CULTURE COMMONS

Pan-regional cultural decision making

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This Insight Paper explores policy implications arising from a roundtable discussion that took place on 8th April 2024 exploring **pan-regional governance of creative, cultural and heritage sector policy.** The roundtable formed part of a Knowledge Exchange session associated with <u>'the future local cultural decision making'</u>, an open policy development programme led by Culture Commons and a coalition of UK-wide partners.

The Knowledge Exchange sessions are designed by Culture Commons to bring all programme partners and external experts together, build links, share insights and broaden perspectives on a range of subjects relevant to the programme's core research themes.

In-keeping with an open and transparent approach of the programme, Culture Commons is committed to publishing an Insight Paper *a*fter each Knowledge Exchange session that reviews how the issues discussed may inform the overall policy process.

This Insight Paper will be formally reviewed as part of the growing evidence base that will inform the policymaking phase of the programme.

Keywords: Pan-regional Governance; Partnerships, Devolution

At the time of publication

'the future of local cultural decision making' open

policy development programme partners were:



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The Programme

<u>'the future of local cultural decision making'</u> is an open policy development programme led by Culture Commons and a coalition of partners made up of local governments, sector representatives, arm's length bodies, grant giving bodies and leading research institutions.

Together, we are exploring how further 'devolution' and/or increased local decision making might impact on the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem in different nations and regions of the UK.

More information about the programme can be found on the dedicated <u>digital hub</u>.

Open Policymaking

Open Policymaking was described by UK Government in 2014 as a process that 'opens up the formation of public policy to a wider variety of stakeholders'.

Culture Commons have adopted some of the key principles sitting behind this approach and elaborated on them when designing this programme, particularly the commitment to transparency.

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If you have any questions or comments about anything in this publication, we welcome your views: please email us <u>contact@culturecommons.uk</u>

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Background

Across the four UK nations, a variety of statutory and non-statutory pan-regional governance structures and partnerships are developing that support a range of policy priorities including economic development, nationally significant infrastructure projects, health and social care programmes and strategic spatial planning activities.

According to the Local Government Association (programme partner), pan-regional partnerships exist to "co-ordinate activity with their member local authorities and government. They follow from the recognition of the importance of building economic and infrastructure strategy around functional economic areas, both at a sub-regional and subnational level".¹

Whilst funding and support have been making their way to the creative, cultural and heritage sectors indirectly through pan-regional programmes (e.g. via economic development, skills programmes or capital development activities), pan-regional approaches that are solely or mainly dedicated to supporting the growth of local creative, cultural and heritage sectors are limited.

Nonetheless, in recent years, we see a growing interest in the role that dedicated panregional activities could play, particularly in supporting local and regional cultural governance, for the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem in different parts of the UK.

As part of the work of this programme, we are interested in how such subnational governance approaches may support the wider 'devolution' agenda by providing a mechanism for targeted place-based investment and focused local partnership working, while nonetheless continuing to facilitate strategic collaborations across regions and minimising any isolation that localised approaches could lead to.

For the fifth in our series of Knowledge Exchange sessions, we invited two of our programme partners to share insights about the ambitious, culture-led pan-regional governance programmes they are planning and delivering.

Learning Outcomes

We set the following learning objectives for this session:

- How are pan-regional cultural programmes funded and governed?
- What do they hope to deliver for the regions they involve?
- Can we point to any successes in their development or deployment so far?
- How might we measure the success of such mechanisms in the future?

¹ See <u>https://www.local.gov.uk/subnational-bodies-lessons-learned-established-and-emerging-approaches</u>

- What are the benefits and challenges of pan-regional approaches to cultural decision making?
- What are the drivers and mechanisms that support the different approaches to pan-regional cultural decision making?
- What value might pan-regional cultural decision making mechanisms add to existing tiers of governance?
- How might our sectors feature in other pan-regional decision-making structures in the future?

Agenda for the session

17.00	Welcome from Culture Commons
17.10	Lorraine Cox Creative Estuary (with representatives from local authority officers within the CE partnership) "The Creative Estuary approach: what have been the challenges and opportunities?"
17.25	Tom Stratton Chief of Staff at Royal Society of Arts <i>"Building a Northern Creative Corridor (NCC)"</i>
17:50	Discussion between speakers and attendees "How should the creative and cultural sectors feature within pan regional structures in the future?"
18.15	Session closed

About the Contributors

Creative Estuary

<u>Creative Estuary</u> is a development partnership of public sector and cultural organisations, working together to transform 60 miles of the Thames Estuary across the County Councils of Kent and Essex, in the South East of England.

The partnership includes 11 local authorities: Essex County Councils, Kent County Council, South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), Kent and Essex County Councils, Thames Estuary Growth Board, Greater London Authority (GLA), South East Creative Economy Network (SECEN), University of Kent, University of Essex, Locate in Kent, and cultural organisations Estuary Festival CIC, Metal, and Cement Fields.

The history of the partnership

Creative Estuary is part of the <u>Thames Estuary Production Corridor (TEPC) project</u>, initiated by the South East Creative Economy Network (SECEN) and Greater London Authority (GLA) in 2017. The work of the TEPC was recognised and endorsed as a key part of the Estuary's future in the <u>Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission report in 2018</u>.

The <u>UK Government's response</u> (March 2019) to the *Growth Commission's* report, committed to support a £1 million strategic *Thames Estuary Growth Board*, led by UK Government appointed envoy Kate Willard OBE, who set out a strategic action plan '<u>The</u> <u>Green Blue'</u> in 2020 to drive growth in the region.

Initial funding

Following an open EOI process, the 2019 UK Government committed to allocate an initial £4.3 million via the (the) Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport's (DCMS) and Arts Council England's (ACE) <u>Cultural Development Fund</u> to develop the TEPC; this funded phase one of the work of Creative Estuary project.

In April 2023, Creative Estuary received a further £1.15 million from ACE's National Lottery Project grant <u>Place Partnership Project Fund</u> to continue work through to 2026.

Delivery

Across the two phases of the programme, Creative Estuary has delivered a variety of <u>capacity building and leadership projects</u>, focused on developing skills, business support, networks and co-commissioning opportunities for the creative, cultural and heritage workforce - while leading the brand and vision for the wider area. This work also includes a <u>Creative Asset Place Programme</u> focused on supporting the development of cultural assets in the region.

One Creative North

The Northern Creative Corridor coalition aims to unlock the huge potential in the North of England's creative industries. This cross-regional partnership, led by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), Arts Council England (ACE), Creative Industries Policy & Evidence centre (PEC) (each partners in this programme) and <u>leading regional sector organisations</u>, will develop regional strategies that build skills, unlock finance, support innovation and nurture arts & culture across the North of England.

Background

In 2023, Newcastle University and RSA became host to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded Creative Industries <u>Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC)</u>. Since 2020, PEC have been exploring and mapping the <u>UK's micro and Creative Clusters</u> – recently identifying 709 micro-clusters across the UK where firms are co-locating at a smaller scale, either within or outside of Travel To Work Areas (TTWA) to develop.²

On the back of their work to explore the development of the creative, cultural and heritage sectors in the North of England³, <u>a new partnership</u> made up of Metro Mayors and leaders of Northern sector organisations was formed in November 2023, committed to building a 'Northern Creative Corridor' (NCC) covering a geography founded on the PEC micro-cluster research.

In 2024, at the annual 'Convention of the North' plans were finally endorsed for the newly entitled 'One Creative North' as part of the conference's '<u>Manifesto for the North'</u>

Aims

According to the partnership's <u>founding charter</u>, it is hoped that any initiatives developed through the Northern Creative Corridor will:

- Provide economies of scale and scope in the creative industries and beyond
- Avoid duplication of spending or fragmentation of incentives and initiatives
- Promote beneficial cross-regional/cross-sector partnerships and networks
- Enable collective action to shape regional and national policy, funding bodies and employers

² Interestingly, of which " (247) are found outside the 47 clusters which have been identified in previous research at the commuter 'level'". See, <u>https://pec.ac.uk/wp-</u> content/uploads/2023/12/PEC-Creative-Radar-report-November-2020.pdf

³ See <u>https://www.thersa.org/rsa-journal/2023/issue-4/feature/taking-flight</u>

A note about the examples explored in Knowledge Exchange #5

As a four UK nations programme, we are taking care throughout all our activity to explore case studies and hear perspectives from the devolved administrations.

This session focussed on two programmes taking place in England, but we orientated the conversation towards principles associated with regional working that are equally applicable to the contexts in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. We invited our partners from the devolved administrations to contribute to a Q&A session after our contributing speakers.

Further work on regional and devolved nations approaches will be explored in future Insight Papers.

We also draw attention to the nascent nature of the 'One Creative North' programme, which, although a clear example of pan-regional ambition has not yet moved into it's delivery phase. Nevertheless, there is already much to explore from the partnership momentum gathering around this project that is applicable to exploring collective governance at the heart of pan regional cultural decision making.

Implications for Policy

Our Knowledge Exchange and Insight Gathering activity have been conducted under <u>Chatham House</u> rules. The observations made by contributors have been quoted but not directly attributed to individuals.

The policy implications outlined in this in this section are those of Culture Commons and do not necessarily reflect those of the speakers or the wider programme partners.

Part of something bigger

When exploring two very different approaches to pan regional working, each of our speakers from **Creative Estuary** and **RSA** attributed a perceived benefit to working at the regional level as being **"part of something bigger".** Our speakers picked up on **four** clear benefits from working in this way:

"If you have a bigger, so-called local marketplace...that carries greater weight, whether it be with investors, whether it be with industries looking to locate somewhere... the bigger the unit that you're able to operate at, functionally, the more attractive it is. And there is emerging evidence that, particularly for innovation within the creative industries, the more that you're able to link up different sub-sectors within the creative industries and fuse them, cross fertilise, the more innovation that can take place..." **Firstly** our speakers suggested that working together to support the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem across a wider geographic area could present **sectoral growth and coordination opportunities** - including by opening up new markets and attracting investments in the workforce and firms associated with the sectors. Our speakers agreed that more connected regional working would open opportunities for local creatives, SMEs and support the subsectors within the creative industries in particular to innovate and cross pollinate.

These observations chime heavily with research led by the Creative PEC, who, although acknowledge the relatively underexplored evidence of 'corridors' and 'superclusters' in the UK, indicated in their 2023 *Geographies of Creativity* report:

"In key areas like access to finance and skills, where adjacent creative clusters may be competing for constrained resources or facing similar barriers, **it may make sense for them to coordinate their development strategies.** Linking creative corridors would then have the potential to generate new agglomeration economies beyond what any one cluster might be able to achieve on its own."⁴

Identifying and charting the impact of sectoral growth opportunities of pan regional corridors is an area relatively

⁴ Geographies of Creativity (Siepel, Ramirez-Guerra, Rathi, 2023) p36: <u>https://pec.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Creative-PEC-Geographies-of-Creativity-State-of-the-Nations-December-2023.pdf</u>

underexplored in the UK. However, there is an element of common-sense that can be applied to the idea of 'coordination' across geographies. One of the aims of the PEC/RSA corridor is to "avoid duplication of spending or fragmentation of incentives and initiatives".⁵

In developing the approach for One Creative North, the RSA/PEC team held a number of sector-based consultation workshops. One of the issues that came up was the discussion on skills policy for the creative industries:

"I think it came through very clearly [from the workshops] that the approach to skills that we have in England, and I think it probably does stretch into the devolved administrations as well, is not sufficiently tailored to the creative industries. There are some specific structural features that we need to think far more about if we're going to get the most out of our creatives, and **we need to be much more joined up across places**"

We can see that there may be huge benefits of this approach against the context of more 'localised decision making' - mitigating against layers of competing or confusing localised programmes or strategies (ranging from curriculum and skills programmes development, to place development approaches).

Secondly, one of the local county councils involved in the work of the Creative Estuary commented that **"brand and marketing"** felt particularly important in this context; that coming together with a strong set of complementary regional assets was a more attractive proposition to external investors.

"Creative Estuary has got a very strong brand, and I think that is really important in terms of visibility and credibility. **It helps to drive up ambition and enables those economies of scale to be made**. I think that's particularly important to external people looking in, particularly people we want to try and get investment off.... it's a bit of a game changer." (County Council, officer)

This observation rings true with the work that the UK Government Department for Business and Trade (DBT) and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) have pursued in recent years for attracting both Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and incubating domestic market growth through such 'geographically marketed areas'. At the time of writing under this current UK government, '<u>Investment Zones'</u> and '<u>Freeports/Green Freeports</u>' are latest policy incarnations of this concept.

Both initiatives are place-based, economic policy interventions instigated by UK government - designed to work with local partnerships to attract investment and breed innovation through different fiscal incentives and/or relaxations. The creative industries have been designated by the UK Government as one of the 'five priority sectors'⁶ for Investment Zones.

⁶ See UK Government's information sheet on Investment Zones, <u>https://www.gov.uk/guidance/investment-</u>

⁵ See Northern Creative Corridor Charter https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/de sign-for-life/northern-creative-corridorcharter.pdf

In 2022, Culture Commons were commissioned by the University of Manchester, to explore the emerging concept of <u>'Creative Improvement</u> <u>Districts</u> - which are one form of such local economic policy currently being trailed by Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to encourage the growth of the industries locally.

The Creative Estuary brand underlines the power of **simple 'umbrella' branding,** but in the context of our wider policy development it could be worth exploring how such economic interventions, from Investment Zones to Creative Improvement Districts, could contain an increased focus **on the full breath of the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem - rather than targeting the creative industries in isolation.**

Thirdly, both examples suggested that the benefits of working together at a regional level facilitated a *"feeling of connectedness"* among local council officers across the region:

"It's...the likeminded nature of people sat around that Creative Estuary table, as equals, as partners, regardless of whether you're a district, a unitary or a county. And the **collective confidence** that brings, and that's really, really important". (Local Authority Officer)

This "connectedness" seemed to be a vehicle for councils across the area to learn from each other, as one council officer observed:

"I was really new into the job when I first became part of Creative Estuary, and it helped me negotiate the 'rabbit warren' of connections...sometimes it can feel very siloed and disconnected, and part of my job was to connect that together, and that was supported and helped really extensively.... I don't know how many miles away [we are] from [neighbouring authority]...I'm perfectly happy to sit down with [neighbouring authority officer] to talk together.... and we understand that the next phase will be about us coming together even more..." (Local Authority Officer)

Fourthly, the Creative Estuary team don't appear to have been merely creating a network for local authorities themselves to share resources within: they seem to be levering their own support, additional investment and technical expertise that the local authority teams admit they often lacked themselves.

One local authority described Creative Estuary had leveraged conversations across their own internal council structures, supporting the cultural team to 'make the case' for culture as a legitimate policy consideration across the other property, commercial and economy directorates.

Another country council offer explained how Creative Estuary were becoming an organisation with "Institutional knowledge", shared across all local government partners. They explained;

zones-in-england#full-publication-updatehistory

"I think a really big sort of impact that we feel is that sort of the softer power of the network and...the legacy of the work" (Country Council officer)

An 'expert support network' of this kind bringing technical specialists and advocacy capacity to local areas could be a game changer for local governments where resources and capacity is incredibly stretched, if not already at breaking point.

The Creative Estuary team reflected on their perceptions of supporting and working with local authority officers in this way as part of the Creative Estuary mission:

"a key plank of our approach is to really get deep into local authorities at their invitation, obviously, to work across departments and with departments.... we're finding, incidentally, that one of the shifts in local government in this area... is that more and more senior officers have...**a sentence instead of a job title** there are many sort of connections and groupings...largely because of reorganisations, not necessarily about policy shifts"

This phenomenon can be viewed firstly as a positive, that 'cultural policy' is integrating across departments and increasing seen as integral to place based regeneration and other areas such as mental health and wellbeing - a holistic approach that is increasingly argued as vital for addressing policy silos⁷. However, viewed in context of increasing pressures on local government, and the resulting restricting and efficiency measures, we can also see, adding culture into the mix of other pressing local policy priorities such as tourism, parks, leisure and others, can 'downgrade' a focus on culture; put a huge strain on individuals working at local government levels while reducing the capacity for local teams to focus solely on the supports needed for the sectors. This observation is consistent with discussions we've had across local government officers across the four nations of the UK and emerging research from our partners at the Heseltine Institute.

Taken together then, these four perceived 'benefits' of being "part of something bigger" include: **the potential for magnified sectoral growth opportunities and coordination**; **the power of a unifying and noticeable brand**; **a connecting support network for local government** and; the **ability to leverage additional resource external to local government**.

Perhaps it's the **combination of these perceived benefits that can unlock the conditions for the sector to thrive within a pan-regional area,** while ensuring that authorities and hyper local areas within them are supported in equitable and inclusive ways.

⁷ See, for example, our first knowledge exchange session on <u>'What do we mean by</u> <u>local cultural decision making'</u>

Sector capacity building

Creative Estuary programme is heterogenous - it has many facets and work strands, including initiatives to up skill and widen opportunities for local creative practitioners, support firms and community based organisations to develop their organisations; dedicated <u>regional festivals</u> and <u>co-commissioned</u> <u>project based work</u> - that over phase 1 resulted in commissioned 559⁸ creative practitioners.

An evaluation of the impact of the CDF1 funded projects, was conducted by STEER economic development between 2024-23. Although the report acknowledges the impact of the pandemic on the over growth trends, and the challenge of developing consistent data across the heterogenous natures of the projects, the report points to a number of qualitative and quantitative outcomes, including; skill development, job creation and wider social benefits such as 'pride in place', creative risk taking' and raised aspirations⁹.

One of the core features of Creative Estuary's programme in phase two has been to build platforms and forums for networking and <u>knowledge exchange</u> between the sector. According to the Creative Estuary team this is important not only for the sectors themselves but for the health of the overall ecosystem:

"We're making space for creatives by ...thinking about a social and economic economy, so moving that idea of social value into and ahead of the creative economy, and thinking about that in terms of how people are brought together, how partnerships are developed for the long term"

This type of partnership creation involves reaching all types of stakeholders across an community. Forums and governance groups like ACE's Cultural Compact initiative intend to achieve such a nexus, but to truly explore the development of such a diverse ecosystem we need to involve stakeholders outside of the 'usual suspects' into such a partnership.

Lastly, one of the growing strands of work for the Creative Estuary team is to support more <u>'creative assets'</u>; working with councils on initial feasibility work to unlock vacant buildings for creative and cultural uses. On this point, speakers in our discussion reflected on how it was "just far too difficult" for local authorities and other partners to "unlock buildings" even those that are vacant and underused. This is a theme the Culture Commons team have heard repeatedly throughout the evidence gathering work, and through the policy work the team will explore policy levers and models for ameliorating this issue.

This form of capacity building -**"investing both in people and places"** - is often the type of early phase development work that is so integral to build the strength of the creative, cultural and heritage sectors in an area. The ability of Creative Estuary to leverage this type of resource and expertise appears

⁹ Ibid.

⁸ See Process and Interim Impact Evaluation of DCMS's Cultural Development Fund, Round 1, STEER economic development, 2024.

to have enabled local authorities (as above) and creative organisations alike to unlock assets and the skills needed to grow locally.¹⁰

It is important to acknowledge the role that **central government and arm's length organisations have played in facilitating the development of the Creative Estuary project itself.** Since it's foundation, Creative Estuary has been financed directly by the UK Government's Cultural Development Fund (Round 1) and, for it's later stages, from ALB grant funding. The £4.77 million awarded to the Thames Estuary Corridor Project through CDF1 was predominately revenue expenditure – enabling the organisation to deliver the kinds of 'capacity building' activities noted above.

A Cluster or Ecology based approach?

Within our discussion, we explored the down sides of deploying 'strength led' clustering approaches to the identification of 'potential corridors':

"If over the last four years, we had only worked in areas where we thought that there was strength...we wouldn't have gone to [local area]...which has really opened up that area and developed..."

An over-emphasis on cluster-led regional sectoral development risks overlooking deeply entrenched in-region inequalities - even in areas of perceived industrial strength such as London and the South East.

What might be needed, one of our partners reflected, is an ecological approach that focuses on the entirety of the relationships between creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem:

"I think it's a question about the ecologies...How do you build an ecology? Because things don't always flourish out of the larger centres. Sometimes they flourish in opposition..." (Anita Taylor, University of Dundee)

We explored how so-called 'left behind areas' factor into industrial strategies and cultural policy more broadly in a later Knowledge Exchange session. Reflecting on our emerging work in the context of our Creative Improvement Districts, alongside continued evidence behind the place based inequalities present in the growth of the sectors¹¹, we believe this type of ecological approach is vital and that attention should be paid to the relationships and networks that foster it. However, this may not necessary be at odds with cluster development - merely suggest that the later simply one part of the former.

We also hope to unpack some of this ecosystem thinking as the policy development work continues; particularly how we can consider what 'success' looks like in this context'.

content/uploads/2023/12/PEC-Discussion-Paper-1-Regional-Inequalities-October-2019-FINAL.pdf

¹¹ Mind the gap: regional inequalities in the UK's creative industries, B.Thether, Creative PEC, https://pec.ac.uk/wp-

Decision making at a regional level

While both examples discussed in this session presented the benefits of working at a pan-regional level, we didn't fully touch on the decision-making mechanisms setting behind them.

While One Creative North has undergone a consultation with regional political leaders and leading sector organisations (including the development of a <u>Charter signed</u> by Metro Mayors and larger Northern based sector organisations) - we don't yet have a full sense of how local leaders, grassroots organisations and local citizens will play a role in the ongoing decision making.

In terms of 'tiers' of local government involved in the Creative Estuary programme, we see a patchwork of collaborations weaving across them all. The original idea for TEPC originated at the combined authority level with a strategic vision initiated by Greater London Authority (GLA) and the South East Local Enterprise Partnership. Yet, it's clear that the backing of UK Government has unlocked the full potential of this initial collaboration to deliver the positive outputs described by our speakers. This included endorsement by the Commission in 2018, a UK Government appointed Envoy to set up a central government funded 'leadership board' and significant investment of central government resource funding (and later ALB funding) to continue the work of the project.

At the opposite end of the scale, although the team at the helm of the Creative Estuary are attributed as "generously sharing" assets and information across all the local authorities in their area, and their co-commissioned programme has been recognised for their collaboratively, locally-led approach, there isn't yet a sense of long term involvement **in decision making and accountability for local decision makers (including the public) in these initiatives.**

In our policy development going forward, we'll look at approaches that utilise the benefits of some of the regional working we've touched on in this Insight Paper but that are also governed by open and accountable decision makers. Reflections shared during this discussion also suggests that there may be an opportunity to incorporate forums for local people to make their views heard in how strategy and funding associated with the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem are being distributed and made.

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