

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE & CULTURE COMMONS

Working together locally to support Tayside's creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem

INSIGHT PAPER

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Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| Background | 6 |
| Contributors | 8 |
| Implications for Policy | 14 |
| Heritage, history & landscape | 14 |
| Civic Practice | 15 |
| Inside out/outside in..... | 16 |
| An appetite for regional working..... | 17 |

This Insight Paper explores policy implications arising from a lunch and panel discussion for the creative, cultural and heritage sectors that took place on 11th June 2024 at the V&A in Dundee, Scotland.

The panel formed part of a two-day Insight Gathering visit to Dundee, hosted by University of Dundee with support from Culture Counts, associated with [‘the future local cultural decision making’](#) - an open policy development programme led by Culture Commons and a coalition of UK-wide partners.

In-keeping with an open and transparent approach of the programme, Culture Commons is publishing an Insight Paper after each Knowledge Exchange session. This Insight Paper will be formally reviewed as part of the growing evidence base that will inform the policymaking phase of the programme.

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Culture Commons bring the creative, cultural and heritage sectors together with the research community and policymakers to co-design new policy and influence decision making at the local, regional and national levels. We are leading **'the future of local cultural decision making'** open policy development programme.

You can find out more about us at www.culturecommons.uk

University of Dundee

University of Dundee is a university that holds social purpose, building on their long-standing values. They are not afraid to act purposively to make a real difference in the world. The primacy of social purpose was intrinsic in its founding principles and has evolved and grown as they continue to transform lives, locally and globally, working together as a community to deliver positive change. We will be "One Dundee".

The University of Dundee's impact on the world around us is enabled by the intensity of its focus in research, education, and engagement. In the coming decades, this triple intensity will be further enhanced across the university. The changes they make will ensure that the legacy passed on will be strong, vibrant, and relevant to current and future challenges we all will face.

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, the creative and cultural sectors, arm's length bodies, grant giving bodies and leading research institutions.

Together, the partners 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](#).

Open Policymaking

'The future of local cultural decision making' is an open policy development programme based on a not-for-profit and collaborative partnership model.

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.

Disclaimer

The views and interpretations expressed in this publication lie solely with the authors and those they are attributed to and may not be shared by Culture Commons or ‘the future of local cultural decision making’ open policy development programme partners and associates.

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

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Background

'the future of local cultural decision making' open policy development programme partners are particularly interested to better understand how pan-regional governance and delivery mechanisms might be developed to support the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem.

We know that there is much work already taking place across the UK that explicitly brings our sectors together over larger geographical areas: we explore some of these examples in an Insight Paper on 'pan-regional cultural decision making' from earlier in the programme.¹

As part of our ongoing Insight Gathering activities in Scotland, **Culture Commons** and our Scottish programme partners **Culture Counts** and **University of Dundee**, hosted a special lunch and panel discussion with leaders from the creative, cultural and heritage sectors across Tayside & Fife areas on 11th June 2024 at the V&A Dundee as part of two day 'Insight Gathering' visit to the region.

The aim of the session was to explore if, how and to what extent existing infrastructures across the region might be brought together in a more concerted way. This session brought forward some valuable insights that we wanted capture as part of the open policy development process.

Our thanks go to **Emma Preston**, Cultural Projects Manager at University of Dundee for facilitating the full two day visit. We would also like to thank **Dr Susan Mains** for making contributions to the final draft of this Insight Paper.

The agenda for the activity was as follows:

| Time | Item | Contributor |
|-------|---------------------|--|
| 13:30 | Welcoming words | Cllr Lyn Short Maryfield Ward, Dundee City Council Spokesperson for Culture, Sport & History Trevor MacFarlane FRSA Director of Culture Commons Introduction and background to programme |
| 13:40 | Panel introductions | Chaired by Professor. Anita Taylor Dean of Duncan and Jordanstone, University of Dundee) |

¹ <https://www.culturecommons.uk/publications/pan-regional-cultural-decision-making>

| | | |
|-------|---|---|
| | | <p>Panellists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leonie Bell - Director, V&A Dundee • Helen Smout - Chief Executive, Culture Perth & Kinross • Claire Dow - Culture Strategy Lead Officer, Leisure & Culture Dundee • Heather Stuart - Chief Executive, On Fife |
| 13:50 | <p>Section 1 Working together to support the local creative, culture & heritage ecosystem</p> | <p>All Panellists</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What would you say is one unique quality about the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem in your local area? 2. How is your organisation engaging with local partners - including involving local citizens - to support the creative, cultural and heritage life of your area? 3. How do you think we can engage local communities to have more of a say in local creative and cultural activity? |
| 14:15 | <p>Section 2 Working together to support the regional creative, culture and heritage ecosystem</p> | <p>All Panellists</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. How do you think Tayside's creative, cultural and heritage sector can work together across the region to support each other locally? How can your organisation play a part in this? 5. What mechanisms and or/support might facilitate this work? |
| 14:35 | Q&A | All participants and attendees |
| 15:00 | Close | |

Contributors

Duncan and Jordanstone, University of Dundee

Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design (DJCAD) is the design school within the University of Dundee. World-renowned for high quality teaching and research, the school has trained globally recognised artists and designers. Turner Prize winner Susan Philipsz, designers David Salariya and Russ Nicholson, film directors David Mackenzie and Clio Barnard, and photographer Albert Watson are among those who have studied at the Perth Road institution.

DJCAD was founded in 1909, when James Duncan of Jordanstone and Drumfork bequeathed a large sum of money from his estate to found a school of industrial art in Dundee. The College did not become entirely independent of the Institute of Technology (now the University of Abertay) until 1975. It was then officially renamed Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and remained independent until 1994, when it became part of the University of Dundee².

Professor Anita Taylor

Professor Anita Taylor is Dean of Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design at the University of Dundee. Anita is the founding Director of the foremost annual drawing exhibition in the UK, the Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize (since 1994), and Drawing Projects UK, a public-facing initiative dedicated to drawing (since 2009). She has extensive teaching, research, peer and expert review, and her academic leadership experience includes: Executive Dean of Bath School of Art and Design at Bath Spa University; Director & Chief Executive Officer, National Art School in Sydney, Australia; Dean of Wimbledon College of Art, University of the Arts London (UAL); Director, The Research Centre for Drawing at UAL; and Vice Principal of Wimbledon School of Art.

² See <https://www.dundee.ac.uk/stories/rich-and-creative-history-duncan-jordanstone-college-art-design>

V&A Dundee

The **V&A Dundee** is the first ever dedicated design museum in Scotland and the first of a new series of design museums to open outside London. With Scottish Government as the principal funder, The V&A operates as an independent charitable organisation under Design Dundee Limited in partnership with V&A, Dundee City Council, the University of Dundee, Abertay University and Scottish Enterprise. As an organisation in Dundee, the V&A aims to "*champion design and designers and... share the infinite possibilities they bring as catalysts of creativity and change.*"³

The V&A waterside location is now an iconic destination in Scotland. Designed by architect [Kengo Kuma](#), the project became part of Dundee City Council's 30 year £1.6 billion [waterfront regeneration project](#) that started as a vision in 2001 to restore the city centre relationship with the city's historical docklands.

In September 2023, V&A celebrated five years since its opening, reporting that in this time the organisation attracted 1,700,000 visits (including the global TV sensation *Succession*) and generated £109 million for Dundee's economy⁴.

Leonie Bell, Director

Leonie is responsible for ensuring that V&A Dundee continues to grow and evolve as a world-class design museum, for deepening the museum's social and civic reach and for welcoming visitors from around the world. Leonie is also an Honorary Professor of Design at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee, a Design Economy Ambassador for the Design Council, a member of the Bonnetmakers Craft, one of the Nine Incorporated Trades of Dundee and a trustee of the Edinburgh International Festival.

³ <https://www.vam.ac.uk/dundee/info/vision-and-mission>

⁴ BOP Consultancy, [V&A Dundee: An Impact Study](#)

Culture Perth and Kinross

Culture Perth & Kinross (CPK) are an Arm's length External organisation (ALEO) established as a charitable trust in 2016 to deliver cultural services, including galleries, museums, libraries across Perth and Kinross.

CPK recently partnered with the Perth & Kinross Council on the delivery of the [Perth Museum](#) - a £27 million capital project to transform the former City Hall in the centre of Perth into a globally significant museum and new home for the [Stone of Destiny](#), which is returning to Perthshire for the first time in more than 700 years. The project received £10 million from UK Government as part of the Tay Regions City Deal.

At the end of 2023, CPK and the council published [Perth and Kinross Culture Strategy 2023-2028](#). As a designated UNESCO City of Craft and Folk Art, the city of Perth (awarded status in 2012) plays a huge role in a predominately rural authority. The plan recognises that 150,000 people work in creative industries in the area, but only 8.3% of people in more socially-economically deprived communities participate in culture⁵.

Helen Smout, Chief Executive

Helen Smout has been Chief Executive of Culture Perth and Kinross, a charitable trust and ALEO since its launch in 2016. She's dedicated her career to working as a collaborative leader in across Perth and Kinross - most recently with Perth and Kinross Council on the development and delivery of the Perth Museum a £27M capital project to transform the former City Hall in the centre of Perth into a globally significant museum and new home for the Stone of Destiny, which is returning to Perthshire for the first time in more than 700 years.

⁵ [Perth & Kinross Culture Strategy](#). p23

Leisure and Culture Dundee

Leisure and Culture Dundee (LCD) is a charitable trust ALEO delivering leisure and services for Dundee City Council, including sports facilities, libraries, museums and sector support activity since 2011.

Dundee is a historic centre of industry, creativity and design. In 2014, Dundee became the UK's only UNESCO [City of Design](#). With an industrial history in Jute production, the city's family run [DC Thompson](#) publishing house grew the international reputation of the city throughout the twentieth century (thanks to the help of the Beano) while [Rockstar Games](#) breakaway 'Grand Theft Audio' established the city as a Gaming hub in the twenty first.

Between 2018-2024 Dundee hosted one of AHRC's Creative Industries Clusters, InGame. A partnership of Abertay University, University of Dundee, University of St Andrews, [InGame](#) pioneered collaborative R&D in the video game industry; delivering 177 industry collaborations, upskilled 2,283 professionals and stimulated £11.5 million in industry co-investment in just 5 years of operation⁶.

Claire Dow, Culture Strategy Lead Officer

Claire is currently the Culture Strategy lead officer for Dundee's ALEO 'Leisure and Culture Dundee' on a secondment from City Development in Dundee City Council where she leads the Events Team. Claire's current work in local government, follows a career in performing arts spanning creative producing, talent development, management and consultancy roles for a variety of companies. Claire was Creative Scotland's Clore Fellow for 2014-15, an Associate Producer with Dundee Rep Theatre & Strategic Consultant for Stellar Quines Theatre Company.

⁶ See, <https://innovationforgames.com/about-ingame/>

On Fife

Fife Cultural Trust operating as On Fife are the ALEO responsible for 42 cultural venues across Fife; including Libraries, Arts, Museums, Galleries, Archives, Theatres and Creative Development Services on behalf of Fife Council with a view to ensuring the long-term sustainability of these services.

In 2023, On Fife completed a major capital refurbishment of the [Adam Smith Theatre](#) in Kirkcaldy (originally opened in 1899 by Andrew Carnegie). In order to ensure the space stays connected to and engaged with the community, On Fife and [Nomad RDC](#) have launched '[RELEVANT](#)' - "a creative consultation project involving staff, key stakeholder groups and the wider community working collaboratively with OnFife to explore the building's spaces and services"⁷.

Fife encompasses several different regions, including a semi-industrial south and a more rural north. It is home to the world-famous Golf open at St Andrews and is the ancestral home of Scottish monarchs. Regionally, Fife is in close proximity to both Edinburgh and Tayside - it is part of both City Region deals for [Edinburgh and South East Scotland](#) and the [Tayside Cities Regional Deal](#) area.

Heather Stuart, Chief Executive

Heather Stuart has held a range of senior positions establishing and leading large and complex organisations and services across the private sector, local and central government, and the charity sector. Her current position is Chief Executive at On Fife, and also Vice chair at Pitlochry Festival Theatre. She leads the Cultural Portfolio Lead for VOCAL Scotland (the national association for culture and leisure managers in Scotland) and she was recognised for her national contribution to arts and culture at the debut Scottish Womens' Awards in 2017.

A note about our contributors

In Scotland, local authorities are increasingly establishing Arm's length External organisation (ALEOs) to deliver required services. While there is no legal definition of an ALEO is it generally considered to be a body with its own legal identity, set up by the council to deliver functions. ALEOs are often referred to as 'trusts' but usually their structure is that of a company or limited liability - some may also register as charities (provided they have a wholly charitable purpose). First developed as sports trusts in the 1980s, ALEOs are now widely used for property, transport, economic development, and more recently, care services and culture.⁸

⁷ <https://relevantonfife.co.uk>

⁸ See Audit Scotland (2011), [Arm's length organisations: are you getting it right?](#)

Implications for Policy

Our Knowledge Exchange and Insight Gathering activities have been conducted under [Chatham House](#) rules. The observations made by contributors have been quoted where appropriate, but not directly attributed to individuals.

The policy implications outlined in this section are those of Culture Commons and do not necessarily reflect those of the speakers or the wider programme partners. Observations made by contributors have been quoted directly and indicated where relevant.

Heritage, history & landscape

At the start of the conversation, we asked leaders and representatives from ALEOs and cultural organisations across the Tayside and Fife regions to describe the defining features of the creative, cultural and heritage sectors in their area. It is striking how much heritage, history and the landscape shaped perspectives of the sectors in the minds of our panellists:

“You know, we're so well-endowed in people who have just made such fantastic impact on the world, you know, like Adam Smith, Andrew Carnegie... the royal heritage and so on...it's that sense of place and sense of identity and that I feel has given rise to a really vibrant and diverse array of cultural activity.”

While this may be a simple observation to make, it's one that should not be overlooked. Using the overlapping layers

of history, landscape and architecture as a springboard for future strategy and local policy development is a powerful tool and one that is being increasingly understood by decision makers exploring 'the local'.

What's striking to us, as observed in this conversation as well as numerous others we've had across the course of the programme, is the role that the heritage sectors, with their connection to landscape and physical geography, are playing in developing both local cultural identity and even informing future industrial strategy.

“Dundee and its surrounding region is a small city, I think we've been able to develop a critical mix... for me, all of that roots back to being an art school city and then a trading city, a textile city, and... there's dark, difficult histories within that. But I think that evolving into being an art school city creates an open outlook...”

Our programme partners at Wigan Council are another clear example of this. Working with artists Al and Al, the local Council developed their 2019 - 2023 cultural strategy, [The Fire Within](#) taking this exact approach: drawing on local historic 'icons' fusing this with narratives associated with industrial heritage to capture the 'genius loci'⁹ of Wigan and translate this into a vision to grow the future creative economies of the area.

We're also seeing examples of history, heritage and landscape explicitly setting

⁹ A Latin phrase meaning 'Spirit of place' that is now used in architecture and master planning practice to refer to the unique atmosphere or feeling of a place.

the future direction of devolution deals in the English context – for example in the introductory text to the devolution deal developed by Hull and East Yorkshire.¹⁰

By recognising the power of place – and supporting discussions about what activities or locations are important to a range of residents – cultural and heritage sector organisations have a unique opportunity to facilitate greater engagement with city-wide communities. This opportunity can also enable more sustained reflection on how different neighbourhoods and social groups may connect to city identities in different ways. This, in turn, can encourage more diverse and nuanced approaches towards understanding how heritage and culture illustrate connections across local, national and international scales. Culture and heritage enable cities and regions to “think big,” while grounding ideas in the experiences of “lived in spaces.” Indeed, it could be argued that cultural organisations in Tayside – in parallel with other locations – provide the opportunity to think about the “glocal” – a term used by geographers to highlight the global and local combined, rather than focusing on the possible contradictions between working at different scales.

The power of geography, history and heritage of place in shaping local cultural strategies and decision making should not be overlooked by local decision makers. We think that further consideration needs to be applied to ensure that this approach is striking a healthy balance between generating a positive, local convening force while

fostering welcoming, open and forward-looking environments.

Civic Practice

As part of the panel discussion, we were keen to understand if and how the panellists were currently working with, or had ambitions to, involve local communities in their organisational decision making.

It became clear that our contributors had started several pilot schemes to involve communities in the co-curation of programmes and had clear ambitions to build on these to ensure their assets reflect the contexts, stories and perspectives of the local communities they serve. Our speakers shared an ambition to relinquish **“curatorial control”** and **“open doors”** to the public – particularly underrepresented groups – to ensure their identities and stories are reflected and thus hopefully broaden access to local galleries, museums and cultural venues.

“It has to be open and transparent, and it has to be welcoming, and it has to be something that people can ultimately see themselves as part of – or see themselves reflected within.”

Our contributors shared organisational missions to work in an increasingly accountable, agile and transparent manner to achieve this type of outcome:

“And I don't think you can work with communities without having that conversation with them and say, ‘you

¹⁰ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hull-and-east-yorkshire-devolution-deal>

know what, we're going to have to hold our hands up every now and again, but keep us right and keep us to task and keep us accountable”

However, our panellists reflected that this way of working was highly dependent on trust – and that this form of capacity between communities and local community stakeholders required resource and time:

“It’s the relationship building with those communities, and often that’s individuals or very small groups, and it takes time, and it takes trust.”

Furthermore, our panellists also reflected on the organisational risk to this way of working:

“...for us, our whole vision was about opening doors to inspire and challenging ourselves to do that in a way which doesn't just cater for those who are already engaging with us ... which has actually manifested itself in some quite high-risk things like giving over gallery space and one of our bigger facilities to the community. There's risk. There's risk in all of that... but we are finding it genuinely transformational.”

Lastly our panellists reflected on why such approaches were important. They reflected on understanding audiences as crucial stakeholders and that, as receivers of public money, venue operators had a responsibility as ***“cultural public servants”***.

However, the challenges associated with reaching diverse audiences who aren't currently engaged with what local

museums, galleries are offering remains a huge common concern across our panellists organisations.

Inside out/outside in

Over the course of the discussion, we reflected on the challenge of setting a civic focus against ambitions to deliver national impact and even global reach.

Dundee was described as an interesting test case in this regard. We discussed the strengths of the city's local networks and tight knit relationships across the creative, cultural and heritage sector representatives and organisations in the city. However, while a comparatively small city, Dundee has global ambitions – part of a UNESCO City of Design network, home to a nationally significant museum network and maintaining a world leading research and innovation community – Dundee continuously appears to punch above its weight on the global stage.

As we see in other core cities across the four nations that we spoke to, local decision makers have had to develop a critical mix of supporting and developing local infrastructure and provision (“inside out”) while attracting investment, and sharpening skills, innovation and ***“excellence”*** with others on the national and international stage (“outside in”).

There seemed to be no hard view on where the sweet spot in getting this mix right sat. Throughout the findings of the programme, we are increasingly encountering a strong sense that successful places take a ***“ecosystem approach”*** to creative, cultural and heritage provision that recognises that

being competitive in an increasingly globalised world can only come from the firm foundations created by a well-supported local provision and investment.

Reflecting on the games industry in the city, our panellists explained how many of the private companies in the city are micro to SMEs, with little capacity for facilitating wider community engagement on their own steam. A representative from an arm's length organisation in Scotland reflected on how great it was to see the [Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre \(DCA\)](#) host a 'drop in and play' session where local children and young people could meet 12 local game developers and explore new designs. This project exemplifies a form of knitting together of the strengths of the creative industries taking an ecosystem approach. As the participant reflected:

"I think bringing games with culture is a real opportunity for Dundee."

An appetite for regional working

We explored the level of interest from decision makers in Scotland for working together on a more regional basis.

While there are several regional decision-making structures in Scotland (e.g. [Regional Economic partnerships](#) and City Deal boards), culture, creative and heritage sectors don't feature within these regional structures per se. We were keen to gauge the perceived net benefit that regional working could offer authorities in East Scotland - and what mechanisms already in operation in Scotland could facilitate this best. We took inspiration here from the new and

increasingly powerful Combined Authorities in England.

"One of the things we had recognised in the run up to the Tay Cities Deal across Angus, Dundee, Perth and Kinross and Fife was that we really needed to be connecting more. And one of the things that we did was [have] a Tay Cities Culture summit...and people were really excited about that...I think that my observation, though, is that for it to be valuable, it probably needs to elevate itself up from projects...and it needs to... find a lens that we all can look at things through."

Our panellists clearly expressed not only an interest but an understanding about the potential benefits for working together across the Tayside and North Fife region - including opening up economies of scale, shared skills production academies and wider opportunities for apprenticeship and job placements too. How regions are viewed within the cultural and heritage sectors could be a rich area for further exploration and collaborative activities. To some extent regions offer a "looser" geography and the possibility to untie organisational identities from previous local or national restrictions. Tayside offers an interesting context where a varied regional identity exists in the wider geographical imaginary. Exploring how this could be mobilised to share experiences, build resources and social networks, could also be an innovative process and platform, for developing supportive cultural policy.

Everyone that spoke also recognised that the lack of capacity, resource and the

extra demands on organisations that come from meaningful regional working would require support.

“...[we] probably need it now more than ever, but we have the least capacity to do [it]... so I think we probably do just need to...do it actually...There’s something about Fife Perth and Kinross Angus and Dundee that I just think is undiscovered and really extraordinary.”

We touched on in [our first programme Insight Paper](#) exploring regional ways of working currently established in Wales. In this session we further explored the lack of incentives and rewards for engaging in this shared way of working – recognising the reality of locally based performance targets and how, without regional performance measures, ‘the local’ would always be the priority for officers. As one of our speakers reflected:

“So maybe what larger, bigger government needs to do it...needs to start looking at 1996 [and] the pooled way of regional working...”

There is clearly excitement about the potential for collective regional approaches to support the creative, cultural and heritage sectors in this part of Scotland. Nonetheless, we have had a clear steer from the panellists that such a structure would need to be based on a strong governance framework that is resourced appropriately.

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