

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK & CULTURE COMMONS

Perspectives on cultural devolution from within the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem

INSIGHT PAPER

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Published as part of
**the future of
local cultural
decision making**

An open policy development programme
led by Culture Commons and Partners



Aug 2024

Table of Contents

Why Conversations?.....	7
Do we understand each other?	8
Does Devolution mean 'bottom up'?	12
The paradoxes of 'cultural devolution'	14
Despite the paradoxes... ..	16
Critical issues for a new policy agenda for Cultural Devolution	18

This Insight Paper was produced by the **University of Warwick** as part of **'the future of local cultural decision making'** - an open policy development programme led by **Culture Commons** on behalf of a UK-wide consortium of partners.

Abstract

This short Insight Paper began as a series of conversations with key professionals, as a preliminary to researching the Discussion Paper entitled 'Surveying the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem of the West Midlands'¹ and a second called 'A role for Cultural Rights in local decision making?'²

Keywords

devolution; cultural devolution; cultural democracy

¹ [Surveying the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem in the West Midlands \(culturecommons.uk\)](http://culturecommons.uk)

² [A role for Cultural Rights in local cultural decision making? \(culturecommons.uk\)](http://culturecommons.uk)

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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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To cite this paper, please use:

‘Perspectives on cultural devolution from within the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem’, Jonathan Vickery for Culture Commons, August 2024



Why Conversations?

A general feature of any form of devolution is the decentralisation of power: this usually means a smaller-scale field of operations for policy implementation (i.e. the regional, the local), and a more targeted approach to policymaking, using more granular data and 'local knowledge' of the specific requirements of particular places and their people.

This can mean that effective decision making and policy involves more 'person to person' interaction, communication, greater flows of information, and a more socially connected knowledge of the spaces and places a devolved policymaking is targeting.

In short, we will need to have more conversations, listen more, exercise understanding and empathy, and do this regularly as the policy landscape changes at an ever greater pace.

These preliminary 'conversations' were not formal interviews, and have been used to extrapolate a range of broad views on devolved cultural policy. In terms of method, this was similar to using a 'focus group' - the interlocutors were asked general questions on the subject and aims of the research, and their responses are aggregated and serve to articulate a useful range of general views and perceptions on the subject.

None of the views and perceptions are attributed to an individual; the author of this report is responsible for the aggregation and articulation of the points below. It must not be assumed that all interlocutors agree with all points; this Insight Paper does not aim to define the terms of a detailed analysis, but more broadly to identify opportunities and effective pathways to a more devolved cultural policymaking.

Conversations were held online at various times between March 2023 and June 2024, and the interlocutors were Val Birchall (onetime Director of Culture at Coventry City Council Cultural); Andrew Erskine (Tom Fleming Cultural Consultancy); Clive Gillman (Creative Scotland; response by email); Jonathon Neelands (Warwick University / Coventry Culture Works); Anthony Ruck (Culture Central, Birmingham); Vishalakshi Roy (Earthen Lamp/ Warwick University); Salla Virman (WMCA); and Trevelyan Wright (Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton); Dr Jordi Baltà Portolés (European cultural consultant on local

cultural policies); Professor Milena Dragičević Šešić, Belgrade; and colleagues in the UNESCO Unitwin Network on Cultural Policies, Diversity and Social Transformation (managed by Dr Daniel Gad, University of Hildesheim).

The selection of the interlocutors was based on prior acquaintance and their known relevance to the issues concerning this collaborative open policy development programme. They all had different views and experiences of the issues at hand, and the narrative below is simply the author's way of realising the value of these conversations by addressing a central concern – the challenge of a devolution in cultural policy and decision making.

Do we understand each other?

I argue that political devolution will demand more communication, knowledge, and understanding in decision making and the implementation of policy at the local and regional levels.

A first issue, therefore, is the terms we use and the ways we refer to and discuss the subject – our 'lexicon'. Key terms are not simply words, but are often political or social with a certain measure of history and theory. As the subject of devolution now part of an established national politics, the basic lexicon of devolution is already something we share to some extent. But this is not necessarily the case with 'culture'.

The cultural sphere is an expanse of very different disciplines, fields of knowledge, and professional specialists. Moreover, cultural institutions tend to specialise in a particular genre or realm of culture, and where, like heritage or contemporary art as examples, operate within very different policy environments, economies of resource, and according to independent codes of professional practice. This is one difficulty with establishing a coherent lexicon for discussing culture and the cultural sphere, scene, sector, or ecosystem – defining common goals or frameworks when we all inhabit very different discourses and value systems.

For the UK, the term 'cultural policy' is not an established term of public policy, unlike France, Germany and the Nordic countries. With the appearance of the multi-disciplinary

Department of Culture, Media and Sport in 1997, it became more possible to see a 'cultural policy' as a term that simply aggregates all the areas of policy supported by a government ministry – from the arts policy to heritage policy to craft policy or design policy to media, and so forth. Moreover, with the increasing use of the term by UN-level treatise and the Council of Europe, one might think a common lexicon of culture and policy would have developed, but that is arguably not the case.

Nonetheless, for our Conversation interlocutors, the term 'cultural policies' is now used as a kind of metaphor or used as by the EU or UNESCO and their international treaties on culture. The academic journal, *The International Journal of Cultural Policy*, is the world's top journal for cultural policy research and based at the University of Warwick (published by Taylor and Francis), and originally inspired by Council of Europe developments in cultural policy, among other things; and the Centre for Cultural Policy Studies was established there in 1999, just after New Labour had become the first UK government to establish a comprehensive ministry of culture – the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) – making it possible to use the term 'cultural policy' as do European countries.

The significance of the New Labour era (1997-2010) still endures in conversations and general discussions on cultural policy, with both national and international interlocutors. New Labour's early years were littered with 'initiatives', many of which were left unresolved. They included the work of specialist policy actions teams and 'task forces', incursions into urban design, regional development, neighbourhood renewal, and community planning. New policy phrases swiftly emerged, from 'renaissance of the regions' to the arts in urban regeneration, local authority cultural strategies, social inclusion, with new demands defined by 'public service agreements', more rigorous reporting, monitoring and evaluation, targeted funding and continual reviewing for efficiency and effectiveness.

New Labour initiatives all contributed to a new 'profile' for policy and policymaking, as a more exciting activism or at least development-orientated endeavour. But, where New Labour supported political devolution, the centralisation of accountability mechanisms and Treasury oversight, made devolution constantly open to centralised diktat.

In terms of cultural policy, the DCMS 'Creative Industries Mapping' document in 1998 was to gain an international impact: it cast the performing arts within the new policy field of 'creative industries', followed by an updated publication in 2001, which included the arts. While the framework was economics (trade, output, and so on), the implication of a unified field of 'creative' activity (from computer software to theatre) was appealing to policymakers.

There were also other innovations – by 1998, a National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) had been established, later pioneering a pragmatic research and strategy-making approach to national policymaking; the National Lottery was becoming a force for cultural funding, increasingly with an emphasis on place and infrastructure; the Arts Council England, by 2006, was using the terms 'Combined Arts' and 'Interdisciplinary Arts' in their national policy frameworks, recognising a broader range of socially-engaged and applied artistic practice. And many other factors all amounted to effectively dissolving the established historical semantics of culture itself: 'Culture' was no longer the Fine Arts of university educated Shakespeare-conversant, grammatically-well spoken middle class aspiration – culture was trade, community and place, industry and enterprise, fashion and anything else that was recognised as 'creative'.

The conversations with experienced cultural professionals reveals, first of all, that while a lot has taken place since New Labour, there persists two axiomatic policy truths – that 'culture' is not one set of fixed coordinates ('change' is constitutive of culture, and policy itself changes culture); and, that 'culture' is not separate from social and economic realities, but *evolves within* these realities.

It's easy to take this for granted, but the general expectation that cultural policy must take account of both social and economic realities, was a New Labour innovation. Today, we expect 'cultural policy' to involve an explicit social dimension (for example, access to resources; facilities and urban infrastructure; participation and inclusion) as much as we do an economic dimension (from budgets, strategic management, financial planning, employment and HR). The question of 'quality', or of aesthetic value, or media controversies over 'But is it Art?', or of pop culture versus high culture, canons and collections, the narratives of European art history, are all no longer central or even concern most policy at all.

What is 'the Local'?

As one interlocutor noted, in a very short time, 'culture' has been wrested from the narratives and intellectual demands of European art history and philosophy, and positioned within a more pragmatic (if vague) notion of Cultural Democracy. And yet, while the cultural policy definition of 'cultural democracy' remains an unfinished project, there is no doubt that post-New Labour cultural policy involved a re-validation of the local – particularly neighbourhoods and communities, and city centres, or arts venues (like arts centres) that represented a place and its people.

Where once 'the local' was synonymous with the parochial (a realm aspiring artists would swiftly exit), the local is now host to a range of 'socially-engaged' art projects if not artistic enterprises. The phrase 'local people' is no longer a term of denigration; and while New Labour 'multiculturalism' is still contested, its values and norms still endure – cultural cooperation and exchange (what UNESCO would call 'interculturalism') is commonplace, as is the expectation that culture can address social issues or situations (has social agency; for example, today even regional or local museums possess the facility for assessing visitor experience in the context of a socially diverse populace, providing education for children or young people, maintain basic statistics on their 'audiences', and make cogent arguments to funders or stakeholders on their social benefit and even economic impact).

Nonetheless, for most conversation interlocutors, a question remains on the identity of 'the local' as a policy term, and the kinds of support local or even regional culture must expect from devolved government. Indeed, there is a question mark over the forms of governance that are required across the cultural sector, given the inherent diversity within the English regions (the social diversity between rural and urban alone, is huge).

Maintaining the specialist and professional-organisational dimension of culture, as balanced with the needs of local communities or places, is not something for which we possess obvious templates. Will devolution demand or make possible a different re-scaling of an arts organizations marketing, or programme, or understanding of its audience: or will it make no difference?

In devolved governance terms, the relation between the local, the regional and the national is not self-evident, particularly as national cultural funders and national standards and values of culture are overwhelmingly the dominant frame of reference. And as many local places might attest, 'culture' is more than the arts, heritage and crafts, and is increasingly exceeding the boundaries of policy altogether, particularly in relation to ethnic or religious, sub-cultural or young people, and even the expanding category of 'post-work' retirees or 'unable to work' people, of which there is a growing cohort.

As noted by one interlocutor, there is not enough sociological analysis of British culture – how culture is evolving, particularly in relation to demographics and population, and how this process can be shaped by policy. People 'live' locally, but do they expect culture to be local, and what does that mean?

A few interlocutors observed how the 'glocal' (the role of globalisation within the local, particularly for young people, and the pervasive presence of social media). Yet, globalisation itself is changing, and some older 'international' issues remain unresolved. For example, the role of Human Rights in regional or local culture is still a policy question, as is the few pieces of international law pertaining to culture – notably, the two principal UN conventions for cultural policy, the 2003 UN Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the 2005 UN Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (both managed by UNESCO).

In theory, local people or regional agencies representing culture, should be able to petition their government on how these conventions are being observed (or implemented); few people have heard of them. There is an almost complete lack of dialogue between local (or place-based) cultural sector representatives and Government over the local implementation or realisation of these treaties.

Does Devolution mean 'bottom up'?

A few interlocutors remarked on the inherent conundrum of the popular policy cliché, the 'bottom up'. Cultural policy, both local and national, is still searching for ways of involving local people in decision making – the conundrum of 'cultural democracy' is yet to be resolved. But there is a greater conundrum – local democracy itself.

A devolutionary decentralisation of decision making and funding (as the New Labour era taught us) does not necessarily entail greater 'democracy'. Indeed, democracy has to be 're-invented' at every level (said one interlocutor). This is because, obviously, resources and administration will always be centrally coordinated at some level (even if only, a local authority), and so how local beneficiaries and their participation will be 'involved' in this, remains an open question (as voters, local citizens, beneficiaries, stakeholders, participants, collaborators, or we position and define a set of expectations for local people on the aims of devolution?).

The phrase 'bottom up' suggests that citizen involvement translates into a greater local value or more targeted impact; yet, it may translate into more limited aspirations, limited scale and expectations, in relation to a smaller more select set of people. Even so, the inherent contradiction within public policy – being both for, and on behalf of, the people – is usually managed at the level of delivery (in culture, by arts organisations in receipt of public funds, for whom 'involving' their publics is always a puzzle). But is this the most effective means of managing one of the central contradictions of democracy?

Most interlocutors were highly in favour of more devolution in cultural decision making, but are also convinced that new forms of governance will need to be innovated – to avoid an over-concentration of power (or perhaps just a 'policy-overload') in local authorities. In fact, given the paucity in statutory frameworks for broad political devolution itself, the very term devolution promises a level of local participation that is possibly not even practical.

For interlocutors with experience in local government, devolution needs to operate in both scope and scale: as scope, it must very swiftly invest in a capacity-building of capabilities in policy making and local administration of policy delivery, extending the realm of culture from the arts to a place-based force for development; and in scale, must expand by investing in the actual lives, productivity and potential of people and their immediate environment (of education, living and working).

What is not already devolved? The 'political economy of devolution' as it has evolved since New Labour and thereafter since the 2011 Localism Act, is not completely transparent in terms of how decisions are currently made and who makes them. Cultural

professionals are still asking 'what should be devolved' or what has already been devolved but not implemented or activated?

Interlocutors with an experienced view of national policymaking, pointed out how a growing framework of national non-negotiables (central Government commitments) is leaving less and less 'space' for a genuinely local decision making, and a recent preference for trans local or regional partnership frameworks can compromise a fully devolved cultural policy. What would it mean to have a fully localised cultural policy?

In one sense, the value of local arts organisations is to work in the space that local governance is unable to penetrate – the cultural geography of local life. But this is rarely systematic or pervasive in any given town or city. And arts organisations in receipt of public funds are usually bound to funding agreements that demand pre-defined procedures, standards, values and mechanisms of evaluation – where 'the local' is simply a smaller-scale version of the 'national' and crossed by the international.

The paradoxes of 'cultural devolution'

It remains a sociological reality that 'culture' is often understood to mean the arts and heritage, and to that extent is still bound up with education and social mobility and does not directly involve most local people or even the population at large.

How many 'local' art galleries or museums are there, and does this matter? Are 'local people' asking for more culture, and how?

'Culture', in one sense, can represent everyone and a common space to which everyone has a right, and yet, most cultural professionals will testify to how marginal culture is within public policy and how culture, in turn, struggles to become embedded in local life or a particular socio-economic environment outside the cultural realm.

And it remains the case that most cultural funding and policy-directed resource tends to service the most experienced, established or expensive of organisations and venues of culture, often high arts forms, like opera and theatre, their professionals, buildings and facilities.

While the classical order of aesthetic significance has dissolved (the historical genres and their hierarchy of value) the 'culture' that is funded remains largely artistic, historical, specialist and (notwithstanding New Labour's attempt at cultural democracy), is once-removed from the social realities of 'local people'. This, of course, is a central challenge of cultural policy, with no guarantee that devolution will suddenly change things. Indeed, the cultural institutions, organisations and actors in a given region, town or city, will remain the same (for the short term), whatever the devolved changes in funding. A devolved cultural policy, therefore, must be a 'development' policy – a future-oriented policy.

Since, New Labour, the 'strategy' format of cultural planning has become a dominant feature of cultural policy (strategy as a provisional, often organisation-specific, and a targeted problem-solving and measurable delivery action planning – and time-limited). While strategies, like project management, are seen as an ideologically neutral if not pragmatic tool for being organised and productive, the challenge of a regional public policy is greater – i.e. it involves the challenges of democracy itself in ensuring its people have representation and can participate.

Cultural policymaking, likewise, has a broader democratic aspiration (hence the commonplace expectation in promoting 'cultural democracy') and in doing this must involve 'development' (pathways to restructuring local place-based cultural life according to the demands of representation and participation).

Cultural policymaking requires an ongoing role for research – as knowledge is required where 'democracy' is never obvious, and many of our templates of public life (from public consultation to citizens rights) are now old and outmoded. How many towns or cities have 'mapped' or audited their cultural life, or have a basic analytical understanding of the socio-economic complexion of culture, its role in the development of their town or city, its impact and evolution in the next decades?

Local devolution can easily become a local (and provisional) form of 'strategy-making', which in turn can act as a practical delivery framework for national policy (policies conceived nationally, not within the particular complications of local places). Indeed, 'the local', as a unit in national political economy, is still an uncertain space: its unhappiness or social psychology (aspirations, vision, productivity), its fast changing social demographics

(young people; old people; unwell people), its sub-cultures, ethnic or religious diasporas, and what is still called the 'traditional working class' – are all the object of little sustained research attention.

The role of community centres, local interest groups, faith communities and councils, housing and residents' associations, and other less formalised groups, might all be future participants in a local governance. As one interlocutor stated, 'devolving to the local' does not simply result in an enhanced democracy: devolution can mean greater bureaucracy and expense, expenditure of time and policy work, overlapping jurisdictions and professional competencies. And democracy involves representation and participation, which are not, in fact, structural features of local culture or arts organisations. The cultural sector is perhaps notorious for its traditional forms of organisational management.

Government and governance (all over the world, it seems) is becoming more complicated and complex – particularly with increasing international regulation and compliance, security, internet and digital, and the huge breadth of rights-based protections. If this complexity is cascaded downwards, then devolution may mean that the regional and the local suffers from a surfeit of political bureaucracy, and the State itself (as symbolised by central government) will become more remote and unresponsive, all the while maintaining a necessary power (or threat) of intervention.

The paradox of New Labour – devolving delivery while maintaining decision-making diktat – remains a memory, and so regional and local governance may always seem provisional and generate political cynicism. Furthermore, national agencies like Arts Council England, may need to consider a new kind of coordinating role; the role of DCMS would need recalibration, and statutory frameworks for devolution would need a much clearer iteration than at present.

Despite the paradoxes...

There is much to support in the devolution of cultural policy decision making:

(i): 'Local cultural policy' is an increasingly recognised field of interest around Europe, and the subject of academic research studies as well as experiments by local authorities. Policy theory, models, cases and frameworks of practice are available online.

(ii): A devolution of policy and decision making suggests a new approach to (or at least an adaptation of) governance. 'Local cultural governance' is not a familiar phrase and so requires some policy research and public consultation (within cultural sectors and local authorities). Not all governance activities require funding, or are even necessary for devolution, but may just enhance the democratic processes that are expected within the devolutionary project. Indeed, a local debate on cultural governance may make existing cultural delivery agencies (funding arrangements, people, places and organisations) more responsive – more informed and targeted at local needs and development opportunities. Local governance may begin as a process of adaptation and grow into formal or informal alliances with interests in the interconnection of culture and local social-civic contexts. Devolution becomes less a 'system' change than an innovation in how delivery processes work in a given place.

(iii): Devolution can inspire and incentivise local cultural actors and agencies to increase their capabilities and perhaps change or radically reformulate their cultural or artistic aims. If a devolutionary framework is strong, however rudimentary, it can be used as a means of re-imagining a place-based role for an arts organisation or freelance artist. While the impacts of devolution should be specific to a place, cultural professionals should be briefed and prepared to respond, with the participatory means for making a local place a space for an engaged culture production.

(iv): An explicit cultural governance mechanism would allow for a capacity-building of partnerships for knowledge and research. Professionals, businesses, social workers, universities, consultancies, community workers, faith groups, may all have valuable data or local knowledge, and a local knowledge infrastructure would make up for the dearth of granular data on the changing complexion of regional and local life. Devolution will necessitate new kinds of knowledge and so new methodologies by which to track and comprehend the relation between the social and cultural economy of local life.

(v): Devolution may just aim for a smaller-scale, targeted and engaged cultural delivery, or envisage a more extensive aim in cultivating a sense of local 'ownership' for culture, even enfranchising local community, religious or other organisations as partners. There remains a lack of models for local participation in cultural delivery, maximising local resources or even 'latent' cultural resources (spaces, volunteers, even funds or sponsorship).

(vi): Most local places and even cities, there has been a decline in local media, the local press, and a sense of participation in a local public realm. Devolution can be a mechanism for reviving a 'politics of place' or sense that people can contribute to the ideas, aims and plans, that shape their environment. This would need to be calibrated to the actual participatory scope for contribution, and while a wide range of new digital tools and public consultation platforms exist, a greater sense of the shaping role of local views and perceptions is required.

Critical issues for a new policy agenda for Cultural Devolution

By way of balancing the positive expectations above with an anticipation of the challenges of devolution – there now follows 10 critical points forcefully made during the conversations. Some of these points will amplify issues already mentioned, but they all underscore the need for further research and a knowledge-based approach to governance innovation and cultural policy development.

1: Currently, national public policy decision-making can be more transparent than local decision-making; and all too often, the local is merely a lower-level iteration of a national decision. A reduction in the scale and number of people involved in decision-making does not, in itself, guarantee an enhanced transparency or democratic participation. Even so, a renewed sense of democracy could be born from local authorities willing to explore different processes of decision making in the context of participatory governance. The role of 'decision-making' in devolved policymaking must be the subject of some procedural innovation as well as monitoring.

2: There is little research and innovation in governance conducted by local authorities in the UK. While there are all kinds of new citizen assembly or consultation models, established participatory governance frameworks constructed bottom up (or in a laterally participatory way) are not the norm. Moreover, exploration and experimentation is slight – static models or templates often do not evolve with the fast evolving local life, and historical forms of local authority administration do not lend themselves to much evolution.

3: Market-based decision-making models (or 'neoliberal' ways of thinking) have permeated public life to the extent that our lexicon of strategic management is inexorably tied into the values that come with efficiency, performance, monetary cost and economic value. This has taken priority over qualitative values, aims, civic virtues, the common or public good. New frameworks of wellbeing and sustainability have to some extent facilitated a return of person-centred or common interest-based policy making, but much more attention needs to be paid to the qualitative dimension of local life and how its values can return.

4: A feature of neoliberal government has been to devolve 'liabilities' (i.e. aspects of public, social or cultural life that are de-valued in a market economy – social care, or the education of neurodiverse children are recent examples): devolved governance should maintain clear lines of responsibility between itself and national government, and strong channels of negotiation between it and central government. Public policymaking is embedded with assumptions of all kinds (a 'maximalist' approach to market-based activity and local economy, and a minimalist approach to local culture or community life). Neoliberal habits of mind will consistently demand that 'culture' contributes to the social and economic life of a place – but does not expect the social or economic to contribute to culture. Culture all too often is still cast as luxury, excess, leisure or privilege, and not labour or an equally productive and life-enhancing economy of non-monetary value. The policy theory of 'local economy' and public services needs to be reconstructed (to feature culture and its public roles). Cultural funding tends to be siloed and separated from the rest of the public realm, largely directed to professionals and organizations, and not capacity-building cultural capabilities in the population or across the public realm.

5: There are many national actors and agencies interjecting value into regional or local cultural life – for example, the Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) scheme was described by one interlocutor as a 'national solution to a local need', which, is not calibrated to any given dimension of a local economy or community. An analytic assessment on the multi-scalar workings of the cultural economy (or ecosystem), particularly on the relation between the national, regional and the local, will enable local decision making to more effectively calibrate policy to the specific configurations of organisations, programmes, audiences, local people and the local social geography.

6: There is little research on the dynamics and patterns of development that is 'local culture' – cultural behaviour, tastes, consumer culture and spending habits, leisure and enjoyment and how (if any) a cultural economy or cultural ecosystem could be said to exist. Few have granular data on local culture and few local authorities have a substantive understanding on how their cultural infrastructure needs will or can develop to meet a rapidly changing populace. To this, we may be reminded of the ambiguities generated by local authorities long since dispensing with terms like 'citizen' and referring to 'local people', 'ordinary people'; 'everyday life', street life, along with neologisms like trans-local, the hyperlocal, the glocal, and other terms that can only signify a lack of a stable framework and lexicon for referring to governance, democracy and the people.

7: In many local areas, religion or faith-based groups, community centres and community groups, civic associations and special interest groups, all play an important role in local cultural life. Their involvement in local governance could be part of an evolving local cultural democracy.

8: Within the process of devolution, policy mechanisms like pan-regional alliances, cultural 'corridors', or cross-regional partnership arrangements, do not necessarily play a role in capacity-building the local (indeed can avoid the local, or what is perceived to be the lower level of capability inherent to the local). Learning from European case studies in local governance may be instructive: in Germany, for example, the 'local' can be as professional, capable and industrially advanced as any other 'level' of society or economy. The UK's patterns of local and regional development have all too often depleted the resources of the local, ignored the local, or used the local simply as a labour source.

9: What research capability or resources exist to serve a devolved cultural policymaking? Local authorities often rely on national data or external research consultancies: these both have a role, but do not replace local research capability. Coventry is an example of local partnership of city council with two universities, generating innovative research. Not all that research can be used, as the city's facility for governance is not great. But this partnership stands as testament to the potential of local existing or latent resource for knowledge-based production. And 'knowledge' needs to take many forms: a pervasive scepticism on the nature of the 'evidence' used in Government policymaking – indeed, one interlocutor referred to 'policy-based evidence making' and the fact that policy will always be 'politics' as 'evidence' never interprets itself. Moreover, evidence does not

necessarily derive from research, or an actual knowledge-based engagement with a dynamic and evolving place. This is why the centre of Coventry's research partnership was the innovation of methodology. Local authorities have a low capacity for research, with little joined up thinking between research knowledge and decision-making, and so devolution offers a huge opportunity for a methodological and knowledge-based development.

10: Professional competencies are critical in how far devolution will work. Many places do not succeed either because their people are not equipped, motivated and incentivised, or they do not attract people with the capabilities that a new devolved development really needs. Many local authorities cannot attract suitably skilled and educated staff (or where certain capabilities are absent in regional or local labour markets). Research, policymaking, budget planning and project management skills, are not only in short supply, but local authorities find it difficult to afford such people. The organisational culture of local or regional governance needs a strategic re-think, and that must involve the cultural sector, and the potential for governance and cultural policy partnerships with universities.

Conversations with key professionals demonstrate the productivity of dialogue, discussion and consultation, and through knowledge and experience, articulate a set of key issues. Given the pace of change and conditions of urgency that a process of further devolution will face, setting out both aspirations and critical issues in advance will more constructively help define the most practical and worthwhile strategic goals.

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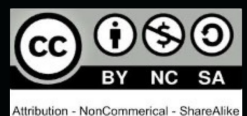
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Published as part of
**the future of
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decision making**

An open policy development programme
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