The role of local authorities in supporting local cultural decision making

RESEARCH PAPER

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Contents

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Abstract

This paper draws on evidence from both academic and practitioner literatures to provide a review of the ways that subnational governments are working to develop policy and deliver support for creative, cultural and heritage sectors; the barriers that they continue to face; and the implications this may have for their future policy development. The findings from this literature review highlight the existence of an increasingly complex governance and policy landscape, with subnational governments playing an increasingly proactive role in supporting local creative, cultural and heritage activities through a variety of novel mechanisms. However, challenges remain, not least within a context of constrained local government resources. Further research will be required to understand how such challenges can be most effectively navigated.

Keywords

devolution; cultural compacts; creative clusters; co-production

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The Programme

'the future of local cultural decision making' 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 digital hub.

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Executive Summary

o Devolution in the UK has created a complex context for local cultural decision-making, with multiple actors across all layers of government playing a role in providing support for local creative, cultural and heritage activities.

o Whilst local authorities remain the biggest public funders of culture across the United Kingdom, devolved national governments as well as city-regional combined authorities also play a strategic role in unlocking the full social and economic benefits of culture and creativity. In addition, citizens and communities are also demonstrating their potential to play a more substantial participatory role in local cultural decision making.

o A range of examples included in this paper highlight how subnational governments are developing innovative support for the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem in their area, as well as how local governments are playing an increasingly proactive role in coordinating local stakeholders to facilitate cooperation between sectors.

o Nevertheless, subnational governments now face a particularly challenging landscape. With investments in culture often among the earliest casualties of constrained local authority budgets, there is limited institutional capacity within local government to deliver effective support for these sectors.

o Although evidence suggests that there may be growing appetite for subnational governments to play a larger role in coordinating local cultural decision-making, further research will be required to understand how a challenging governance and policy landscape can be most effectively navigated.

Introduction

This paper forms part of the contribution from the Heseltine Institute at the University of Liverpool to '[the future of local cultural decision making](#)' – an open policy development programme led by Culture Commons and more than 20 partners from across the UK.

Working with Culture Commons the Heseltine Institute was tasked with contributing to the programme's 'Local Cultural Decision Making' research theme; specifically exploring how creative and cultural life is already being supported at the local level across the country, and the role that subnational governments (including local authorities and, in England, city-regional combined authorities) are playing within this.

This paper presents findings from an integrated literature review of existing subnational policies, proposals and interventions to support the creative, cultural and heritage "ecosystem" across the United Kingdom (UK). It draws on evidence from both academic and "grey" policy and practitioner literature to provide an overview of how subnational governments are working to develop policy and deliver support for these sectors; the barriers that they continue to face; and the implications this may have for future policy development.

There is a growing appreciation for the considerable wider benefits associated with investing in the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem in local areas – from economic growth to improved wellbeing (Cultural Cities Enquiry, 2019; Burger et al., 2021; LGA, 2022). However, there has so far been less attention paid to the ways in which subnational governments currently support 'local cultural decision-making' (see Culture Commons, 2024).

Extending the devolution of powers and responsibilities from the UK Government to subnational government has been indicated as a priority for the new Labour government. As such it is important to consider the capacity that local and city-regional governments currently have for decision-making associated with the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem, as well as the barriers that currently make it harder for them to provide such support. This paper therefore seeks to illustrate a variety of subnational activity and innovation from across the UK to evaluate the potential for further local cultural decision making in future.

The paper is structured as follows: first, we provide a brief outline of a literature review of academic and grey literature. This is followed by an exploration of current sub-regional policies and interventions that support the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem; a deep dive into regional and local examples that support these sectors particularly well; and an overview of some of the main challenges and barriers highlighted within the existing literature. Finally, this paper concludes by posing some important considerations for the programme's Steering Panel to consider when developing policy in the next phase of the programme, as well as identifying several focal points for further research.

Methodology

To develop this paper, we conducted an integrative literature review drawing on academic and practice-led research associated with the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem with a particular focus on policy support and decision making at the local and city-regional government levels across the UK.

We used a series of key word searches using several sources including Web of Science, Google Scholar, Scopus, and Policy Commons. We also undertook an additional targeted search of leading academic journals including the International Journal of Cultural Policy; International Cultural Management and Policy; and International Journal of Cultural Policy.

The review included literature focussed on all four UK nations and also considered international evidence relevant to the UK context. A full list of the literature included in this review is included in the References section below.

For the purposes of this programme, Culture Commons are applying a broad and inclusive definition of the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem, which includes: firms in the creative industries (as defined by DCMS Standard Industrial Classification Codes); the publicly and privately funded cultural sectors; the workforce operating within the Creative Economy (i.e. workers with DCMS Standard Occupation Classification Codes and those in Creative Occupations working in other parts of the economy), including employed, freelance/self-employed and atypical workers; arm's length bodies (such as Arts Councils); grant giving bodies (such as Trusts and Foundations); the research community (including schools, colleges, high education institutions and informal sites of learning); local, regional and national decision makers (e.g. in local authorities, combined authorities, national governments).

The current governance landscape

The UK represents one of the most centralised systems of government in the industrialised world (McCann, 2016, p.1). However, the introduction of new forms of devolution in recent decades has created a complex landscape of multi-level governance across the country, with a variety of decision-making powers shifted away from Westminster and Whitehall to more localised governance structures (Elliott et al., 2022).
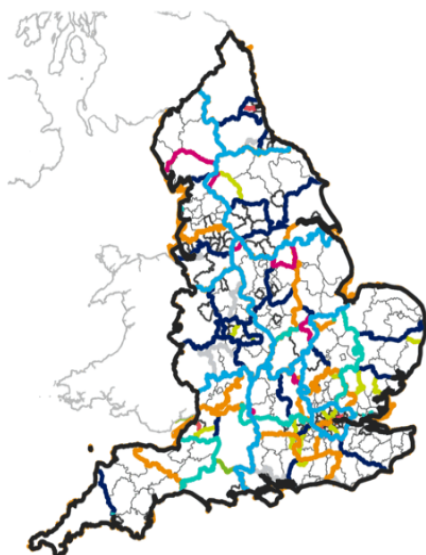
'Devolution' has different expressions in different parts of the UK, ranging from the models of quasi-federal parliamentary systems in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; to the extensive powers held by the Mayor of London and Greater London Authority; as well as the more limited 'delegated delivery' models found in the combined authority areas established across England since 2011.

The process of devolution in England has been especially uneven, piecemeal, sporadic and complex, creating an overlapping patchwork of governance arrangements (Durose and Lowndes, 2021). Different localities are governed by slightly different combinations of institutions and layers of government, each with different levels of competency for different policy areas, and with different relationships with central government (see Kenny and Newman, 2023). A complex governance landscape at the UK level has implications for the design and deployment of policy to support the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem.

Figure 1: England's incoherent policy geographies (Kenny and Newman, 2023).

At a **national level** the UK Government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) supports the cultural sectors to varying degrees in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland through a variety of mechanisms. DCMS also provide funding for, and

oversight of, a range of arm's length bodies, for example British Film Institute (BFI) and Arts Council England (ACE).

In Scotland, the Culture and Major Events Directorate of the Scottish Government has devolved responsibility for arts, culture, heritage and the development of the creative industries. Funding in Scotland for these sectors are distributed by a variety of non-departmental bodies, including Creative Scotland (Alba Chruthachail).

Similarly, culture is a devolved policy area for both the Welsh Government and Northern Irish Executive, with funding distributed by additional public bodies, including the Arts Council of Wales (Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru) and Arts Council of Northern Ireland respectively.

At the **city-regional level** in England, several combined authorities (e.g. the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, Tees Valley Combined Authority and West Yorkshire Combined Authority) have an acknowledged – albeit not always clearly defined, and largely consultative – role to play in cultural decision-making, as outlined in their founding devolution deals (for example, see HM Treasury 2015a, p.14; ibid., 2015b, p.9; ibid., 2020, p.27).

More recently, the so-called 'trailblazer' devolution deals introduced for Greater Manchester Combined Authority (partners in this open policy development programme) and the West Midlands Combined Authority have also emphasised the role that combined authorities can play in supporting the creative industries and cultural sectors.

The creation of a "Strategic Cultural Partnership" for Greater Manchester (HM Government, 2023a, pp.59-60) and a "regional culture and heritage framework" being proposed in the West Midlands Combined Authority (HM Government, 2023b, p.65) as just two live examples. Both initiatives have a stated ambition to bring key local, regional and national stakeholders (including arm's length bodies) together to rationalise funding and support strategic investment and collaboration.

At the **local level**, local authorities have a significant role to play in shaping the cultural offer within place, for example through the development of cultural strategies and mobilising powers in adjacent policy areas such health, education, economic development, planning, and licensing to achieve wider priorities via a cross-cutting creative approach. Local authorities are also able to utilise their convening powers to bring together local partners to develop shared approaches and objectives for the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem and create an appealing environment for the creative industries to thrive (LGA, 2022, p.9).

In England, local authorities are still the biggest investors in the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem, spending approximately £2.4 billion a year on associated services, and contributing to the maintenance of "3,000 libraries, 350 museums, 116 theatres and numerous castles, amusement parks, monuments, historic buildings, parks and heritage sites across the county" (LGA, 2023). Scottish local authorities spend around £570 million a year on culture and sport, equating to roughly 4% of all net revenue expenditure (COSLA, 2022). Welsh local authorities spent £244 million on libraries, culture, heritage,

sport and recreation in 2022/23 (Welsh Government, 2023, p.3). Similarly, the most recent available figures for Northern Ireland suggest that local councils spend more than £46 million on culture and heritage each year (Hull et al., 2015, p.2).

Local councils often hold levers and resources that are needed to support creative industries in their area: developing key policies and strategies; using local assets and infrastructures to create local environments conducive for attracting more creative enterprises; local capacity building initiatives among others (see Figure 2: Local Levers for Change, LGA, 2020).

Local levers for change

- Local Industrial Strategy
- Cultural strategy
- Planning
- Licensing
- Public Health, Wellbeing & Social Care
- Education
- Regeneration & your local plan

Key policies & strategies

Assets & infrastructure
- Council assets
- Others' assets
- Public realm
- Digital – infrastructure & data

Leading & convening

- Business support
- Developing skills & retaining talent
- Attracting businesses and talent

Local capacity building

Investment & funding
- Using council budgets
- Co-bidding for grants
- New funding models
- Inward investment

- Advocacy
- Convening power
- Engagement and Consultation
- New organisational structures
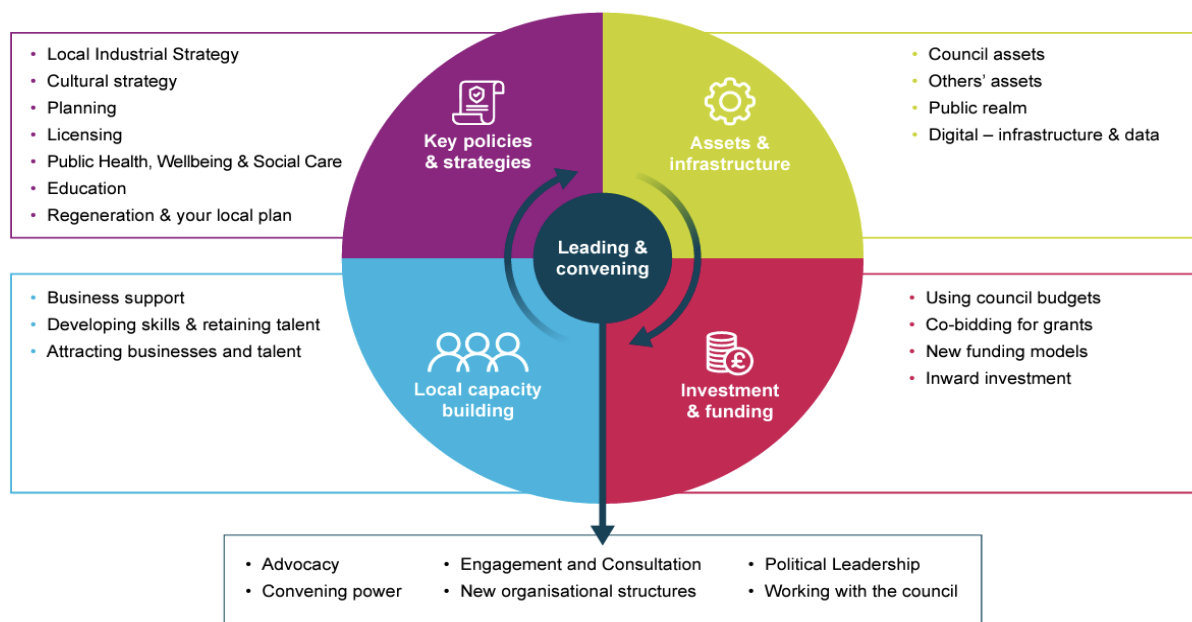- Political Leadership
- Working with the council

Figure 2: Local Levers for Change (LGA, 2020).

At the **community level**, experimental programmes are exploring opportunities for local residents to play a greater role in cultural decision making.

For example, the *Creative Civic Change* programme handed 15 communities across England control of over £200k each to invest in culture in their area without being prescriptive about what this includes. Delivered by Local Trust and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (partners in this open policy development programme), the initiative prioritised neighbourhoods in England that have not benefited from investment for these sectors and where and where there is limited social and cultural infrastructure.

Through the programme, these communities have been given the time, support and resources they needed to realise their own vision for the local area, "whether it's transforming public spaces, celebrating shared histories, or bringing people together" (Creative Civic Change, 2020, p.4).

Likewise, the Culture Collective programme in Scotland focuses on community engaged creative activity, supporting participatory approaches and projects designed and driven by the communities they are based in, where creative practitioners and communities work collaboratively to shape the future cultural life of Scotland.

Reflecting the complex governance arrangements that characterise the UK, activities associated with promoting local creative, cultural and heritage sectors have flourished in some places more than others, with notable variation in the scale and scope of provision evident across the UK.

A range of localised approaches to cultural decision making exist, despite the often confusing policy and funding arrangements sitting at the national, regional and sub-regional levels. Emergent regional efforts, particularly in the English context, appear to be having benefits for creative, cultural and heritage ecosystems in local areas though more work is needed to measure and analyse their impact. There also appears to be potential in co-design and co-delivery models, which engage a range of sectoral partners and local citizens in developing creative, cultural and heritage programmes at the local level.

Policy innovation at the local level

Our review has surfaced a variety of mechanisms that have been proposed or deployed to support local decision making associated with the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem at the local level. These interventions can broadly be characterised as collaborative in nature. Emphasis is given to bringing multiple stakeholders together; engaging established local leaders; leveraging existing powers; and utilising co-production processes to activate local assets and networks. This way of working is intended to foster closer relationships between local governments, arm's length bodies, cultural organisations, as well as citizens and local communities. Key policy innovations identified in the literature are set out below.

Cultural Compacts

A recommendation emanating from the *Cultural Cities Enquiry* (2019), Cultural Compacts aim to bring together local partners with a shared interest in maximising the civic role of culture within a place, including businesses (inside and outside traditional DCMS subsectors), universities, the NHS, local authorities, and the cultural sector.

As described in the *Cultural Cities Enquiry* report (2019, p.13), the purpose of Cultural Compacts is to "support collective, coordinated action to grow and sustain the cultural ecosystem in the city, aligning activity and funding, and leveraging additional human, financial and property resources".

Cultural Compacts offer a model for structuring the strategic coordination of local stakeholders to ensure that activities align with local economic and social development plans and promote a shared understanding of each city's locally distinctive assets and priorities.

In 2019, the DCMS and ACE funded the creation of 20 new Cultural Compacts across England. Early progress suggests that this initiative has successfully helped to make a difference in some places, with partnerships able to "generate new visions and ambitions for the cultural sector…position culture more prominently in local agendas, formulate collective plans and build a wider base of support" (Arts Council England, 2020, p.1; see also Culture Commons, 2022, pp.37-38).

Creative clusters, microclusters and corridors

Over recent years there has been growing interest in how the 'clustering' of creative businesses and workers in particular parts of the country can be nurtured and harnessed to promote economic growth (NESTA, 2018; DCMS, 2023; Siepel et al., 2023, p.4; etc.). The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre have developed this thinking in recent years, identifying a series of clustering effects at a variety of special levels, including:

- **Creative clusters** typically describe 'travel to work area' geographies where it is proposed there is sufficient ecosystem agglomeration to warrant and support investment in research, development and innovation, skills development and give creative firms access to finance. Research by Nesta (2016) has identified large established creative clusters based in cities like London, Oxford, Bristol, Newcastle and Edinburgh. Two 'creative clusters' - Manchester and Sheffield - are also part of this open policy development programme.

- **Microclusters** describe much smaller areas – such as streets, neighbourhoods, and individual towns – that can exist outside of the larger areas normally identified as creative clusters. These 'microclusters' of geographically concentrated creative firms make up an important element of the UK's creative geography. However, they can face several significant barriers to growth - including poor access to external finance and workforce pipeline (Siepel et al., 2020; Siepel et al., 2021).

- **Creative corridors,** meanwhile, offer up proposals to 'join up' dispersed clusters and microclusters to coordinate and ease competition over resources (including access to finance and skills). These 'creative corridors' are hoped in turn to generate new agglomeration economies beyond what a single cluster might be able to achieve independently (Siepel et al., 2023, p.36).

Case study: *Future Screens NI*

Future Screens NI (FSNI) is one of nine 'creative clusters' funded through the *AHRC/Industrial Challenge Strategy Fund*. The focus of FSNI, like the other eight clusters established across the UK, is primarily on growth in the creative industries through investment in research and development. However, evidence suggests that FSNI has also had a notable impact on the social and cultural life of Northern Ireland by helping to address aspects of social and cultural dysfunction caused by the dual legacies of economic peripherality and thirty years of political conflict (Moore, 2021).

Through the Covid-19 pandemic FSNI became a focal point for dialogue with Northern Ireland's Department for Communities, with FSNI gaining representation on key advisory groups working with the department. Subsequently, FSNI have developed a strategy focused on (1) enabling more direct partnerships with key policymaking bodies (including Arts Council Northern Ireland); (2) lobbying for the creative industries sector to be represented formally on policy and decision-making bodies in the Northern Irish Assembly; (3) emphasising the need for collaborative strategies in a region where notions of social and cultural identity are deeply contested; and (4) rethinking FSNI funding structures to allow rapid and direct intervention in community initiatives that can promote the creative industries in under-represented areas (Moore, 2021).

Case study: Proposal for a *Northern Creative Corridor*

A recent report by the RSA (2023) (partners in the open policy development programme) has proposed developing a Creative Corridor in the North of England, connecting creative industries across the region through coordinated regional strategies and networks.

Creative industries in this region are more dispersed, and grow more slowly, than those in London and the South-East. A coordinated plan to connect existing clusters could help to leverage existing strengths more effectively while also protecting local specialisms. A *Northern Creative Corridor* could also help to improve access to skills and finance and drive innovation and employment across the region. Such coordination could add as much as £10 billion in GVA to the economy and double the size of the Creative Industries sector in the North, strengthening the UK's wider network of creative hubs.

Leveraging existing powers and budgets to innovate

At both local and city-regional levels, this review has revealed the various ways in which subnational governments have developed dedicated cultural strategies for the promotion of creative, cultural and heritage ecosystems in their areas. It is notable that some sub national governments are using their formal powers in policy areas such as skills or strategic investment to leverage support for culture, where their responsibility for policymaking may be less formalised. This suggests there is already a level of appetite within subnational governments to find novel ways to develop their place-based creative, cultural and heritage ecosystems whether they have formalised competencies over them or not.

> **Case study:** *Local council planning powers that can already support the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem.*
>
> *Section 106* funding, the contributions sought from developers to support the costs of local infrastructure, have been used to fund a theatre in London, *New Diorama*. The developer in question, British Land, has now recognised that the theatre is a huge benefit to the area and is continuing to provide Section 106 contributions after the end of their initial agreement because of the theatre's success in driving footfall to the local area (LGA, 2020).

Case study: Greater Manchester Culture Strategy (2018-2024)

In April 2019, Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) published its first culture strategy, *Grown in Greater Manchester, Known Around The World*. The strategy comprised three key priorities: (1) Create the conditions for creativity to flourish; (2) Enrich the lives of all our people through engagement with the culture and heritage of Greater Manchester; and (3) Celebrate, protect and develop Greater Manchester's unique culture, heritage strengths, assets, and ecology.

Over the last five years, GMCA has worked to deliver on these priorities through a variety of different activities, demonstrating the Combined Authority's capacity to leverage a suite of devolved powers and funding to support local culture in a variety of ways. This includes:

- A Greater Manchester *Culture Fund*, which has supported 40 organisations across the city-region.
- The *Great Places* funding scheme, provided by Arts Council England and National Heritage Lottery Fund, to establish new collaborations between the cultural, voluntary and health sectors and explore new ways to improve the health and wellbeing of residents.
- The Greater Manchester *Town of Culture* programme. Bury became GM's first *Town of Culture* in 2020, with a £50,000 award to support activity in the town centre.
- *Creative Improvement Districts* (CIDs) piloted in Oldham, Wigan, Leigh, and Stockport, with an aim to drive local regeneration by supporting the cultural, creative, and night-time economy. (See 'Creative Improvement Districts', Culture Commons, 2022)
- *Greater Manchester Music Commission*, designed to bring together industry experts to advise the Mayor of Greater Manchester on how to best support music in Greater Manchester.
- GMCA has also co-invested and supported a number of strategically important events and projects that have brought millions of pounds into Greater Manchester.

As a result, between 2018 and 2024, GMCA has increased its own investment in culture by 40% and has found a subsequent increase in engagements in cultural activities amongst citizens of 53% (GMCA, 2024).

Case study: Mayor of London's Culture Strategy

Recognising that London's creative industries generate £47 billion to the economy and one in six jobs in London are in the creative economy, the Mayor of London's Culture Strategy (2018) outlines how mayoral powers and competencies, as well as the wider resources available to the Greater London Authority, will be used to provide additional support for culture in the capital. The Mayor's vision and priorities for culture are to be realised through a variety of projects and programmes, including:

- A *London Borough of Culture* programme, with the first two winning boroughs (Waltham Forest and Brent) receiving £1.35 million each from the Mayor to shine a spotlight on the hidden gems and unique character of areas across the city.
- *Culture Seeds*, a new £1 million, London wide, funding programme offering micro-grants to support community-led cultural projects in every single borough.
- *Young Londoners Fund*, a £45 million fund to help young people fulfil their potential, including through harnessing their creativity.
- Support for the *Cultural Inclusion Manifesto*, which promotes equal access to cultural and arts opportunities for children and young people with disabilities.
- Continued funding for a range of festivals and events, with an emphasis on more community involvement, increasing quality, raising profile and improving volunteering.
- Investment of £7 million to establish the capital's first *Creative Enterprise Zones*, with further support to provide affordable workspaces, enterprise and skills support, pro-culture *Local Plans* and policies, and business rates relief for creative enterprises.
- *The London Curriculum* uses the city itself to bring lessons to life, with free teaching resources provided through collaboration with over 80 cultural organisations.
- *The London Music Fund*, an annual fund of £300,000 to help the capital's young musicians to practise their talent and progress.
- The creative industries are a core area within the *Skills for Londoners Strategy*.

Co-production

Co-production, the "process of bringing together stakeholders with different yet relevant expertise to address a shared problem or concern" (Durose et al, 2024, p.1) is an increasingly prevalent concept in debates about public sector reform. It is therefore not surprising that some local authorities have sought to co-produce policy associated with

the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem with the public and local stakeholders. For example, Warren et. al.'s (2018) study explores the value and benefits of community-driven cultural activities using Birmingham city as a case study. This research highlights the importance of "deliberative approaches" to local cultural development as they provide a catalyst for social cohesion in a highly diverse urban setting. In particular, the paper argues that 'ownership' of cultural projects, underpinned by good local governance, can successfully stimulate transformative outcomes at the neighbourhood level.

Responsive local governance is also the theme of Cunningham. et al's (2021) study of different cultural and creative hotspots in Australia. There are key lessons from this comparative research with examples drawn from different parts of Australia such as Cairns, a small city leading a successful shift to prioritise local needs over visitor focus and integrating cultural institutions into wider infrastructural ecology supporting tourism. The research also explores how local governments faced with complex governance can still implement effective cultural policies, matched with a policy ambition and effective cultural asset management, "as local governments adopt cultural facilitation as a place-making strategy, a lever for local development, and acting as 'brokers and enablers', connecting across silos to encourage interactions in situ" (Cunningham. et al, 2021 p.772).

Case study: Collaboration at the heart of the Mayor of London's *Borough of Culture* programme

London Borough of Culture programme has been running since 2017, with Waltham Forest, Brent, Lewisham and Croydon, having all previously held this position. Wandsworth and Haringey have now successfully bid to be the London Borough of Culture in 2025 and 2027, respectively. A key part of the bidding criteria is for applicants to demonstrate how they are using co-production to design their cultural programmes and activities. Outcomes of the programme and legacies to note across participating councils so far include:

- Increased visitor attractions and attendance e.g. over 500,000 visits to 1,000+ events and activities (Waltham Forest *London Borough of Culture*, 2019).
- A yearly *Brent Art Biennial* and a new bi-annual music event as a legacy of the *London Borough of Brent* (metrolandcultures.com, 2024).
- Enhanced partnership working with local businesses and organisations. An example includes the *London Borough of Lewisham* and Goldsmiths University collaboration to create *In Living Memory* cultural initiative to "unearth lost or untold stories that painted a new more diverse history of the borough - as told by its residents" (Goldsmiths University website, 2024).

Case study: The *Culture Collective* programme in Scotland, driven by community participation.

The *Culture Collective* is a network of 26 participatory arts projects, shaped by local communities alongside artists and creative organisations, and funded by Scottish Government emergency COVID-19 funds through Creative Scotland (£10.2 million). The projects focused on community engaged creative activity, supporting participatory approaches and projects designed and driven by the communities they are based in, where creative practitioners and communities work collaboratively to shape the future cultural life of Scotland.

The *Culture Collective* programme helped to create 493 roles and employment opportunities across the 26 projects (Queen Margaret University, 2023). In addition, an evaluation of the programme found evidence that it has supported a range of positive impacts, including:

- Enhanced recruitment processes and fair work practices.
- New, broader partnerships and connections for arts organisations and practitioners.
- A bridge for emerging practitioners into long term careers.
- Development of skills, expertise, experience and practice for practitioners at all career stages.
- New opportunities for organisations to connect with local communities and groups.
- Consolidation of organisations' places in their communities.
- Empowered community voices, confidence and ownership of space.
- Pathways for minority community members to be represented.
- Embedding creative voices in strategic development and locality planning.

Research on local government support for the local creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem views co-design as an important enabler of growth and sustainability within these sectors. Fazlagić et. al (2020) developed a useful conceptual framework to design better policy interventions at the local level. The study's evaluation tool measures the effectiveness of local government in promoting culture and creative industries based on four key areas: investment perspective, the good governance perspective, the citizens' perspective, and the business climate and creative class perspective (see Figure 3). Having meaningful cooperation between local government and local creative sectors is viewed as a vital component, alongside funding local innovations and entrepreneurship and campaigning at the national level to champion central government funding for these sectors.
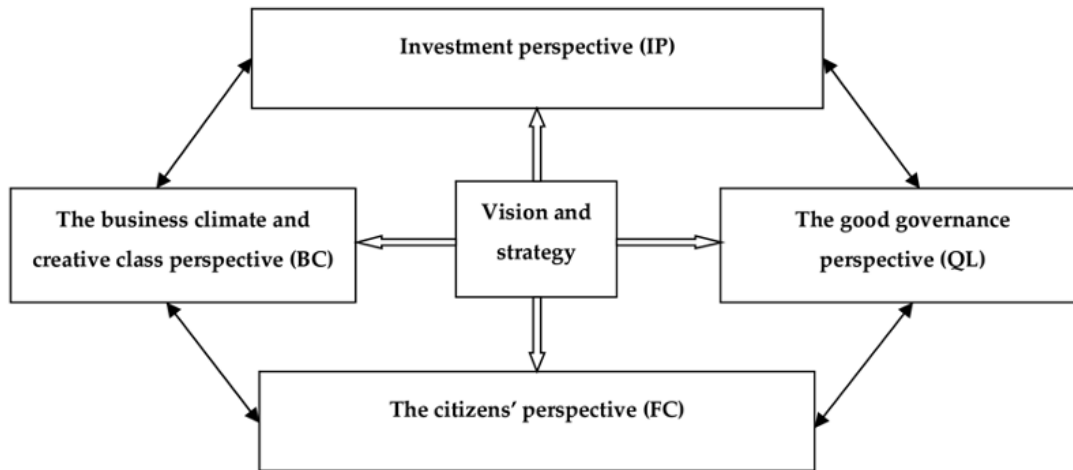
Figure 3: A sustainable development model for counties (Fazlagić et al., 2020 p.13).

In summary, there is ample evidence of localised solutions developed out of existing powers and funding pulled from different sources with examples of high-quality collaboration already taking place. It appears from the examples we touch on in this paper that, in addition to additional funding, there are also significant benefits associated with the development of more effective leadership and a willingness to collaborate with multiple stakeholders. A mixture of the right policies and adequate incentives appear to play a significant role.

In the next section, we look at evidence on the challenges faced by subnational government in pursuing local cultural decision making.

Barriers to localised delivery

Whilst there is evidence of subnational governments developing innovative ways to provide policy support to the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem, there are several barriers that risk undermining the role that local policymakers could play in nurturing them further.

Impact of austerity

Creative, cultural and heritage services supported by local authorities have been deeply impacted by the budget cuts imposed by the last government. In England alone, the total spending power of local authorities fell by 26% between 2010/11 and 2020/21 (National Audit Office, 2021). The 2024 *State of Local Government Finance* report produced by the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), which anonymously surveyed senior local council leaders, found that two-thirds were cutting services, with parks, leisure facilities, arts and culture at the top of the list (2024). In addition, local authorities such as Birmingham City Council (which in 2023 issued a section 114 notice, effectively declaring bankruptcy) are prioritising cuts to their creative, cultural and heritage infrastructures as part of a wider £300m savings programme (BBC, 2024).

A similar story emerges for the devolved nations with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) in Scotland decrying the shortfall in funding coming from the national level. COSLA points to 2023/24 council spending plans set by the Scottish Government which could mean cuts to cultural services of around £40m, (2023).

Equally, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) also highlights that creative, cultural and heritage services having been affected by austerity measures, with spending on culture and recreation falling by 42% between 2009/10 and 2017/18 (WLGA, 2018), (see also Figure 4).

Service spend change since 2009-10

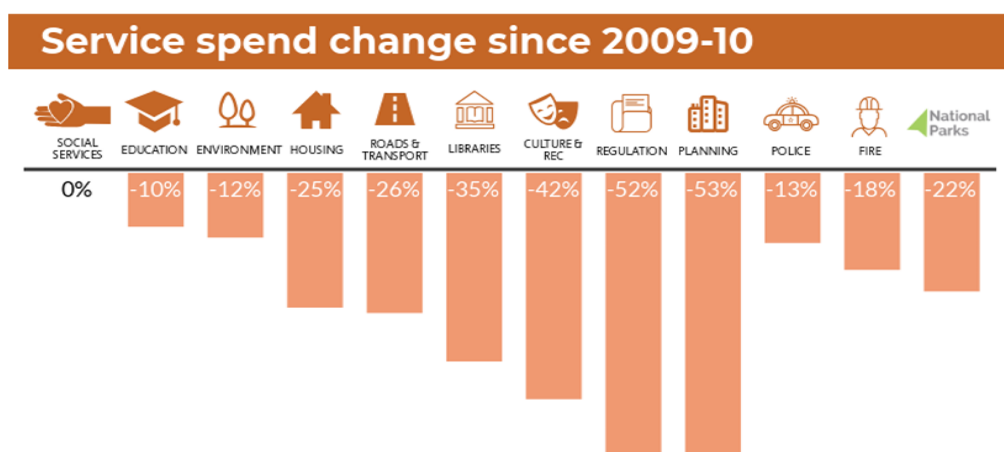| SOCIAL SERVICES	EDUCATION	ENVIRONMENT	HOUSING	ROADS & TRANSPORT	LIBRARIES	CULTURE & REC	REGULATION	PLANNING	POLICE	FIRE	National Parks
0%	-10%	-12%	-25%	-26%	-35%	-42%	-52%	-53%	-13%	-18%	-22%

Figure 4: Service spend change since 2009-10 (Welsh Local Government Association, 2018, p.5).

More broadly, Fahy et. al have (2023) highlighted the "gradual abandonment of place-centred policies at the local level, particularly in areas with higher need" (Fahy et. al 2023, p.12), as well as national differences in the effects of austerity on local governments across the UK. For example, local authorities with the largest reductions in expenditure are primarily found in Wales and parts of England, such as the North and in London boroughs. In England, the annual reduction in budget was greatest for local authorities in the most deprived quintile. This has implications for the level of resources available for local governments to invest in culture and contributes to the varying landscape of provision and access to cultural opportunities across the country. The Local Government Association (LGA) (partners in this open policy development programme) has echoed some of the concerns raised while also highlighting the benefits of investment in culture by local authorities (see figure 5).

£1.1 billion

The amount local government invests directly in cultural services each year in England[4]

23%

The additional turnover supported in the wider economy for every £1 of turnover in arts and culture[5]

£1.23

£115.9 billion

Contribution of the creative industries to the UK in 2019[6]

£115.9 billion

ADMIT ONE

700

The number of creative industry micro clusters across the country[7]

Figure 5: Cornerstones of Culture (Commission on Culture and Local Government, 2022, p.1

Austerity measures have derailed some of the developments in creative, cultural and heritage policy interventions in local places, and has meant that subregional governments have necessarily prioritised the delivery of core statutory services. Creative, cultural and heritage services remain among the most impacted when councils are forced to make efficiency savings, undermining interventions as well as institutional capacity to deliver support for cultural, creative and heritage programmes.

Additional policy challenges

In addition to the impact of austerity measures, wider policy changes have also negatively affected the cultural and creative sectors over recent years.

For example, Swords et. al (2023) reviewed UK spatial policy development to support creative industries pointing out notable milestones. They highlighted the 2012 "bonfire of the quangos", which saw several non-government public bodies axed as part of wider public sector spending cuts and reforms introduced under the 2010 Coalition Government, and directly impacted a number of the arm's-length bodies responsible for arts and culture development. By the end of the decade, the policy infrastructure "was weaker, places had to compete for money to a much greater extent and there was a narrower emphasis on what the creative industries were for, namely, economic growth" (Swords et. al, 2023 p.182). The study calls for targeted interventions at the point of need, driven by local priorities, supported by adequate funding.

Meanwhile, in 2021, the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre convened an industry panel made up of creative industries from across the UK. This highlighted local variations in support for creative industries, further supporting the 'postcode lottery' findings from Swords et al.'s study (MacFarlane, 2023). Access to finance at the local level has also been considered a challenge, with bureaucratic public procurement practices often viewed as a barrier for those within creative industries (e.g. Easton and Burger, 2020). This underlines that localised policymaking is not necessarily a magic bullet and can even risk exacerbating disparities of services and access if mismanaged.

Conclusions

This integrated literature review has outlined both some of the opportunities and challenges facing the future of local cultural decision-making in the UK.

Devolution and a move towards increased local decision making to date has created a complex, multi-layered governance landscape, with a range of stakeholders at all levels playing a role in promoting the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem to varying degrees dependent on place.

As illustrated, a range of subnational governments are already demonstrating their capacity to leverage their powers and responsibilities in these policy areas. However, such innovations at the regional and local levels have so far largely centred on *coordinating* collaboration across stakeholders and promoting opportunities for greater strategic cooperation across the local creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem. Nonetheless, some local and combined authorities are showing that they can develop meaningful interventions that address wider policy priorities through creative, cultural and heritage activities, even without more formalised powers (e.g. through devolution deals) in these areas.

Critical barriers clearly remain, constrained local authority budgets are limiting investments in the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem, undermining institutional capacity to deliver effective support in place. These realities seem to manifest in a more pronounced way in areas where there are already low levels of infrastructure for these associated sectors.

Whilst further devolution of powers, responsibilities and resources may not be a 'magic bullet' for some areas, the evidence we have amassed suggests that there is growing appetite, and understood potential, for subnational governments to play a strategic role in unlocking economic and social benefits associated with a thriving creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem. However, to deliver on this potential, it will be important to understand how activity can be effective in an increasingly complex, multiscale governance landscape.

Whilst further research is required to fully evaluate the impact that various local government policy innovations are having in this these policy areas, the available literature suggests that the capacity of subnational government to coordinate between and across stakeholders may be integral to their future flourishing.

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