-Culture-2.pdf
Coventry Monitoring and Evaluation Team	https://coventry21evaluation.info/about-us/our-team/ https://coventry21evaluation.info/about-us/
Coventry City of Culture, research and evaluation	https://coventry21evaluation.info/strategy-reports/final-evaluation-report/
Birmingham Observatory	https://birmingham-city-observatory.datopian.com/about
Digital Coventry	https://www.coventry.gov.uk/digital-coventry
Coventry City of Culture data, evaluation and research	https://coventry21evaluation.info/research-database/?keyword_tag[]=cultural-data
The 'Coventry Cultural Challenge' event	https://coventry21evaluation.info/past-events/coventry-cultural-challenge/
Event 'Walking through Coventry Data' (December 2022)	https://coventry21evaluation.info/past-events/evaluation-events/walking-through-coventry-data/

5: Tools, participatory policy and capacity building

As noted above, the principal research innovations of WMCA are the Cultural Infrastructure map (within the broader Place Profiler, along with the city-based statistical Observatory platforms). Since 2007, the national Joint Strategic Needs Assessment obligation (JSNA) has been a joint responsibility of LAs and CCGs (clinical commissioning groups); the methodologies and extent of the data gathering is devolved to the LA region and demands of a local population. The production of a Joint Cultural Needs Assessment (JCNA) in 2020 in Coventry was a policy innovation and a potentially long term resource. It was used to define the aims and parameters of the Coventry Cultural Place Profiler, and itself influenced by the strong evolution of place-based cultural programming, not least data from the Arts Council England's Creative People and Places programme (since 2012). The purpose of the Profiler is for 'arts and culture organisations develop their ability to offer a strategic response to the cultural and non-cultural needs of their local communities, based on a joint assessment of the actions needed to improve the cultural lives of all and to reduce inequalities and obstacles to participation in arts and culture. All of which requires developing outcomes through enhanced local partnerships, consultations, and evidence-led planning'. The significance of the JCNA is also policy development on social, health and urban planning, where culture is usually ignored – the Place Profiler demonstrates the clear interconnection.

There have been many recent and past partnerships that involved participatory and capacity building activity – Coventry Cultural Educational Partnership (CCEP) with West Midlands Arts Connect (WM bridge) is one. The 'City of Culture Transforming Leadership Programme', funded by Arts Council England, flagged up the need for professional capacity-building, particularly through empowering those often relegated to the margins. The programme's Final Report sets out its purpose in capacity building a diversity of people and skills in the city (a cohort of 15), bringing together mentors from major organisations, and deliver on 24 months of seminars and individual development sessions within the Legacy framework of the City of Culture. The final report claimed that the project developed an inclusive leadership development model specific to the City. A further example of capacity building is the recent commissioning and publishing of short research studies or of writing on culture – the public research initiative 'The Future Trends Series'. This saw the publication of a range of papers on the value of culture and its role in social, community, economic and wellbeing contexts – and also the relevance of cultural practice to policy research.

One significant project with policy implications, was Talking Birds' 'Coventry's Citizens' Assembly on Arts, Culture & Creativity'. The Citizen's Assembly is not, of course, a new idea for participatory policy or for generating a 'public voice' or public consultation. But this particular project (Cf. its final report) was specifically defined in terms of culture as the

production of knowledge and policy ideas. It stands as a model for a 'testing lab' for local cultural governance mechanisms. Talking Birds exemplify an arts organisation that conduct research, consultation, policy thinking and social engagement, even though they are not formally included in governance mechanisms of the city. They phrase their work as a 'theatre of place' drawing on their artistic history, using theatre and performance as methodology for place-based engagement, knowledge and creative expression; they articulate profound civic knowledge, and are able to identify dilemmas, issues, areas for civic development and a knowledge of the social culture of the city, which local policy should take into account. The Assembly outcome 'recommendations' include making the arts and culture more embedded in everyday social life through creating opportunities, events in schools, promoting local artists, information and public spaces for culture. Specific ideas include 'Neighbourhood Creative Hubs', an arts location transport 'travel pass' for young people, a city centre 'garden' (thematically integrating cultural with climate and environmental issues), street arts, and new information channel, involving networking and advice – ideas now positioned in the new Culture Works governance framework.

Public consultation in both Coventry and Birmingham has increased with digital and online facilities: the current Coventry City Council 'Let's Talk Coventry' (initiated in 2021) is a consultation and engagement platform when used in response to major political or planning developments in the city. The City now has active social media representation. The Birmingham equivalent to Let's Talk is the 'Be Heard Birmingham'. In 2018, Birmingham city council introduced a consultation platform called The Big Creative Birmingham Conversation Survey (closed in July 2022), which aimed at bringing together stakeholders from across Birmingham's creative and cultural sectors to discuss and shape the future of the city's cultural strategy. The conversation focused on identifying challenges, opportunities, and priorities for the city's creative industries, as well as fostering collaboration and innovation within the sector. The initiative sought to engage artists, cultural organisations, businesses, policymakers, and community members in a dialogue about the role of creativity in Birmingham's economic and social development.

Birmingham City Council supports localised arts projects that engage with or vocalise local people's ideas or needs, such as the 'Culture on our Doorstep' project, or the 10 Local Arts Fora, that allow each of the city's districts to build capacity in formulated views and knowledge that can be inserted into the policy process. This process is managed by the city supported organisation 'Number 11 Arts'. The City Council has also partnered with University of Birmingham in generating research on the Conversation content and the city as a global arts location. The University also has a new project called 'Culture Forward', based on collaboration with city and region partners.

Critical Points

The amount of place-based research that has emerged from Coventry in the last five years, along with the impact of this research (Cultural Place Profiler; the JCNA), testifies to both the potential strength of cultural self-management in a city and to how research products and tools can be distributed (potentially up-scaling the value of local knowledge for

national use. The UK City of Culture served to stimulate and provide a platform for research collaboration, but this also flagged up the presence of significant intellectual and creative resources in a city that is not often engaged in place-enhancing cultural development. The role of leadership was underscored, as well as the lack of a networked governance and transparent pathways to legacy and sustainable development. Time-limited projects can contribute a great deal, but they are no substitute for consistent development (universities themselves are obvious and exemplary products of a commitment to consistent development). There is a lack of a sense of knowledge production embedding itself in a city and generating increasing capabilities, as there is a sense of progress beyond time-limited mega-events. City Councils, as responsive as they are to politics and national budgets, are often not the stable consistent institutions that can facilitate a consistent development in a city's cultural economy: partnership, network or ecosystem-based approaches to governance offer a way forward.

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6: Marketing and promotion - cultural sector publicity

Originally an American innovation, 'arts marketing' has, in the UK, become part of a broader spectrum of activities usually called 'Audience Development'. While a traditional arts marketing approach was focused on promotion and advertising and was generally specific to an event or specific artistic genre (targetting their well-known communities of interest), there has been a huge broadening of marketing skills and technologies. Arts and cultural organizations now take marketing communications as a given, and have effectively integrated them into a whole range of social and public engagement activity.

Contemporary art remains resolutely 'international' in terms of its stylistic expression and methodological approaches (the 'international art world' is the principal frame of reference), but it is more the case that for the contemporary artist the 'local' is no longer the embodiment of the parochial and all the professional limitations from which any successful professional will aim to escape. The new Coventry Biennial of Art, has exemplified that, and was founded in 2017 as the Strategy research project was gaining traction in the city as a credible policy framework. In Birmingham, the older Eastside Projects artist-run gallery, has also served to break down previous categorical divisions between 'art-craft; art-commerce; professional-amateur; city-local; contemporary art-community arts' and all the old oppositions by which the fine arts were defined. However, while Community Arts as a genre still exists, the new innovation of 'socially-engaged' arts has encroached on its territory and extending the 'local' into the sphere of the international art world.

Both the Biennial and Eastside would exemplify how the 'local' is not viewed as a contained or objectively defined sphere (like a 'district'), but is amorphous, dynamic and full of people whose experience, memory, identity, community and media or online interconnections extend outwards into the world. Today, many 'local' arts projects digital media as an embedded dimension of social life, and whose discursive dimensions may reference global policy concerns such as climate change, wellbeing, human rights, and social justice. Some arts organizations in the region have taken a strategic interest in the social reality of digital media supplanting traditional forms of public or communal life, sometimes activating online community or reconstructing older physical models of place-based congregation. A persistent theme of both the Coventry Biennial and Eastside Projects, is the need for contemporary art to continually cultivate a 'public' for art – recognising the dynamic and provisional nature of all forms of social community in the present day. Birmingham Opera Company are known pioneering the social 'recontextualisation' of opera performance (using social spaces in which to engage the public with opera); and Coventry have a range of socially-engaged artist groups such as Ludic Rooms, Mothers Who Make, and the Photo Archive Miners. Socially-engaged partnerships are now a common strategic mechanism of disseminating art – from Birmingham's Ikon Gallery to Coventry's Herbert Museum. Most if not all cultural and arts organisations will now be equipped in digital communications, marketing and promotions, partnerships and socially-engaged methods of practice and performance.

In Coventry and Birmingham, culture is 'communicated' in many ways. While the city council is probably the only consistent agency for representing the whole landscape of culture in a city – its 'cultural sector'. But even city councils, beyond the needs of planning or their sponsorship of visitor economy marketing, do not dedicate strategic attention to representing culture as a sector of the urban economy, or indeed the evolution of the city's cultural life within the strategic aims of the city and its public services. And while city councils possess communication capabilities, their dedication to this task is usually rudimentary – extending only to conveying public information on events, facilities, funding schemes, employment opportunities or any notable changes taking place. A city-wide celebratory mega-event (a Commonwealth Games; a UK City of Culture) are obviously embraced as a prime opportunity for extending such communication and promotion to representing the whole city.

Coventry City of Culture (2020-21) attracted international media interest; the new Coventry Biennial of Art has been successful in establishing a regularly increased visitor attendance largely through its own marketing efforts and international networking. The main Birmingham institutions (Museum and Art Gallery; Royal Ballet; Symphony) all have in-house marketing capabilities, and can command a national and international media profile. The opening of Birmingham's new central Library (2013) was able to attract media attention (largely through its award winning architectural design); the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery can often generate national media attention around a major exhibition (especially if it involves its famous collection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings).

Tourism or visitor economy-based marketing is usually the central channel through which the 'whole' culture of a place or city is promoted both nationally and internationally. However, this is usually limited to events and sites attractive to visitors, such as major institutions, heritage places of significance, and cultural places that could be positioned in a schedule that includes leisure and entertainment opportunities. Actual 'place-based' culture (for local residents, community, or citizens) is not often included. Local media, city event listings, venue advertising, social media and other event-networks will all remain the most up to date media for all cultural activity (even though this is usually limited to events or performance-based culture). On specific art forms, types of art or categories of culture, the most informed and informative communication on activities, access and participation opportunities, comes through specific organisations. There is no central cultural communications hub in either city by which the city's cultural life is represented.

A cursory survey of Coventry's cultural economy reveals a wide range of organisations. There are a number of outstanding (if small or medium-scale) heritage locations, but there is a noticeable lack of major landmark institutions (equivalent to Birmingham's institutions, or a 'MOMA' or flagship contemporary arts venue). Comparatively, there are a low number of arts organisations in receipt of national funding in Coventry (ACE 'portfolio' organizations, for example), and the cultural organizations with an international reputation are arguably the Cathedral, and Coventry Transport Museum. This register below serves to indicate the categories of organisation present in the city, itself representing a critical

mass of professional capability that could contribute to place-based cultural decision making

<i>Categories of Cultural Organisation in the City of Coventry</i>		
City institutions – historic institutions representing the heritage, civic culture, public culture and cultural assets of the place	Herbert Museum and Art Gallery	www.theherbert.org
City Public Agencies – organisations, boards or associations with devolved responsibilities	Culture Coventry Trust [part of CV Life]	https://cvlife.co.uk/
Nationally funded organisations (e.g. Arts Council NPO)	The Tin Music and Arts	https://thetinmusicandarts.org.uk/
City-branded organisations – i.e. whose identity is embedded in the history of the city	Belgrade Theatre	https://www.belgrade.co.uk/
Event-based organisations with a national profile	Coventry Art Biennial	https://www.coventrybiennial.com/
Artist-run or arts production organisations with a general national profile	Talking Birds	https://talkingbirds.co.uk/
Artist-run or arts production organisations with a specific national profile (i.e. for innovative; avant-garde; challenging; notorious)	Theatre Absolut	https://theatreabsolute.co.uk/
Landmark cultural institutions ?		
Nationally significant heritage locations (non-ecclesiastical)	Guildhall	https://www.stmarysguildhall.co.uk/
Nationally significant monuments, memorials or public art	Future Monument (Jochen Gerz, 2002)	https://jochengerz.eu/works/the-future-monument
Nationally significant architecture	Coventry Cathedral	https://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/
Nationally significant education institutions	Coventry University Warwick University	www.coventry.ac.uk www.warwick.ac.uk
Nationally significant or research or innovation organisations	Coventry University Technology Park	https://www.coventry.ac.uk/business/facilities/technology-park/
Touring organisations/ production companies	Imagineer	https://imagineer-productions.co.uk/

Local and place-based arts venue with a regional profile	Albany Theatre	https://www.albanytheatre.co.uk/
Local and place-based production organisations with a national profile	?	
Local festivals	The Earlsdon Festival	https://www.facebook.com/earlsdonfest/?locale=en_GB
City festivals	Coventry Godiva Festival (in the city memorial park)	https://www.godivafestival.com/
Diversity/ethnic or multicultural festivals	The Positive Images Festival	https://positiveimagesfestival.co.uk/
Local youth-oriented place-based production organisation with a national profile	Highly Sprung Performance	https://highlysprungperformance.co.uk/
Youth or children arts training organizations	Coventry Music Hub	https://www.coventrymusichub.co.uk/
Local/Regional arts centres	Warwick Arts Centre	https://www.warwickartscentre.co.uk/
Local Community/ Local Arts	Weavers' House	https://theweavershouse.org/
Socially-engaged Arts	EGO arts	https://egoarts.co.uk/
National media agencies	BBC Coventry and Warwickshire	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/england/coventry_and_warwickshire
Regional development agencies	Invest Coventry and Warwickshire	https://www.investcw.co.uk/sector/creative-industries/
Outstanding Creative locations	The privately owned, Fargo Village	https://www.fargovillage.co.uk/
Creative Industries zones/villages/quarters	Electric Wharf (mixed use industrial development)	https://complexdevelopmentprojects.co.uk/project/electric-wharf/
International City liaison or cultural relations	Rising Peace Forum Coventry Peace Trail	https://www.risingforum.org/ https://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/visit/see-and-do/peace-trail
City-wide cultural association or public fora	Coventry Culture Works 'Culture Open Forum' (cultural sector conference).	None yet

Critical Points

Arts and Cultural organisations do not routinely participate in the promotion of other organizations, or the cultural scene or sector of their city as a whole (at least, outside a specific project on this subject). Nonetheless, the Coventry City of Culture did serve to represent the objective features of the city's cultural capacity. In fact, the transformative impact of the City of Culture suggested a potentially dynamic interconnection between cultural production and cultural governance – where arts professionals, creative people, organisations and institutional management, all use their professional knowledge and

communications capabilities in the capacity-building of the city's cultural polity. The new Culture Works ecosystemic governance venture articulates the city council understanding that the governance requirements of culture are different from other sectors of the urban economy, and indeed have unique social and international potential in the way development could take place. It also indicates a renewal in LAs understanding of the city's cultural resources, particularly cultural assets long since taken for granted – the latent cultural potential of residents or local communities, and the existing or latent assets of places and their urban history.

Almost all arts and cultural organizations now possess professional communications skills and capabilities; culture is animated by communication, and cultural and creative workers are usually and unusually skilled in their knowledge of communication. However, the communication resources of individual arts and cultural organisations are usually limited and so their communication interests extend only to the immediate objectives of their own projects, events or organisational aims. The many artists and freelancers that populate the cultural sector are voluminous, but have little visible role in the projection of the locale, city or region; and, as noted, there is no one cultural hub for representing place-based or local culture apart from traditional community or parish websites; the exception is local festivals, few of which maintain a consistent presence in the city's cultural life. The initial baseline research for the original Cultural Strategy in 2017 identified a number of further 'Obstacles' that hinder the evolution of Coventry city's culture – and they still do:

- Urban geography and the 'beyond the ring road' phenomenon of Coventry's city centre: the immediate city boundary is an actual 'concrete collar' (as it is popularly known) and facilitates inhibiting factors for the residents on the housing estates external to the urban centre. It is one avoidable factor in the low level of cultural participation in the city, co-joined to factors of economic inequality, poor resourcing and lack of social connections between the residential areas of the city and the city centre.
- The relatively small size and scale of the city's arts organizations: there is a lack of consistent recognition and national funding awards, and this does not appear to be simply on account of artistic quality, achievement or originality.
- The visitor economy in the city is still underdeveloped, as is the place marketing, information on and communication within the city's cultural sector.
- The spaces for artistic production are low in number and always economically precarious. University students in the arts, once graduated, usually leave the city for economic opportunities elsewhere.

Some lessons emerging from the huge research output of the City of Culture year include the need for defined pathways to development – roles in which cultural organizations and workers can play as part as participatory capacity building in the city. A city's cultural economy needs to both retain and attract the kinds of capable and productive cultural workers that are needed for significant development, and that a collective effort is required if the cultural sector can command the attention and facilitate the participation of a socially alienated public.

References	
Herbert Museum and Art Gallery	www.theherbert.org
Culture Coventry Trust [part of CV Life]	https://cvlife.co.uk/
The Tin Music and Arts	https://thetinmusicandarts.org.uk/
Belgrade Theatre	https://www.belgrade.co.uk/
Coventry Biennial	https://www.coventrybiennial.com/
Talking Birds	https://talkingbirds.co.uk/
Theatre Absolut	https://theatreabsolute.co.uk/
Guildhall	https://www.stmarysguildhall.co.uk/
Future Monument (Jochen Gerz)	https://jochengerz.eu/works/the-future-monument
Coventry Cathedral	https://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/
Coventry University	www.coventry.ac.uk
Warwick University	www.warwick.ac.uk
Coventry University Technology Park	https://www.coventry.ac.uk/business/facilities/technology-park/
Imagineer	https://imagineer-productions.co.uk/
Albany Theatre	https://www.albanytheatre.co.uk/
The Earlsdon Festival	https://www.facebook.com/earlsdonfest/?locale=en_GB
Coventry Godiva Festival (city memorial park)	https://www.godivafestival.com/
The Positive Images Festival	https://positiveimagesfestival.co.uk/
Highly Sprung Performance	https://highlysprungperformance.co.uk/
Coventry Music Hub	https://www.coventrymusichub.co.uk/
Warwick Arts Centre	https://www.warwickartscentre.co.uk/
Weavers' House	https://theweavershouse.org/
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BBC Coventry and Warwickshire	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/england/coventry_and_warwickshire
INVEST Coventry and Warwickshire	https://www.investcw.co.uk/sector/creative-industries/
Fargo Village	https://www.fargovillage.co.uk/
Electric Wharf development	https://complexdevelopmentprojects.co.uk/project/electric-wharf/
Rising (Global Peace Forum)	https://www.risingforum.org/
Coventry Peace Trail	https://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/visit/see-and-do/peace-trail

7: The Policy environment

Arts organisations that are production-based organizations will have a very different relationship to policy frameworks in a city than museums, heritage sites, and freelancers and self-employed creative, artistic and cultural workers, are usually not a visible feature of either governance, strategy or city policy frameworks at all.

'Policy' is a word that signifies government, economics, a source of funding, perhaps empowerment and recognition, but also a demand for compliance. The degree to which an organisation operates with a policy 'environment' will depend on their governance (stakeholders; oversight), their strategic management (if any), funding obligations, their need to promote their work to the city and its people (audiences), and the particular requirements of projects that involve the city and its people as beneficiaries. The policies that implicate all cultural organisations will usually include:

- (i) organisational policies (incorporation status/financial; employment; buildings)
- (ii) place-based policies (economic strategies or schemes relating to the funding or operational productivity of their work)
- (iii) funder or sponsor policies
- (iv) visitor, participant, volunteer, outreach or social engagement-based policies.

Indeed, many policies that make up the policy environment may not be 'cultural' at all, but still play a role in the strategic management of cultural production, programming, communications and capacity-building of an arts or cultural organisation.

In a city with a low level of specific public policy support for individual artists and creative practitioners, organisations like Coventry Artspace are important in allowing individual artists and freelance creative, cultural and heritage sector workers to network, gain access to information on changing opportunities, employment regulations, and so on. The Freelancer Working Group of the WMCA Cultural Leadership Board is a similarly important innovation, as is the many spaces and small organizations across Birmingham representing informal, collegiate, self-management and collective support for individual artists, creatives and freelancers who do not have the support of permanent employment. This also includes 'purpose-led' organizations like MAIA ('Black-led cultural organisation, engaging radical imagination for liberation'), which play a role in generating social solidarity through inspiration and a specific approach to creative production.

For organisations with national funding, the policy environment might be more informed by the three ACE strategy frameworks, ACE Strategy 2020 - 2030, 'Let's Create', the ACE Delivery Plan 2021 - 2024, and (if relevant) ACE NPO Relationship Framework. All major funders have their framework of value (Cf. NLHF Strategic Funding Framework 2019-2024) but many complain of the increasing role of funders in pre-defining or determining the 'values' pertaining to strategic aims. This often entails a compliance and conformity with a

range of management measures, from monitoring and evaluation, governance and incorporation, public engagement and impact, communication and reporting. Local training and opportunities for PD in cultural management are limited and rarely city-based: the 'Coventry City of Culture Transforming Leadership Programme' was a single ACE-funded event as a contribution to the City of Culture, and which has not been developed or continued. Nonetheless, as a programme, it underscored the importance of such development pathways given the increasingly complex and demanding policy environment that has emerged.

By way of summary, for a Coventry-based arts organisation, the place-based policy environment might include any of the following areas below. This representative register indicates two aspects of policy development in the city:

- (a) most policies pertaining to cultural work will be national (or funder-specific), not local
- (b) there has been an integration of policy areas – i.e. in the past there were many more specific policy areas, for communities, for wellbeing, sustainability, different facets of urban development, a distinct 'arts policy', and so forth.

The gradual interconnection of the policy landscape means that the policy environment is less complex or 'siloe'd', but where some dimensions of cultural life are minimised or become less visible.

<i>Policy Environment</i>	
One Coventry Plan	https://www.coventry.gov.uk/strategies-plans-policies/one-coventry-plan
Local plan	https://www.coventry.gov.uk/planning-policy/coventry-local-plan-2011-2031
Economic Development Strategy 2022-2027	https://www.coventry.gov.uk/council-democracy/economic-development-strategy-2022-2027
City Cultural Strategy	https://www.coventry.gov.uk/arts-1/coventry-cultural-strategy
City Council Arts and Culture administration	https://www.coventry.gov.uk/arts-1
City Rights-based policy frameworks – Race Equality Code commitments, One Coventry values, Workforce Diversity and Inclusion strategy, DEI policies.	https://www.coventry.gov.uk/diversity-inclusion/equality-diversity-1#:~:text=During%202022%2C%20Coventry%20City%20Council,of%20racism%2C%20harassment%2C%20and%20bullying
Coventry Green Space Strategy 2019 - 2024	https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/2298/green-space-strategy
Sports strategy	http://covsport.org.uk/about-us/downloads/css-summary-brochure
Health and Wellbeing	https://www.coventry.gov.uk/data-reports/coventry-health-wellbeing-strategy
Heritage	https://letstalk.coventry.gov.uk/heritagestrategy

Tourism	https://edemocracy.coventry.gov.uk/documents/s15617/Tourism%20Strategy%20-%20Attachment.pdf
Urban Forestry	https://www.coventry.gov.uk/heritage-ecology-trees/coventry-urban-forestry-strategy-2022-2032/5
Food	https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/members/coventry/

Critical Points

One obvious reason why a city's culture has not historically been supported by consistent local cultural policymaking, is that culture is dynamic, ever-changing, and works within frames of value and reference that exceed the local (the trans-region, national, international and even global). This, however, should be an opportunity for both experimental research, local knowledge production and policymaking prototyping and testing of the internal relationship 'the local' has with the world outside. There is surprisingly little interest in cultural policy locally, perhaps because of the historic dominance of institutions, the high levels of professionalism and expertise, the need for advanced education, and a rejection of the perceived parochial limitations of local cultural life. A place-based approach offers a way out of this traditional conundrum – Coventry has demonstrated the relevance of place-based research and an engagement with the local knowledge of local people, along with with 'internationalism' and a global frame of reference for a city with aspiration. The City of Culture became an inadvertent 'living lab' where many policy options were explored – and hopefully, with the new Coventry Cultural Gateway, policy research experimentation and development will evolve into a transformative practice.

While the policy environment is less complicated than it used to be, and innovations like the Coventry Cultural Strategy defines a range of interconnected development pathways, the shape of cultural governance in the city is still to be established. The Coventry Culture Works is a credible collaborative framework, but the leadership and governance process is not particularly visible. The landscape is far from inviting for freelancers, recent graduates and non-university educated young people – and as compared to Birmingham, training, direction and start-up support for young cultural creatives is lacking. For many, the idea of an 'ecosystem' is theoretical – a cultural sector can be very exclusive, professionally hierarchical, and highly competitive.

A policy environment does not necessarily entail a detached public bureaucracy, indifferent procedures and form-filling; it could be a dimension of a knowledge infrastructure that supports the development of capabilities in the strategic directing, management and production of culture. Methodologies of policymaking are evolving and becoming more able to register the dynamic relation between people, place and institutional frameworks. The potential for participatory policymaking has been underscored by the productivity of research in the WMCA and Coventry, where significant partners have been empowered. The recent Local Government Association's National Alliance for Cultural Services, and its learning from the policy evolution of local public

service delivery over previous decades, is indicative of a renewed interest in policy as a source and resource of knowledge that can be used in many ways.

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MAIA Black-led cultural organisation	https://www.maiagroup.co/
ACE Strategy 2020 - 2030, Let's Create	https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/lets-create/strategy-2020-2030
ACE Delivery Plan 2021 - 2024	https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/lets-create/delivery-plan-2021-2024
ACE NPO Relationship Framework	https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Relationship%20Framework%20-%20National%20Portfolio%20Organisations%202023-26.pdf
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Food	https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/members/coventry/

8: Urban design, environment and aesthetics

Both Birmingham and Coventry are examples of cities with strong visual associations and notable architecture. In both cities, the primary source of symbolic value is either the football teams, the universities (Birmingham has 3; Coventry has 2), or the city's principal institutions (both have a combined city museum and art gallery), along with landmark buildings or historically renowned civic spaces (both were renowned pioneers in the modern inner-city pedestrianised shopping centre). And both cities are known for their urban, as well as social, diversity. Although, during the Millennium Commission-funded urban design of 1998-2004, Coventry was markedly differentiated from Birmingham: the latter has consistently referred to itself as a product of the industrial revolution, whereas Coventry has revived its medieval origins, in part as a means of circumventing the almost continual association of modern Coventry with the Second World War and post-War rebuilding.

Since the Post-War period, both cities became visibly characterised by the 'new Brutalist' concrete architecture, made famous by London's South Bank, the Barbican, and iconic housing estates like Sheffield's Park Hill.. Both Birmingham and Coventry played a significant part in the 1951 Festival of Britain, and subsequently became known for their pioneering shopping centres, ring roads, parks, Hippodrome theatres, celebrated cathedrals, and otherwise complex industrial landscape (the fascinating if grim looking integration of residential, retail and industrial buildings, canals and railways). The significant difference between the two cities was the presence of Victorian architecture. The War destroyed Coventry's Victorian centre, and it was never large enough to construct residential 'garden squares', but Birmingham's Victoria Square and Chamberlain Square and Town Hall (of 1834) remains the social centre of the city. Coventry chose to demolish its Hippodrome Theatre to make way for a central city 'plaza' in 2000 (as part of the Millennium Commission funding for new urban design and buildings, with a new frontage for the Coventry Transport Museum). Birmingham's Centenary Square (adjacent to Victoria Square) saw housing for the symphony Hall and International Convention Centre in the 1990s, and the award-winning new Library in 2013. Coventry has no institutions of comparable national prestige, other than the Transport Museum housing the largest collection of British cars in the world.

Currently, Birmingham's most notable features of urban design - in addition to its historic squares, the Birmingham Bullring shopping centre (redesigned by Benoy in 2003), and the forthcoming HS2 station opposite the new Birmingham City University - include, The Ikon Gallery (old Victorian school conversion; opened 1997), The Mailbox (2000), The Custard Factory (fully opened, 2002) and The Cube (2010).

The pioneering methods of Urban Regeneration in the 1980s characterise both cities. Coventry was recognised as an urban design pioneer since its international modernist post-War reconstruction and national brand as 'city of the future'. Birmingham began to undertake long-term restructuring, such as opening the canals - which remain a major feature of the city today. The topography of both cities meant that the Victorian canal

network skirted the city centres; Coventry city centre river (the Sherborne) was progressively built over since the 19th Century and is now only visible outside the city centre (in Spon End). Its canals, however, are the location of new creative industries: Coventry's The Canal Basin, and The Nest - arts creation space, with studios, rehearsal and meeting space, part of the historic Daimler Powerhouse within the mixed-use Electric Wharf development. The Electric Wharf development is managed by the private property developers responsible for Coventry's colourful creative retail park and arts venue, FarGo Village.

Birmingham's central creative industries development is Digbeth, now officially designated as a City Council supported Creative Quarter and probably now equal to the 'Jewellery Quarter' as a celebrated urban focal point. Both cities possess notable arts centres - however, both serving a broad segment of the region, are not situated within their cities: the Birmingham MAC ('Midlands' Art Centre) is located in a park south of Digbeth; the Warwick Arts Centre is on the campus of (and largely underwritten by) the University of Warwick.

Both cities have historically pioneered contemporary public art strategies - Coventry's Millennium Commission funded 'Phoenix Initiative' saw the largest urban re-design since the War, and created the new plaza and a 10-location collaboration between artists, architects, urban designers and engineers (still visible in the city's centre, and where the city remains responsible for permanent in situ pieces, with a Public Art Gateway Group (advisory) but no permanent public art strategy, which had been tentatively established in 2002, along with an urban design strategy, by the Phoenix Initiative.

Both cities have seen great festivals come and go (unlike cultural institutions, which tend to endure, festivals find sustainability a major challenge). The once notable Coventry Jazz Festival is now only a small interest group meeting in a pub, whereas Birmingham has sustained an impressive Jazz and Blues Festival along with its regular and extraordinary music itinerary (with a magnitude that arguably far exceeds its audiences). Nonetheless, many festivals continue: Coventry's Godiva Festival and Europe's first festival of multiculturalism, the Positive Images Festival, continues, along with Birmingham's International Dance Festival, TILT Festival of circus arts and the Fierce Festival of contemporary performance, all of which contribute to a significant annual calendar of event-based culture.

In Spring of 2022, Coventry opened The Reel Store, the UK's first permanent immersive digital art gallery as part of the City of Culture legacy project. Held in the basement of the post-war Coventry Evening Telegraph, it was initially an exhibition presentation of the research undertaken by one of the monitoring and evaluation team (AHRC funded) projects, but also the culmination of the city's progressive use of vacant or temporarily redundant retail or industrial spaces being used by the city's contemporary artists. It closed with the collapse of the City of Culture legacy project. With multiple redundancies and the public sale of all the Trust's assets. The web platforming hosting the research publications, and a range of video productions (most hosted on Youtube), have

fortunately been retained by the City Council. Even so, the city's reputation for policy and management has been damaged, and their currently remains little cohesion in the relationship between policy domains and no great expression of expectation in the city's commitment to delivery.

Critical Points

A historical survey of the two cities and their cultural policy development reveals a lack of continuity and consistent evolution, even though the past testifies to huge innovation. Yet, policy innovations often dissolve through time, leaving behind no sense of progress, development, institutional memory, or evolving policy capabilities. Birmingham has nonetheless retained a public art strategy - it was a national leader in public art commissioning, management and delivery, since the late 1980s: the pioneering Public Art Commissions Agency was established there in 1991, appointed as principal consultants to Coventry's Phoenix Initiative in 1998. Following the Phoenix Initiative, Coventry developed an urban design unit in the city planning department and published valuable strategy statements on street furniture, acoustics, lighting and the integration of culture into urban regeneration master planning and development. Much of that capability and vision has receded along with the experienced staff; but the some capabilities in 'masterplanning' remain - visible in Birmingham's 'Big City Plan', launched in 2010; and today, the 'Birmingham Development Plan'; and Coventry's Urban Design Strategy 2001-2011', and today Coventry's Local Plan (and its many sections, some of which still use legacy planning documents, such as the 2004 'Urban Design Guidance').

<i>References</i>	
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The Mailbox (2000)	https://mailboxlife.com/
The Cube (2010)	https://www.thecube.co.uk/
Custard Factory, Birmingham	https://www.digbeth.com/workspaces/custard-factory
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9: Final Conclusions

This study has attempted to represent the role of Knowledge in the cultural ecosystem of the West Midlands region: it has done this through proposing the framework of 'knowledge infrastructure'. This has allowed us to identify innovations in regional policy research, data and other knowledge-based activity, and in turn, represent the vibrant expanse of highly organised and developed creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem in the West Midlands. The choice of this region was motivated by an observation (an assertion that would require further research to substantiate) that innovations in policy research had taken place and that this has amounted to the creation of a de facto cultural 'knowledge infrastructure', which could become a critical component of a new effort in devolved decision making and policy on culture.

The concept of a 'knowledge infrastructure' in this context is more empirical than theoretical, in that while the Sociology of Knowledge and other field would furnish us with a more exacting model, on the level of observation we can assert that the West Midlands exhibits the facility for original, place-based, policy-driven local development. Its 'knowledge infrastructure' exhibits the following:

- (i) Collaborative arrangements on policy research between universities and local authorities.
- (ii) Research team-building and the production and dissemination of methodologically innovative models of strategy and evaluation.
- (iii) Mapping, survey and multi-scalar data research facilities, allowing for big and granular data research, along with relevant frameworks of application.
- (iv) A wide spectrum organisational field of arts and culture, with a span of both value and capability, local, national and international – with artistic involvement in research and knowledge-based production.
- (v) The professional facility for designing and managing cultural events at local, national or international scale, along with communications and marketing capabilities.
- (iv) Partnership, networks and knowledge-sharing capabilities.

Further research is required on the following:

1. The use of knowledge and the function of data portals, information and research in actual policymaking and governance mechanisms: this would enable to construction of strategic frameworks for using knowledge and maximising impact within different governance contexts. Knowledge resources and capabilities should be clearly explained and accounted for, enabling a clear role in local development and the enhancement of growth.
2. Training, PD and courses on policy, cultural knowledge and knowledge infrastructural skills: this could enable more effective creation and development of knowledge by researchers, consultants and cultural organisations, and facilitate public knowledge leadership (as demonstrated in Coventry). This

could enfranchise universities and other knowledge-based agencies in the development process, and identifying more effective roles for local knowledge and local people.

3. .Knowledge Management processes and responsibility in LA governance: This could facilitate the development of Knowledge Management (as practiced by UN agencies, for example) – maximising the effectiveness of local governance in culture by facilitating effective interconnections between knowledge producers and knowledge users.

10: Appendices

Appendix 1: research rationale

The West Midlands is an appropriate region for selection – and potentially, further research, as:

- Economically, as it was traditionally recognised as the ‘second’ region after London and the South East.
- Its social and cultural diversity is one of the most intensive in the UK.
- In terms of statistical representation, there are no extreme low/high averages in education, skills and qualifications, employment or poverty.
- The regional transportation infrastructure is moderately good and therefore less likely to be a factor skewing audience data.
- Local government has always been active in balancing heritage and historic culture with contemporary and multicultural approaches to local policy: the region is active in breaking down stereotypes and norms in relation to ‘minorities’ and so forth.
- Birmingham and Coventry have their own specific cultural policy trajectories – the WMCA is not a federal homogenising force.

Given the amount of detail that is contained within the selected cases, this study has included only such detail as to demonstrate and allow for the above research aims. All points of detail are supported by links to websites and documents, the extent of which is a necessary indication on the ‘public’ character of the ‘knowledge infrastructure’ that is being proposed. Both cases are exemplary in their use of digital media as a means to making policy knowledge public, even though this contrasts with the lack of transparency concerning governance or the institutional uses of such policy knowledge. Several conclusions will attend to the issue of knowledge transparency. Moreover, the subject of an enhanced public knowledge infrastructure for cultural governance, will require proposals concerning the monitoring, evaluation and communication of such knowledge.

This region and cases were selected, in part, because of the author’s familiarity with and positioning within, past and recent research projects. This includes academic research on urban cultural development, public art, human rights, and community arts, and commissioned research on Coventry City of Culture, and (unpublished) on Coventry’s truncated involvement in the Arts Council England’s Culture Compacts scheme. It has also benefitted from the recent research on local government, and the professional webinars organised by Culture Commons during, were highly informative, and registered many salient points on the UK’s over-centralisation, political low participation and lack of cross-sector policy integration, the enduring democratic and accountability deficit (e.g. low turnout in local elections), decline in local media and press, inequality, lack of mobility, complaints and dissatisfaction, wellbeing – and perhaps most importantly, how UK LAs are overly dominated by national economic policy and to that extent exhibit low investment in

local policy research, policy innovation and extending democratic governance appropriate to specific locales.

This study does not rehearse the above available research, nor summarise the more general changes in UK local government and concomitant research on such – it assumes the enduring significance of past ‘regionalism’ efforts, New Labour’s human rights and equalities legislation, its insertion of ‘multiculturalism’ at the centre of public service provision, its de facto introduction of US ‘New Public Management’, closer Treasury oversight, a new discourse on creative industries, and the general (if vague) horizon of expectations often referred to as ‘cultural democracy’ (see the recent O’Connor, 2024). The Conservative (Cameron-era) Localism Act 2011 remains significant, despite the dissolution of the Local Enterprise Partnerships, scepticism around the ‘Northern Powerhouse’ project (2014-), but greater impetus for the recent Levelling Up initiatives, ‘Devolution Deals’, and new local government configuration of Combined, Unitary, and Mayoral authorities. This study, while situated within a combined authority, aims to be relevant beyond one configuration of local authority governance. It does, however, argue that central to effective governance for culture is a spatial dimension (of ‘cultural geography’), and recognises the significance of recent research and public debates on devolution by the Arts Council England and Local Government Association Joint Statement agreement, the wide range of ‘place-based’ initiatives around the country (from the urban regeneration and public art of the 1980s, to creative quarters and villages, and since 2013, the ACE Creative People and Places projects); various innovations in cultural and creative industries strategy building around the country (Greater Manchester; Bradford and West Yorkshire; Scotland), the work of the LGA Commission on Culture and Local Government and the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association.

Appendix 2: defining ‘culture’

While cultural policy research is replete with terms like ‘cultural sector’, ‘cultural economy’, ‘creative and cultural industries’, ‘cultural ecosystem’ or ‘cultural ecology’, there is a lack of theoretical basis to these terms – and a lack of theory interconnected with methodology development. The significance of Birmingham and Coventry is that they have taken the question of methodology seriously and have opened several pathways for future research.

An infrastructure mapping allows for a definition of culture by typology of ‘spaces’ and organised activities: obviously, this excludes informal, spontaneous, street-based and other kinds of culture that is not structured this way.

Infrastructurally, culture is defined in terms of...

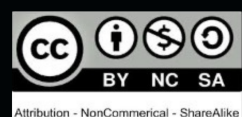
- (i) local history, heritage, identity
- (ii) positive historical change and social communities
- (iii) the arts
- (iv) socially-engaged cultural agencies and projects

- (v) festivals, exhibitions, events
- (vi) the city as cultural actor
- (vii) Cathedrals; CofE churches
- (viii) Non-CofE churches; unused buildings registered for 'worship'; faith communities; religious charities; belief-based development organisations.
- (ix) tourism and visitor economy
- (x) museums, galleries and archives
- (xi) ethnicity and origins-based associations or interest-groups
Including (though not exclusively so...)
- (xii) Education institutions - schools, colleges, universities.
- (xiii) creative industries; technology and innovation-based business enterprise.

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