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Culture-led capital projects: catalysing local decision making in place

DISCUSSION PAPER

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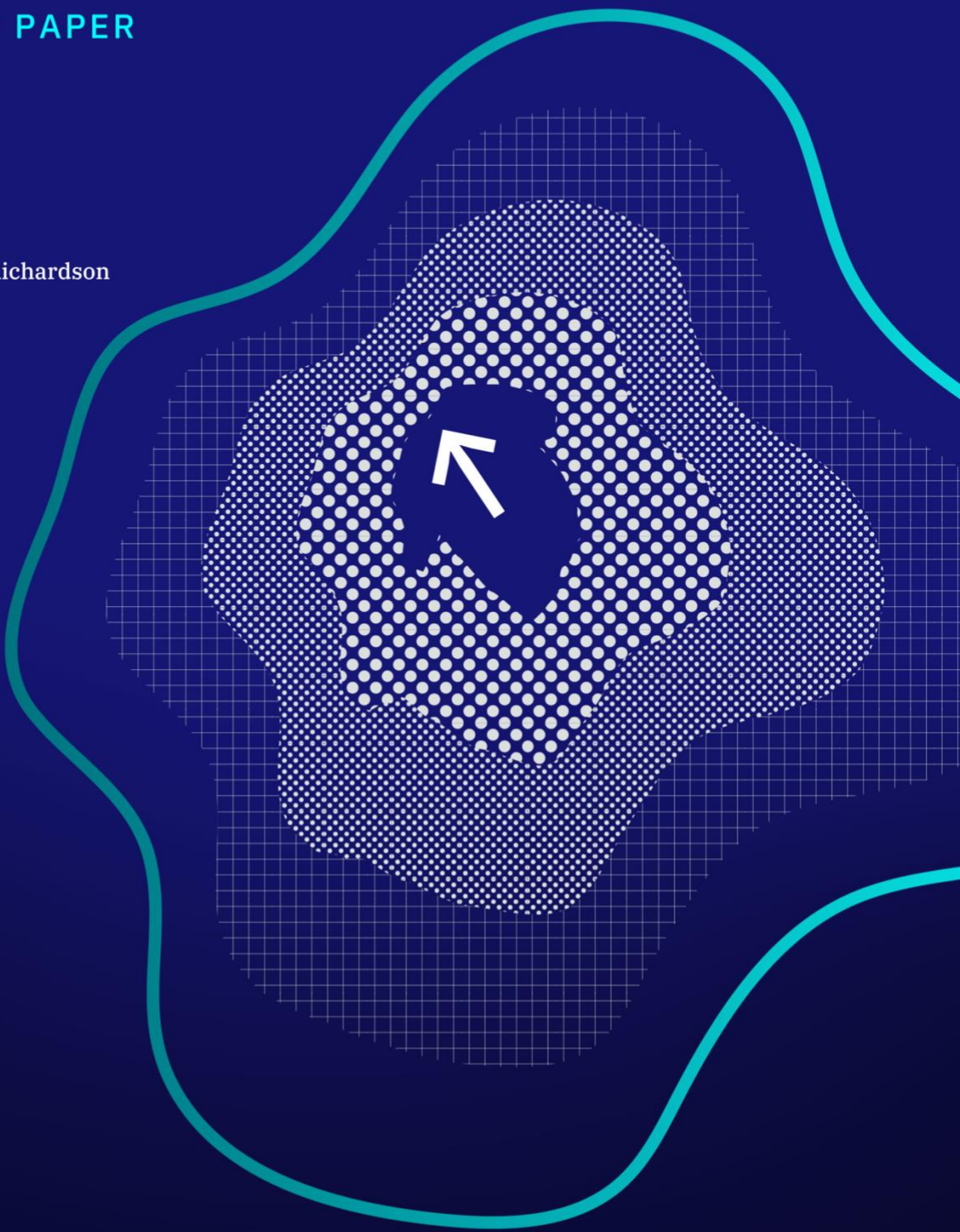

Published as part of a major four-nations open policy development programme led by Culture Commons and partners exploring the future of cultural devolution in the UK.

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Abstract

This paper examines how culture-led capital development projects are creating new opportunities for local cultural decision making in the UK. It forms part of a major four-nations open policy development programme led by Culture Commons in collaboration with 30 partners across the UK, who are exploring the future of cultural devolution in the UK.

Through an analysis of two live case studies – Docking Station (Medway, Kent) and Harmony Works (Sheffield, South Yorkshire) – we examine how capital development projects are already functioning as important nodes within creative, cultural and heritage ecosystems, as well as their potential to enhance 'local voice' in local cultural governance.

Our research suggests that in the right circumstances, projects of this kind can offer meaningful pathways to community decision making, but that their success in doing so often depends on sustained partnerships and funding dedicated to engagement that extends beyond initial capital investments.

This paper applies an interdisciplinary framework for understanding culture-led development projects, including placemaking, cultural regeneration and participation. It concludes that existing funding structures will require adaptation to better enable culture-led capital development projects to support the devolution of cultural decision making.

We propose several specific policy recommendations designed to enhance the effectiveness of culture-led capital projects as catalysts for local cultural development and sustained community voice.

Keywords

placemaking, cultural ecosystems, heritage regeneration, local decision making, partnership governance

Authors

Dr Cara Courage, SFIPM FRSA, a Culture, Communities and Place Consultant-Director, is a globally renowned placemaking, arts and heritage sector leader and has been named in the top 10 of place-thinkers worldwide. Her passion for and dedication to people and places has led her to specialise in practices that are socially-engaged, community-led and in embedded in place, whether that place be a team, a city park, a national museum or a rural town high street. She does this as a consultant, practitioner, researcher and writer. Cara works with local and national government, network organisations, universities, cultural institutions, artists and communities. She has worked on projects from Plymouth to Basildon, to Belfast to Derby, and across the USA and Europe. Cara's most recent project is *Trauma-Informed Placemaking*, with Dr Anita McKeown, a research platform and textbook (Routledge, 2024). Cara is Editor and Convenor of *The Routledge Handbook of Placemaking* (Routledge, 2021); Co-editor of *Creative Placemaking: Research, Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 2018); and author of *Arts in Place: The Arts, the Urban and Social Practice* (Routledge, 2017).

Dr Lucrezia Gigante, AFHEA, is a Museum Studies researcher with an interest in contemporary public culture and the politics of place-based cultural participation. She completed her doctoral research at the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, with the support of Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Midlands4Cities funding. In her thesis *The Spatial Politics of Art Organisations: Public Programmes as Sites for Cultural Citizenship*, Lucrezia explored how situated cultural practices are invested with political responsibility through the production and reproduction of ideas of place. Her research yielded an original critical model of cultural citizenship for constituency-based, place-responsive public programmes in art organisations. She was Postdoctoral Research Associate on Culture Commons' open policy development programme exploring 'The Future of Cultural Devolution in the UK'.

Professor Catherine Richardson is Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Arts and Humanities) at the University of East Anglia. She was Founding Director of the Institute of Cultural and Creative Industries at the University of Kent from 2019-24, with responsibility for the Docking Station, a £15 million regeneration project to deliver a world-leading centre of creative digital production, education and community engagement for the region. Her research is focused on the history of the creative industries in relation to social and cultural change, innovation and immigration, working on the cultural life of towns through the objects, people and ideas circulating within them and the entertainment on offer there; projects focus on creative heritage and placemaking at the meeting point of GLAM and technology,

exploring immersive engagement with lived experience (e.g. middlingculture.com).

Trevor MacFarlane, FRSA, (Series Editor) is Founding Director of Culture Commons. He has authored several reports, research papers and book chapters on the UK's creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem. He was an advisor to the now Deputy Prime Minister and to several shadow cabinet members, including the former shadow Secretary of State for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), advising on Bills and legislation passing through the UK Parliament. He was a Senior Advisor at Labour Together, working on the landmark analysis of the 2019 general election which continues to influence party policy to this day. Trevor was also Chief of Staff to parliamentarians in the European Parliament prior to the UK exit from the European Union, advising the Vice President of the Culture and Education Committee. Nominated by the US Ambassador to the UK, he is a 2023 alumnus of the US International Visitor Leadership Program. As a former creative industries practitioner, Trevor has led award-winning arts organisations, making creative work in some of the UK's foremost cultural institutions. Trevor is proud Chair of Stand and Be Counted, a theatre company that supports refugees, migrants and asylum seekers through creative practice.

The Future of Cultural Devolution in the UK

This paper has been produced as part of a major four-nations open policy development programme led by Culture Commons alongside 30 partners from across the UK. Together, the partners have been examining the risks and opportunities that increased devolution in the UK is presenting to the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem.

You can find out more about the wider programme, the outputs produced so far and a series of policy recommendations, on the dedicated digital policy portal: https://devolution.culturecommons.uk

Open Policy Making

Open Policy Making is a process that opens up the formation of public policy to a wider variety of stakeholders. Culture Commons has adopted some of the key principles associated with this approach and have elaborated on them when designing this programme, particularly the commitment to inclusiveness and transparency.

Disclaimer

The views and interpretations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and those they are attributed to only; they may not necessarily be shared by Culture Commons and/or the wider open policy development programme partners and associates.

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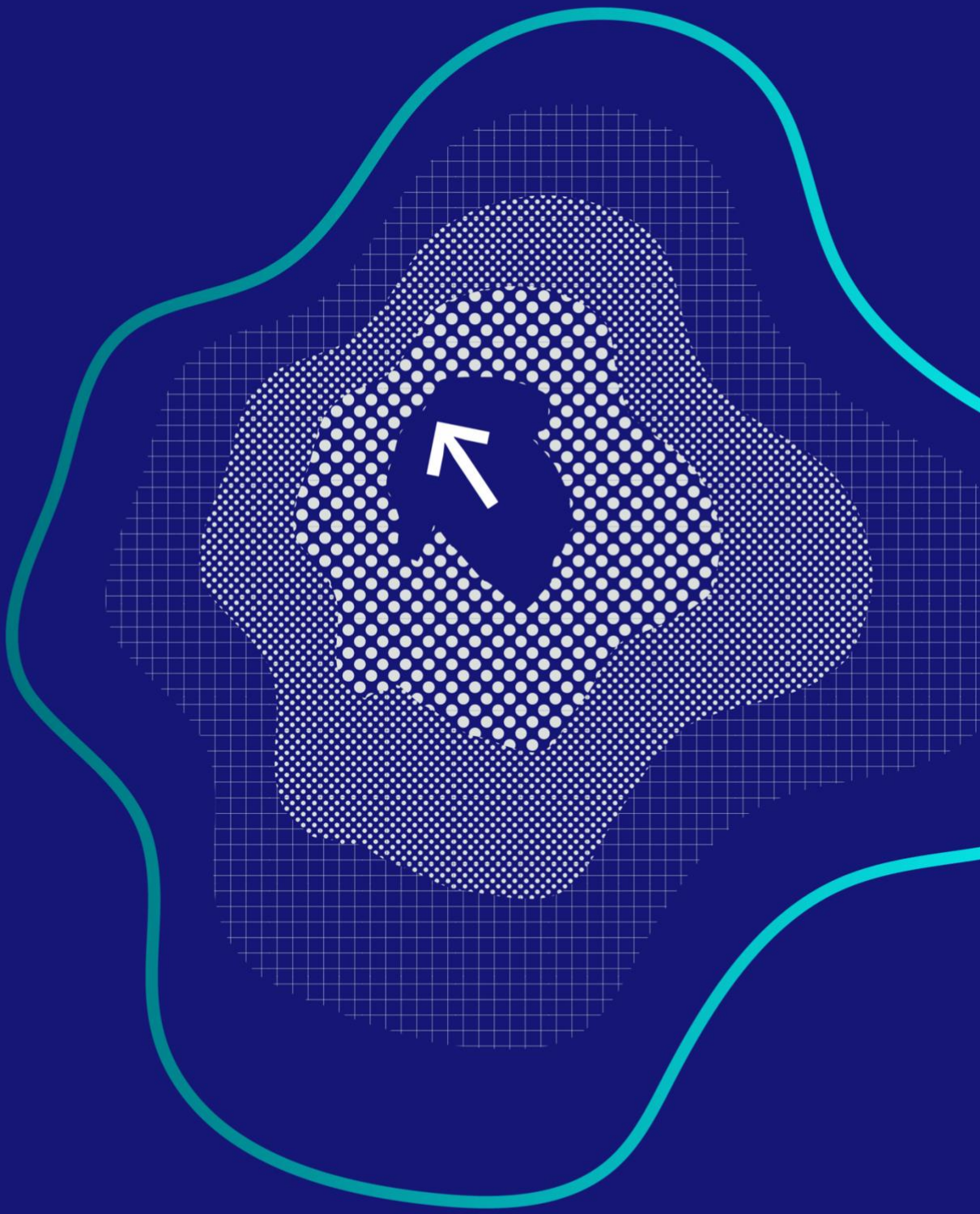

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Executive Summary

This paper critically reviews how and to what extent recent culture-led capital development projects have emerged as catalysts for enhanced local cultural decision making in the UK.

Through examination of two live case studies, the paper considers how such projects can bridge the gap between physical infrastructure development projects and meaningful community engagement, as well as serve as platforms to empower local people and stakeholder groups to make decisions about the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem.

Context and Aims

The past decade has seen investments in place-based creative, cultural and heritage infrastructures via programmes such as the Levelling Up Fund and the Cultural Development Fund. This investment has occurred against a backdrop of further devolution (the transfer of power from the national to regional and local tiers of governance) and a growing recognition of the need for stronger representation of local people within cultural decision-making processes and forums.

This paper is being published at a time when devolution (broadly applied here as the transfer of decision-making power from the national to regional levels) is being extended across the UK. This is one of the primary reasons for the open policy development programme led by Culture Commons having been initiated.

Key Findings

Partnership Models

1. Successful capital development projects associated with the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem depend on robust multi-sector partnerships (for example, between cultural sector, higher education institutions, local government, creative industries and funders)
2. Existing funding mechanisms that support the coming together of partnerships in place are not necessarily supporting teams to transition into delivery phases
3. The sharing of expertise across sectors and Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) sub-sectors in particular, appears to enhance overall project outcomes through the leveraging of wider knowledge capital

Community Engagement

4. The development of heritage assets can serve as particularly powerful focal points for community involvement in cultural decision making due to their long associations with place
5. Multi-generational and heritage-digital engagement approaches show promise in developing skills and fostering a sense of local ownership
6. Engagement strategies delivered over the longer-term seem to yield better outcomes than phase-specific approaches

Cultural Leadership

7. Culture-led capital development projects can serve as incubators for developing enhanced local cultural leadership across a variety of stakeholder groups
8. Engagement with children and young people in development projects can support learning opportunities and open pathways for future cultural leaders

Funding Structures

9. Current funding models lead to fragmented engagement between development teams and local stakeholders
10. The capacity of core development delivery teams is frequently exceeded by short-term funding constraints that are asynchronous

Conclusions

This research contributes to ongoing policy debates about cultural devolution and local decision making. The findings suggest that culture-led capital development projects hold significant potential to be catalysts for enhanced local cultural decision making, particularly as devolution extends across the UK.

However, realising this will require changes to the way projects and the teams leading them are funded and supported in the future. With more nuanced and comprehensive policy approaches, culture-led development projects could serve as powerful platforms to build more equitable and sustainable cultural ecosystems across the regions and nations of the UK.

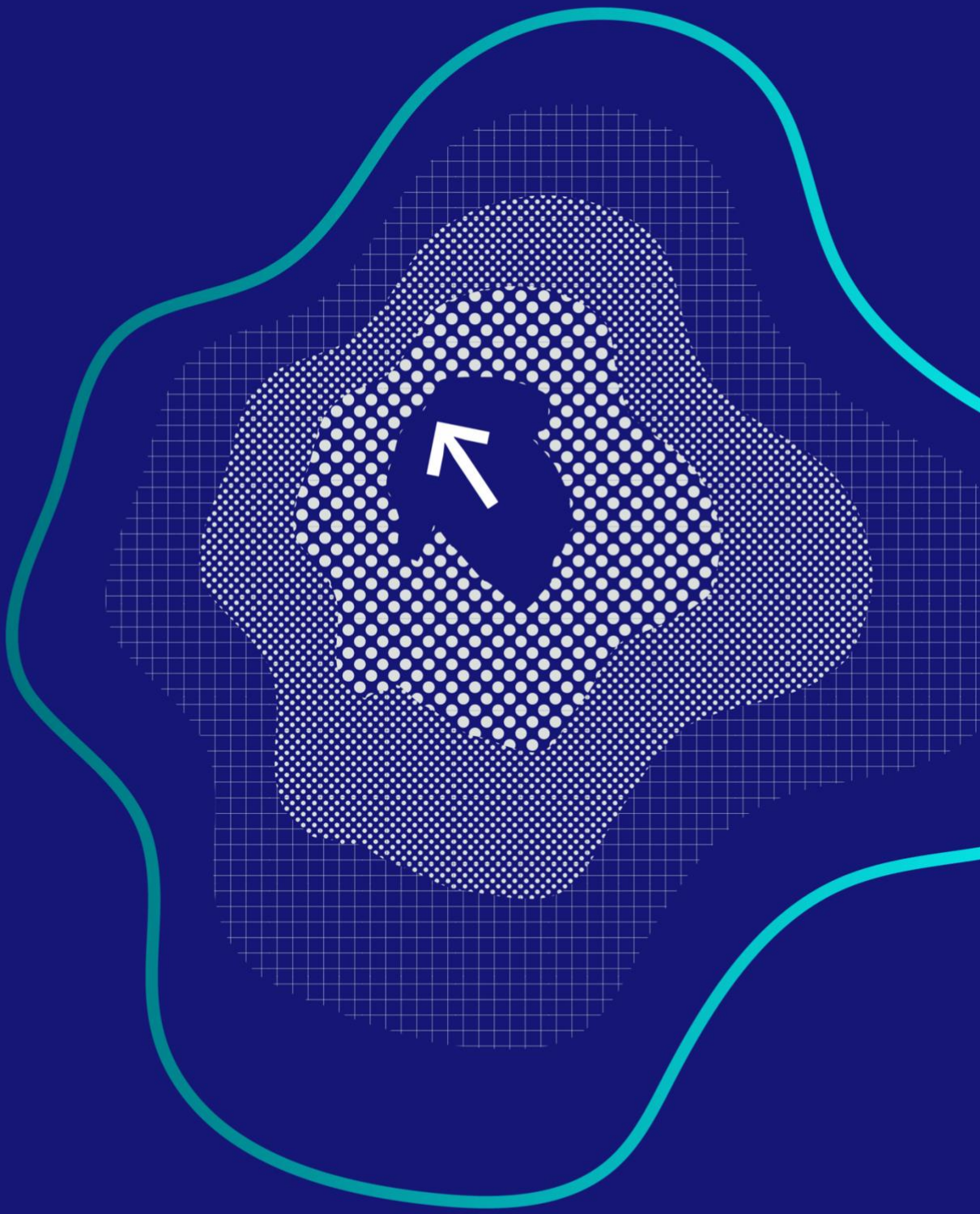
This paper demonstrates that successful culture-led development projects depend on initial capital investments and sustained support for the development of partnerships, engagement activities, and local leadership support. When appropriately resourced and supported, these elements could create genuine

opportunities for communities to shape their creative, cultural and heritage futures.

In summary, our preliminary evidence-informed recommendations therefore are:

- Delivery partnerships require funding beyond initial capital investment to sustain ongoing partnerships and operations, and support decision-making mechanisms
- New specialist funding streams may be required to support the development of multi-stakeholder partnerships to deliver more sustainable culture-led regeneration projects
- Funding mechanisms for capital development projects associated with cultural assets should include ring-fenced funds for meaningful public engagement[1]
- Skills development programmes for local people require earlier integration into the planning phases of capital development schemes
- Legacy planning requires early consideration by delivery teams, allowing for proper scoping, risk management and allocation of resources
- The expertise and lived experiences of different local stakeholder groups requires recognition from professional development teams, as well as mechanisms to integrate them meaningfully

[1] Meaningful public inclusion takes many forms. See 'How do we define effective public involvement in in cultural decision making?', Leila Jancovich, Lucrezia Gigante, Claire Bunrill-Maier, Culture Commons. August 2024. https://www.culturecommons.uk/publications/how-do-we-define-effective-public-involvement-in-cultural-decision-making



Research Context

The past decade has witnessed a significant 'place-turn' in UK policy, which is visible in the proliferation of place-based funding programmes such as the Levelling Up Fund[2] and Cultural Development Fund[3] (CDF). This shift has given rise to a new generation of creative, cultural and heritage assets across the country that hold the potential to support local cultural decision making. Often developed through the restoration or part-restoration of heritage assets as opposed to entirely ‘new build’ schemes, these spaces represent a distinctive approach to culture-led regeneration that merits specific examination.

We are currently seeing several substantial investments in culture-led capital development projects. The Steer evaluation of Round 1 CDF[4] exemplifies this, with the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) and Arts Council England (ACE) investing circa £20 million across five English areas. This investment specifically positions creativity, culture and heritage as catalysts for regeneration, supporting interventions ranging from business development to arts programmes.

Simultaneously, the devolution agenda has focused attention on including the voice of local people and sector stakeholders in the development of local and regional policy associated with the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem. Cultural Compacts, another ACE and DCMS initiative, has demonstrated how place-based partnerships can leverage new value for local cultural ecologies, for example, by positioning ecosystems more prominently in regional economic development initiatives.[5/6] These programmes appear to be able to respond to specific contexts whilst nonetheless connecting up with coherent national frameworks and strategies, creating what Steer describes as a 'highly heterogeneous programme' of interventions.

New spaces now act as nodes, points in the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem that form places of intersection and frequently bridge traditional policy divides between the creative industries and the publicly funded arts, culture and heritage sectors. They are also offering new opportunities for

[2] See https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/new-levelling-up-and-community-investments
[3] See https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-open-funds/cultural-investment-fund/cultural-development-fund-round-four
[4] See https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/cultural-development-fund-cdf-network
[5] See https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/review-cultural-compacts-initiative
[6] See https://ncace.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Courage-Cara-Greater-than-the-Sum-of-Parts.pdf

community decision making that connect the built environment to social and cultural practices to address local policy priorities.

As devolution extends, the relationship between 'place-shaping', cultural regeneration and participation becomes increasingly important to consider. This paper has been instigated by cross-sector conversations taking place through Culture Commons' open policy development programme's knowledge exchange activities, bridging researchers, cultural practitioners, local government officers, planners and developers.[7]

Multidisciplinary partnerships spanning education, the creative industries, arts and culture, as well as the third sector, are emerging as key facilitators. These partnerships can support local creative, cultural and heritage ecosystems and ensure leadership associated with it is able to flourish. However, our research indicates that while partnerships often predate specific development projects, the transition from partnership building activities into delivery may require new ways of working that would benefit from more appropriately designed support mechanisms and resources at local and national levels.

To promote innovative practice in this emerging field, this paper sets out three conceptual frameworks through which we assess a series of live case studies. They are 'place-shaping and creative place-shaping', 'cultural regeneration', and 'participation'. Through these lenses, we examine how culture-led capital development projects are already serving as platforms for enhanced local decision making and the development of the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem.

Our analysis is based on the examination of two live case studies: Docking Station in Medway, Kent, and Harmony Works in Sheffield, South Yorkshire. These projects are deploying different approaches to co-design and 'place-shaping' activities, while nonetheless sharing commonalities in terms of their emphasis on community input and the use of innovative digital platforms.

This paper brings together these conceptual frameworks and a series of empirical findings to consider their implications for the development of future policy in this space. For example, we examine how funding structures could better support the full life cycle of culture-led capital development projects – from partnership formation through to development and sustained programming and operation.

[7] See 'How can property developers support local cultural decision making? Insight Paper', Culture Commons, August 2024. https://www.culturecommons.uk/publications/how-can-property-developers-support-local-cultural-decision-making%3F.

Particular attention is paid to the role of digital engagement in reaching new audiences (especially young people) and the unique opportunities presented by combining physical heritage assets with contemporary ecosystem development initiatives.

Through this analysis, we aim to contribute to a growing body of research, as well as support the open policy development programme's partners to consider how policies might be better shaped to maximise the outcomes associated with culture-led regeneration.

Conceptual Framework 1: Placemaking

‘Placemaking’ and ‘Creative Placemaking’

The terms ‘placemaking’ and ‘creative placemaking’ are increasingly used in the fields of planning, policymaking, and community development, each holding their own understanding and approaches to placemaking depending on their approaches to working with local people and places.

For example, an artist working with a local neighbourhood may consider placemaking a grassroots creative practice, a local planner may view placemaking from a macro view of policy and statutory decision making, while a developer may view it as a means to consult with communities or bring in creative design elements to a scheme. It is therefore important to understand placemaking as a spectrum of practice, with differing stakeholders, aims, scales, methods and budgets, and indeed, entry and exit points. For some, placemaking is a tool to be utilised at a certain point in time, whilst for others, it is an ongoing process.

In our current place, policy and planning context however, it is imperative to understand the differences between placemaking and creative placemaking, as well as their differences with other place-concerned practices (anything from public art to urban design, to master planning and architecture). This will help foster a ‘place literacy’ for place-based stakeholders and initiate reflexive dialogues about the places in which we live, work, learn and play in.

A Collaborative, Holistic Approach to Community

Placemaking is primarily understood as working with the existing assets within a place to transform that place in some way. The practice can prioritise community involvement and collaboration among local stakeholders, including residents, planners, artists and policymakers, although some projects termed ‘placemaking’ may not do this. Project for Public Spaces[8] (PPS), early advocates of the concept, define placemaking as a process that shapes the public realm to maximise shared value, health and well-being.[9] The approach has evolved into a broader framework for community-centred urban planning,[10] which includes physical,

[8] See Project for Public Spaces https://www.pps.org/
[9] See Project for Public Spaces (2007). ‘What is Placemaking?’ Retrieved from https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking
[10] It is worth noting that placemaking and creative placemaking have had a largely urban focus to date, though this is being redressed with a nascent rural placemaking consideration.

social, economic and – though not consistently – environmental and ecological dimensions.

The Routledge Handbook of Placemaking[11] emphasises that placemaking is not only about physical space design but also about fostering social connections and developing environments where communities feel a sense of belonging and ownership (Courage et al., 2021). In this model, placemaking taps into local 'place knowledge' and the unique assets of a place, incorporating these into its identity and function. Placemaking is a dynamic process shaped by continuous engagement, observation and the iterative improvement of public spaces. The relative success of the approach is dependent on the degree to which it is community-driven, inclusive and adaptable to specific local contexts.

What is often cited as setting placemaking apart from other place disciplines is its comfort with the complexity of places; the relational matrix of people, environments, cultures, traditions and histories; and the acknowledgment that places are in a continual process of material change and meaning making. Many placemakers propose that the representation of neighbourhoods and community voice is therefore imperative (Wright, Podgorski, and Tully, 2022[12]; Courage et al. 2021; Markusen and Gadwa, 2010[13]). Courage described placemaking as "an approach and a set of tools that puts the community front and centre of deciding how their place looks and how it functions."

Professional and 'everyday creativity' as an applied practice in place can be another tenant of placemaking. Indeed, at the heart of both placemaking and creative placemaking can be found a commitment to fostering community engagement through creative processes, leveraging local creativity and creating spaces that enhance the social, cultural and economic well-being of neighbourhoods (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010).

Integrating Arts and Culture into Urban Development

Creative placemaking can refer to the specific use of the assets within the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem to catalyse wider community and urban development. For example, creative placemaking may involve artists, creative practitioners, heritage assets and creative programming.

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[11] See Courage, C. (Ed.). (2021). The Routledge Handbook of Placemaking. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429260563
[12] See Wright, J., Podgorski, A., & Tully, K. (2022). Research Digest: Culture and Placemaking. Centre for Cultural Value. https://www.culturalvalue.org.uk/publications/research-digest-culture-and-placemaking
[13] See Markusen, A., & Gadwa, A. (2010). Creative Placemaking. National Endowment for the Arts. https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/CreativePlacemaking-Paper.pdf

The term gained prominence in the United States of America following the release of the White Paper *Creative Placemaking* by Markusen and Gadwa (2010), which was commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts[14] (NEA). This seminal paper highlights how arts and culture can animate public spaces, improve local economies, enhance public safety and bring together diverse communities to build shared cultural identities. Creative placemaking is described as going beyond traditional urban planning approaches by infusing creativity into the processes of development and transformation.

Markusen and Gadwa (2010) identified key elements of creative placemaking, including strategic action by cross-sector partners, a focus on local arts and culture assets, and the mobilisation of public will and policy support. These elements align closely with broader placemaking strategies but place more emphasis on the arts, culture and creativity as a driving force. This convergence of urban development with cultural production and artistic practice has become increasingly recognised as a way to generate positive social outcomes, such as enhanced social cohesion and inclusivity.

Linking Placemaking and Creative Placemaking

While placemaking and creative placemaking may initially seem distinct, they are best understood as a continuum of practices rather than separate entities.

Recent studies, including the *Research Digest: Culture and Placemaking* by Wright, Podgorski, and Tully (2022), argue that placemaking should be viewed as a spectrum that accommodates different levels of artistic and creative engagement. At one end of the spectrum are more traditional forms of placemaking, which are focused on the physical and social improvement of spaces through design, policy and community input. At the other end, there are highly participatory and artist-led projects that use creativity as the primary tool for urban and social transformation.

This spectrum-based understanding reflects the growing consensus that placemaking and creative placemaking share the same core objectives: fostering community participation, supporting local identity and enhancing quality of life. Variations lie in the degree to which arts and cultural interventions are foregrounded within these processes but rely on the active involvement of residents and stakeholders, aiming to create vibrant, sustainable places that meet diverse community needs (Wright et al., 2022).

[14] See https://www.arts.gov/

The term ‘place-shaping’ was prominently introduced by Sir Michael Lyons in his 2007 report *Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government*, where he described it as the role of local government in shaping the identity and well-being of communities[15]. In recent years, ’place-shaping’ continues to be used within the UK, particularly in discussions about local governance and community development.

The Local Government Association (LGA) defines ‘place-shaping’ as the intentional creation or transformation of places to enhance residents' quality of life, promote growth and support vibrant, sustainable communities[16]. This involves a strategic, holistic approach that combines physical, economic, social and cultural considerations, engaging local residents, businesses and stakeholders to ensure their needs are addressed.

The Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) emphasises the importance of ‘place-shaping’ in addressing contemporary challenges, such as economic disparities and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic[17]. They argue that any viable UK economic and social strategy must be fundamentally place-focused, acknowledging the unique needs and characteristics of different communities.

Additionally, the LGA has developed frameworks to support parish and town councils in enhancing their role in local service delivery and ‘place-shaping’. These frameworks aim to build trust, provide practical approaches for implementation and consider capacity-building measures to empower local councils in their ‘place-shaping’ activities.

While placemaking has become a prevalent term in cultural and urban development discourse, several related terms are used across different sectors and contexts, often with overlapping meanings but distinct emphases. We summarise below:

[15] Lyons, M., 2007. Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government. [online] Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/place-shaping-executive-summary [Accessed 27 Nov. 2024].
[16] Local Government Association, n.d. Councillor Transformation Toolkit: Place-shaping. [online] Available at: https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/transformation/councillor-transformation-toolkit/place-shaping [Accessed 27 Nov. 2024].
[17] Local Government Information Unit, n.d. The Importance of Place-shaping. [online] Available at: https://lgiu.org/the-importance-of-place-shaping/ [Accessed 27 Nov. 2024].

Term in use	Summary
Place-shaping	Given a spotlight in UK policy contexts in the 2007 Lyons Inquiry, which suggests a broader remit encompassing local government's collective impact on place-based well-being
Urban Regeneration and Urban Renewal	Emphasises physical and economic transformation of built environments
Community Development	Foregrounds social aspects and local capacity building
Cultural Planning	Specifically addresses the integration of cultural resources in place development
Place Management	Ongoing stewardship as opposed to transformation
Tactical Urbanism	Smaller-scale often temporary interventions
Community-led Regeneration	Emphasises bottom-up approaches
Place-based Development	Increasingly used in policy contexts to describe holistic approaches to local development that consider the distinctive character and assets of specific locations

These varying terms reflect different professional traditions, policy frameworks and theoretical approaches to the practice of intentionally developing places with and for communities. Indeed, all these processes demand an interdisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary cross-sector approach; it is this which distinguishes those practices on the placemaking spectrum from other merely place-based activities.[18]

Core Principles and Common Threads

Several common principles weave like a golden thread across several of these terms and approaches:

[18] This paper focuses on 'placemaking' and 'creative placemaking' as normative and most commonly used terms.

Community-centred Practices are fundamentally community-driven. Whether through participatory design workshops or public art projects, placemaking and creative placemaking prioritise local input and empowerment (Courage et al., 2021). They recognise that the most successful projects are those that respond directly to the needs and aspirations of the people who live and work in a place (Wright et al., 2022).	**Creativity as Catalyst for Change** Creative placemaking explicitly foregrounds the arts, but creativity is also a key component of more normative placemaking processes. This includes creative problem-solving, innovative design approaches and new forms of social engagement (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). Both approaches leverage creativity to inspire communities, build social connections and transform spaces.
Cross-sector Collaboration Effective placemaking and creative placemaking both rely on collaboration between different sectors – public, private and third sector organisations must come together to align resources and expertise (Wright et al., 2022). Partnerships between artists, local governments, businesses and community groups are essential for the success of both types of project.	**Holistic View of Place** Practices consider placemaking to be about more than physical space; they recognise the importance of social and cultural factors in shaping successful places (Courage et al., 2021). A sense of place is tied to shared histories, local traditions and cultural expressions that placemaking and creative placemaking seek to sustain and promote.

Challenges and Considerations

Despite embodying shared principles, both placemaking and creative placemaking face challenges that need careful consideration.

As Wright et al. (2022) point out, ensuring equity and inclusivity within these kinds of approaches remains a significant barrier. Placemaking projects risk exacerbating gentrification or displacement if they are not carefully managed, especially in urban areas undergoing rapid redevelopment. Measuring the long-

term impacts of these projects also remains a complex issue, as the social and cultural benefits they create are often difficult to quantify.

Moreover, balancing top-down and bottom-up approaches presents further challenges. While community-driven initiatives are important, institutional support and funding are often necessary to scale and sustain projects (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). Ensuring that these projects authentically reflect local needs and values, rather than imposing external visions, supports long-term success.

Discussion: Place, Partnerships, Communities, Impact

Placemaking and creative placemaking represent overlapping and complementary approaches to creating meaningful, vibrant and inclusive public spaces. By viewing them as part of a spectrum, it becomes clear that both practices share fundamental goals, with creativity and community engagement at their core.

As the field continues to evolve, understanding these practices as fluid and adaptable could enable practitioners to tailor their approaches to the unique needs of different communities and places. In being able to foster a deeper sense of place and belonging, placemaking and creative placemaking contribute to the development of resilient, thriving communities that reflect the richness of their cultural and social fabric.

Across these analyses, literature on creative (sometimes also referred to as 'cultural') placemaking foregrounds two key issues providing context for the subject of this paper: partnerships and the physical spaces within which they are made visible and impactful for communities.

Looking to projects in the United States of America (where the concept of placemaking originated) partnerships are often described as being built 'across sectors' (for-profit, non-profit, government and community), missions (e.g. cultural affairs, economic and workforce development, transportation, housing, planning, environment and health), and levels of government (local, state and federal)'.[19] Markusen and Gadwa describe how different stakeholders and actors from different sectors "strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighbourhood, town, city or region around arts and cultural activity".[20]

[19] Markusen and Gadwa (2010) pg 6
[20] Ibid., pg 8.

Much of the literature about creative placemaking centres around the analysis of 'ecologies' or 'ecosystems' on the one hand and on individual festivals or other temporary projects on the other. This can miss the important connections between the types of engagement offered and the role of its location in shaping the nature of the interactions between audiences and wider place stakeholders: "Placemaking projects [happen] in a geographical place with clear site demarcation…various scales, from the hyperlocal of a street, to a neighbourhood or whole city or region".[21] However, the interaction between the scale of engagement and the scale of the place remains unexplored in research.

Thinking about the role of particular buildings, it is possible to consider how a high-profile building might shape a wider place, working out from it in terms of impacts. This challenges us to take account of the types of spaces that are coming to fruition as a result of recent capital-focused place-based national funding mechanisms.

The kind of spaces examined in the literature on cultural placemaking are broadening over time. Contemporary work envisions "a more decentralized portfolio of spaces acting as creative crucibles". Creative spaces include cultural and art centres, co-working and digital manufacturing spaces,[22] identified as 'creative' because of their potential to "generate synergies between various social agents, institutions, and economic sectors". Non-traditional, hybrid spaces in which "commercial, cultural, and social activities are blended", are more likely to develop "new forms of collective culture"[23] – a point clearly vital for understanding local voice and cultural decision making.

Some of the spaces are 'meanwhile' uses of other types of buildings, often ones that respond to the decline of town centres and high streets by taking advantage of "situations of non-occupation and obsolescence to relaunch the urban fabric and the social cohesion, recovering the public space for the citizens".[24]

Models that shed an interesting light on questions of reuse include cultural centres, of which there are thousands across Europe, differently named to reflect their various aims and ideologies. These aims include "promoting active citizenship through cultural and artistic activities; revitalizing abandoned industrial buildings and developing neglected urban areas; enhancing creativity, community, networks, entrepreneurship and innovation".

[21] Courage NCACE, pg 4
[22] Franqueira (2015) pg 65
[23] Amin (2008) pg 48
[24] Martin-Mariscal and Fernandez-Valderrama (2024) pg 4.

From the neighbourhood centres of the 1960s and 70s, through to the new creative hubs of the 21st century, there has been an increased focus on "entrepreneurship, innovation capacity and attractiveness of a city or region", which offers a useful chronology through which to consider how buildings have been variably positioned at different times.

'Urban' or 'Living Labs', developed in the early 1990s (but more formally recognised in 2006 in the foundation of the European Network of Living Labs[25]) are often self-managed, featuring a younger demographic, with their potential laying in their ability "to generate new forms of social interaction, economic production and political participation in urban space".

Thinking through how cities function can also provide an understanding of the ways in which buildings and spaces can play a role in structuring engagement and the activation of local voice. In cities, the spaces in which such engagement might take place have an important role in designing and hosting engagement activities that are inviting and inclusive. The balance of power and executive capacity between urban planners, local council culture teams, arts collectives, higher education institutions (HEIs) and other players, and the extent to which their engagement work is co-planned and co-delivered, appears to be fundamental to successful inclusion of local voice.

[25] Martin-Mariscal and Fernandez-Valderrama (2024) p. 4

Conceptual Framework 2: Cultural Regeneration

Cultural regeneration, also referred to as culture-led regeneration or cultural-led urban renewal, is a multifaceted approach to urban and community development that harnesses the power of cultural assets, activities and industries to catalyse social, economic and environmental transformation (Evans, 2005). This concept has gained significant traction in urban policy and planning circles over the past few decades, particularly in post-industrial cities seeking to reinvent themselves and address complex socio-economic challenges (Miles and Paddison, 2005).

At its core, cultural regeneration posits that culture — broadly defined to encompass the arts, heritage, creative industries and local traditions — can serve as a powerful engine for urban renewal and community revitalisation. This approach extends beyond mere physical redevelopment to encompass the social fabric, economic vitality and overall quality of life within a given area (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993).

Evans (2020) underscores the role of culture as a mechanism for fostering inclusive urban growth, with a specific focus on addressing inequality and enhancing local capacity for self-determination. By embedding culture into regeneration strategies, cities can achieve more sustainable outcomes that resonate with the identities and aspirations of local populations.

Cultural regeneration strategies typically involve a range of interventions and initiatives. These often include the development of traditional flagship cultural institutions such as museums, theatres and galleries, alongside the creation of cultural quarters and districts. The preservation and adaptive reuse of heritage buildings plays a key role, as does the support for local creative industries, heritage sites and cultural entrepreneurship. Public art programmes and cultural events, such as festivals and biennales, contribute to the vibrancy of regeneration efforts, while community-engaged cultural activities and participatory arts projects ensure deeper local involvement. These interventions are often implemented through partnerships between public sector bodies, private investors, cultural organisations and community stakeholders (Gross & Wilson, 2022).

Proponents of cultural regeneration argue that it can yield a wide array of benefits, including economic diversification and job creation, enhanced tourism and visitor economy, improved place image and branding, increased social cohesion and community pride, physical environmental improvements, and skills development

and educational opportunities. The UK City of Culture programme, launched in 2013, has demonstrated that culture-led regeneration can lead to significant economic benefits for host cities, contributing to their global and national reputations (Clift, 2021).

However, it is crucial to note that cultural regeneration is not without its critics and challenges. Scholars such as Davies and Sigsworth (2020) have cautioned against overly simplistic or deterministic approaches to culture-led development, highlighting the potential for gentrification, displacement and the exacerbation of existing inequalities. There are also concerns about the sustainability of flagship projects that run the risk of creating ephemeral spectacles that fail to deliver long-term benefits to local communities.

Moreover, the success of cultural regeneration initiatives often hinges on their ability to authentically engage with and reflect the diverse cultural identities and aspirations of local populations. As Duxbury (2019) argues, effective cultural regeneration must be rooted in place-specific contexts and should aim to nurture endogenous cultural assets rather than imposing top-down, homogenised cultural planning models.

As we move further into the 21st century, the concept of cultural regeneration continues to evolve. Contemporary discourse increasingly emphasises the need for more inclusive, sustainable and resilient approaches to culture-led development. This includes greater attention to environmental sustainability, digital cultural engagement, and the role of culture in addressing global challenges such as climate change and social inequality (Flew, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated a shift towards digitally enabled cultural regeneration, with many cultural initiatives now prioritising digital platforms for engagement and participation. This has raised important questions about the role of culture in addressing not only economic and social inequality, but also the digital divide (Bentz, 2020).

In conclusion, cultural regeneration represents a complex and nuanced approach to urban development that recognises the transformative potential of culture in its myriad forms. While it offers significant opportunities for revitalising urban areas and communities, its successful implementation requires careful planning, genuine community engagement and a critical awareness of potential pitfalls.

As policymakers and practitioners continue to refine cultural regeneration strategies, there remains a pressing need for robust evaluation frameworks and longitudinal studies to better understand the long-term impacts and sustainability of these initiatives, particularly in terms of inclusivity, sustainability and resilience.

Large-Scale Capital Development Programme Timeframes and Place in the Creative, Cultural and Heritage Ecosystem

One aspect of this evaluation gap involves the timelines associated with the development of programmes and infrastructures associated with the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem. There is some unevenness in the way they are studied, with a concentration on impact upon culmination rather than on the planning and/or delivery phases. However, in the development of creative clusters, conversely, there is often a focus on the initial Research and Development activity focused on the impetus behind the bringing together of different actors in creative dialogue and the role of 'entrepreneurial initiators.'

At a similar scale, recent work on Smart Cities recommends taking a life-cycle approach to better see where engagement and co-production can feed into the development process to best effect. Existing frameworks tend to be episodic rather than offering flexibility for stakeholder engagement to continue during the life course of Smart City initiatives.

Such approaches, seeing developments disaggregated into several separate but interrelated stages to support properly planned engagement, support the idea that the change process tends to be linear and irreversible, meaning there is a single sequence where every immediate phase becomes a necessary precursor of a subsequent phase, making the process of value addition cumulative. Additionally, exogenous forces shape the environment where the phenomenon is conceived and developed.

In relation to the concerns at the heart of this paper — namely how culture-led regeneration can act as an enabler of increased local cultural decision making — particular emphasis should be given to the distinction between the design of the physical building and its functionality and programmes of ongoing use. Involving citizens only in the former renders them users, whereas involvement in both phases marks them more clearly as co-designers, informing the usefulness of the resulting facility. Site allocation, building design, construction, maintenance, and the long-term sustainable legacy of the asset and its role in the wider creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem are thereby seen as parts of a whole.

A further issue related to the connection between timing and engagement is the way these two elements function in relation to funding. In a museums context, Lynch found a distinct disillusionment brought about by the short-termism of projects and the frequent lack of strategic planning for engagement work, particularly so as to involve the organisation as a whole. Often coming from outside of core budgets and concentrated on particular activities, longer-term planning for engagement can be made impossible, or at least kept on the

organisation’s periphery rather than being a central force in its concerns, discouraging critical reflection on the part of individuals and institutions responsible for its success. The potential spend and therefore scope of activity, the continuity between work packages, and the time to work through their logic and success are highlighted.

The Steer Cultural Development Fund evaluation mentions "the need for sufficient allocation of project management time – in particular given the multiple projects involved". Again, the relationship between the parts of the whole, the specific address to particular groups and subjects, and the wider placemaking project, is key to understanding impact. However, the underlying structure provided by different funding models appears to shape outcomes in fundamental ways.

Conceptual Framework 3: Participation

Participation and Decision Making

To complete the conceptual foundation for analysing the two examples of culture-led regeneration projects in this paper, we introduce a third and final framework: participation.

In response to increasing demand for citizen involvement in decision-making processes, several models and theories have emerged within the discourse of participation in recent years. However, this paper's central question, alongside the research objectives of the wider open policy development programme it has been produced for, is ultimately how and to what extent culture-led capital projects improve – not merely increase – opportunities for meaningful engagement with people, places and institutions. To answer this question, we need to establish a 'grammar' of participation to guide our forthcoming analysis.

Theories of citizen participation date back to the 1960s with thinkers such as US planner and social scientist Sherry Arnstein, best known for conceptualising a hierarchy of participation practices insisting on power and agency. Originally published in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners,* Arnstein's seminal paper *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* (1969)[26] sought to establish a provocative typology of public engagement and critique the lack of genuine citizen involvement in the US urban planning landscape of the 1960s. Each rung represents a different level of participation, from non-participation (manipulation and therapy) through tokenism (informing, consultation, placation) to citizen power (partnership, delegated power and citizen control). As we climb the ladder, the power balance shifts from the power holders to the "have-nots", as Arnstein described disempowered citizens. Towards the top rungs, citizens progressively take the initiative and claim their rights to participate in fundamental decision-making processes until, on the last step, they gain sufficient weight to negotiate conditions and exercise veto power.

While Arnstein's ladder remains widely cited, it nonetheless risks oversimplifying participation, by presenting it as a linear process that moves from one extreme to the other, without accounting for context. This rigid categorisation does not always align with real-world practices. For instance, informing people can be a crucial part of effective participation when it equips them with the knowledge

[26] Arnstein, S.R. (1969) 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 35(4), pp. 216–224. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225.

needed for informed decision making. Conversely, delegating power without adequate training or support can result in a transfer of risks rather than empowerment.

Jancovich, Gigante and Burnill-Maier (2024)[27] argue that effective participatory decision making is about choosing an approach that is appropriate for achieving a specific outcome, while being cognisant of context specificity. This is what the 'tapestry of participation' (de Sousa, 2021)[28] – a contemporary adaptation of Arnstein's ladder – seeks to facilitate by weaving together engagement objectives, types, levels and methods, to create an effective citizen engagement strategy, without establishing a hierarchy of best practices.

Another myth to challenge is that participation is inherently beneficial. In their report *Pathways through Participation*, Brodie et al. (2011),[29] emphasise that participation needs to be "purposeful" for those involved. Similarly, Kelty (2017)[30] warns us against mobilising participation at all costs.

> We sometimes speak of participation as a purpose, an end that we assimilate to democratization [...] but it is just as often implemented as a means to achieve goals that turn out to be inconsistent with that purpose: too much surveillance, too much unpaid labour, too much devolution of responsibility, too much democracy in all the wrong places (Kelty, 2017, p. 88).

Research shows that when 'participation as decision making' lacks clear communication about its primary purpose, communities can feel exploited, which damages the relationship between them and decision-makers (Jancovich et al., 2024). Whether participation is full or partial (Pateman, 1970),[31] invited or self-created (Cornwall, 2008),[32] minimalist or maximalist (Carpentier, 2015),[33] the

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[27] Jancovich, L., Gigante, L., Burnill-Maier, C. (2024) 'How do we define effective public involvement in cultural decision making', Open Policy Development Programme 'The Future of Local Cultural Decision Making', Culture Commons, Available at https://www.culturecommons.uk/publications/how-do-we-define-effective-public-involvement-in-cultural-decision-making.
[28] de Sousa S. (2021), 'A tapestry of participation: revisiting Arnstein's ladder', The Glasshouse, Available at https://theglasshouse.org.uk/glass-house-opinion-pieces/a-tapestry-of-participation-revisiting-arnsteins-ladder/ [Accessed 20/11/2024].
[29] Brodie, E. et al. (2011) 'Pathways through participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship?', Available https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Pathways-through-Participation-summary-report_Final_20110913.pdf [Accessed 20/11/24].
[30] Brodie, E. et al. (2011) 'Pathways through participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship?', Available https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Pathways-through-Participation-summary-report_Final_20110913.pdf [Accessed 20/11/24].
[31] Pateman, C. (1970) 'Participation and Democratic Theory.' Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[32] Cornwall, A. (2008) 'Unpacking "Participation": models, meanings and practices', Community Development Journal, 43(3), pp. 269–283. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsn010.
[33] Carpentier, N. (2015) 'Differentiating between access, interaction and participation', Conjunctions, 2(2), pp. 7–28. Available at: https://doi.org/10.7146/tjcp.v2i2.23117.

theoretical tradition of participation as decision making continues to emphasise the power imbalances that Arnstein sought to expose with her ladder.

Participation in place-based culture

When the discourse of participation is applied to culture, creativity and heritage, the complexities increase. Alongside the concern with power and agency that has more recently translated into experiments of participatory governance within cultural institutions (Strauss, 2022;[34] Jancovich et al., 2024), participation in culture raises questions of community, identitiy and belonging – especially in place-based public culture.

The very definition of cultural participation remains contested. While Article 27 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* recognises everyone's right to "participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts",[35] cultural participation has often been framed in terms of its contribution to economic and social goals. However, over the last decade, research has sought to understand cultural participation beyond attendance or social and economic benefits. Scholars and practitioners advocate for a more holistic approach that acknowledges cultural value and encompasses both everyday creativity and engagement with institutionalised culture (Belfiore and Gibson, 2019; Eriksson, Reestorf and Stage, 2018; Miles and Gibson, 2016).[36]

In practice, cultural participation takes various forms and researchers have tried to rationalise these through various typologies. Drawing on a study on European cultural centres, Erikkson et al. (2018) identify six forms that, moving progressively as in Arnstein's ladder, go from attention to education, co-creation, co-habitation, collective verbal interaction and co-decision.

However, cultural participation also presents significant barriers. Conditions of participation can include spatial mobility, access to social networks, artistic capital, institutional literacy and in the context of global migrations, cross-cultural

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[34] Strauss, M. (2022) 'Democracy at the Top: Embedding Community Participation in Governance and Strategic Decision-Making in Museums and Heritage' Arts and Humanities Research Council; Clore Leadership, Available at https://www.cloreleadership.org/wp-content/uploads/files/democracy_at_the_top_mel_s_full_v3.pdf [Accessed 10/10/2024].
[35] United Nations General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 27 1 (III), 1948, https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights
[36] Belfiore, E. and Gibson, L. (2019) 'Histories of Cultural Participation, Values, and Governance'. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Eriksson, B., Reestorff, C.M. and Stage, C. (2018) 'Forms and potential effects of citizen participation in European cultural centres', Participations, 15(2), pp. 205-228.
Miles, A. and Gibson, L. (2016) 'Everyday participation and cultural value in place', Cultural Trends, 25(3), pp. 151–157.

literacy (Khan, 2015).[37] It follows that institutional efforts to enable cultural participation must prioritise reaching seldom-heard communities, responding to locals' interests and creating space for pluralistic narratives of place.

Discussion: Bridging placemaking and local voice

In this paper, we are interested in the intersection between placemaking and participation as a means to local cultural decision making.

Through practices of participation, place-based projects create an 'activity space' (Massey, 1995),[38] where the trajectories of different people and stakeholder groups intersect. But it is important to remember that the making of place is fluid and ever-changing, and the groups emerging from creative projects, such as culture-led redevelopment projects in this paper, are "neither inevitable nor stable", as feminist geographer Rose (1997)[39] reminds us. Thus, the types of engagement employed in these projects will contribute to determine the infrastructure of people on which they rely.

At their fullest, these interconnections have been described as 'creative and cultural ecologies' – "complex interdependencies that shape the demand for and production of arts and cultural offerings"[40], which are themselves "sustained by many different kinds of value"[41] deriving from the different models on which their actors operate (commercial, non-profit, state and voluntary participants).

The ecological approach to culture-led capital projects allows us to capture the "throwntogetherness" (Massey, 2005)[42] of place-based cultural development and recognise culture as "an organism, not a mechanism" (Holden, 2015, p. 4).[43]

Culture-led regeneration should therefore be understood as operating within an ecology (literally and conceptually) and large-scale capital build projects can usefully be understood as nodes in these wider networks. They have the potential to have a galvanising function, providing focus, anchoring and coordinating the wider ecology. What we set out to understand through the case studies is how

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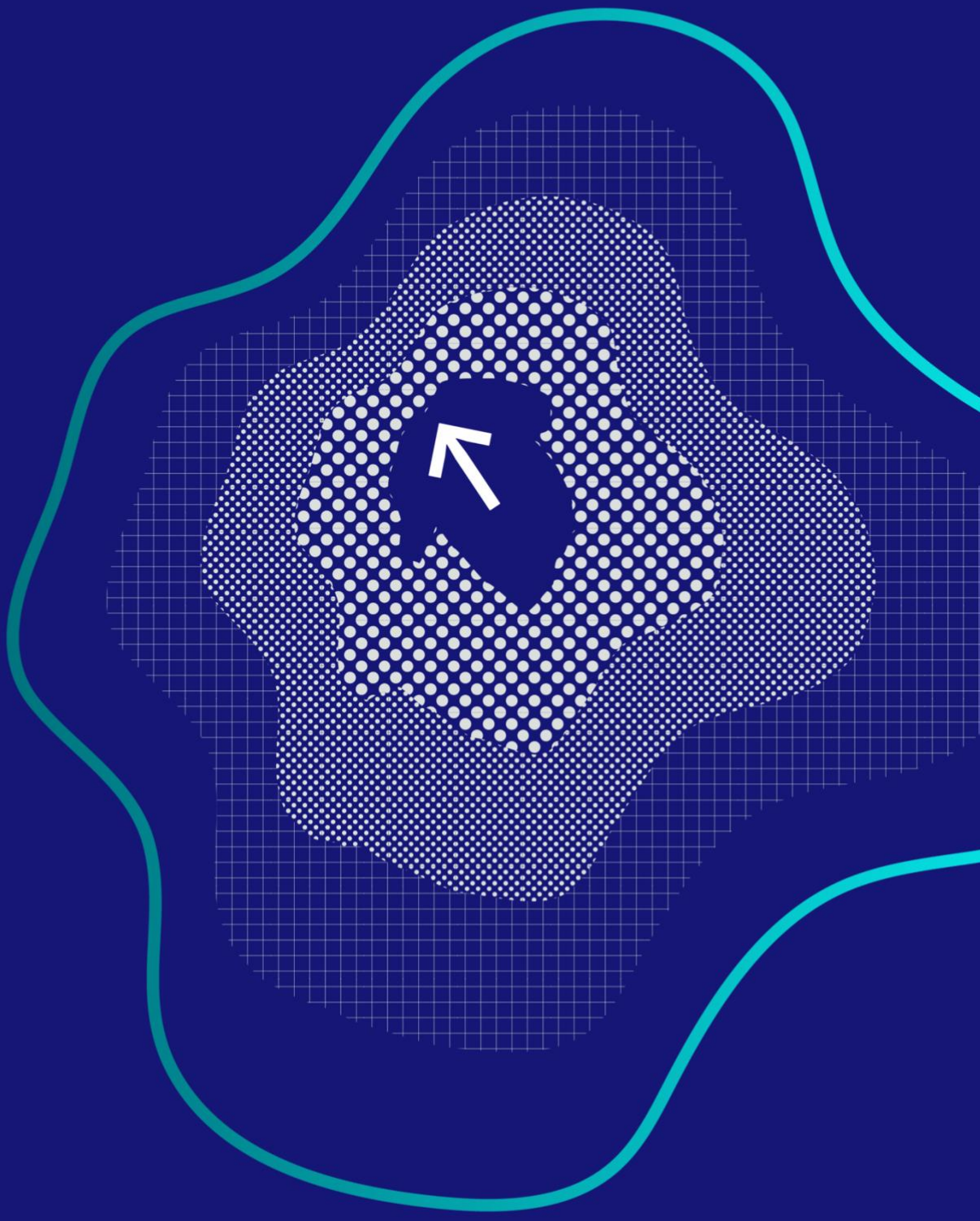
[37] Khan, R. (2015) 'Art in Community: The Provisional Citizen'. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
[38] Massey, D. (1995) 'The conceptualization of place', in D. Massey and P. Jess (eds) A Place in the World? Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 45–85.
[39] Rose, G. (1997) 'Spatialities of "community", power and change: The imagined geographies of community arts projects', Cultural Studies, 11(1), pp. 1–16. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/09502389700490011.
[40] Markusen, A. (2010) 'California's Arts and Cultural Ecology'. San Francisco, CA: James Irvine Foundation, p. 8.
[41] Ibid. p. 8
[42] Massey, D. (2005) 'For space. London': SAGE Publications Ltd
[43] Holden J. (2015) 'The Ecology of Culture, Swindon': Cultural Value Project: Arts and Humanities Research Council, p. 4

these nodes and different kinds of participation contribute to the development, successes or failures of culture-led capital development projects.



Methodology

This paper explores these connections through two English case studies that illuminate different approaches to co-design and placemaking but both include local community input, particularly centred on children and young people (CYP).

The primary research for this paper was carried out through semi-structured interviews with project managers from each of the two live case studies and a desk-based review of relevant grey literature. This included publicly available sources such as reports, websites, local press articles, official council documents and, when available, additional evaluation reports and funding applications.

The case studies are:

Docking Station, Chatham and Harmony Works, Sheffield

In addition to their focus on participation and creative placemaking, the two projects were found to have additional similarities and points of contact:

- They were in receipt of place-based regeneration funding from a variety of sources
- They centred on public engagement through different platforms and strategies, including experimentation with digital technology
- Their engagement activity relied on project-based funding
- They featured the renovation and repurposing of a listed heritage building in an urban location
- They had a particular focus on engagement with children and young people
- They utilise partnership-based models to drive culture-led capital redevelopment

Project	Core Partners	Extended Partners	Funding
Docking Station Chatham, Kent	• The University of Kent's Institute of Cultural and Creative Industries (iCCi) • Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust (CHDT) • Medway Council.	• Creative Estuary • Satellite hubs	• £3.5m Arts Council England's Cultural Development Fund • £5.6m Round 1 Levelling Up Funding • £3.5m National Lottery Heritage Fund • Regional Innovation Fund
Harmony Works Sheffield, South Yorkshire	• Sheffield Music Hub (founding partner) • Sheffield Music Academy (founding partner) • Music in the Round • Brass Bands England • The Choir with No Name • Orchestras for All • Concerteenies	• Sheffield City Council • South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority • The Sheffield College • The University of Sheffield • Sheffield Hallam University	• Architectural Heritage Fund • £250,000 via National Lottery Heritage Fund • £1.6m Levelling Up Fund via UK Government • £2m Gainshare funding via • The Wolfson Foundation

Note: in early 2025, the Harmony Works project was awarded circa £4.7m by the National Lottery Heritage Fund[44] and £3.5m from the Cultural Development Fund via Arts Council England[45]. The interviews for this paper were conducted in Spring 2024 and our analysis accounts for engagement activities and funding received up to that point only.

[44] Harmony Works (2025) 'Harmony Works secures £4.7m of heritage funding from National Lottery'. Available at: https://harmonyworks.org.uk/harmony-works-secures-4-7m-of-heritage-funding-from-national-lottery/ (Accessed: 7 March 2025).

[45] Harmony Works (2025) 'Harmony Works Secures £3.5m Grant From Arts Council England For Canada House Restoration' Available at Harmony Works Secures £3.5m Grant From Arts Council England For Canada House Restoration - Harmony Works (Accessed 31st March 2025)


D O G K I N G
G I A I I O N
University of Kent
University of Kent

Case Study 1: Docking Station, Medway

Docking Station (DS) is a major capital redevelopment project aiming to repurpose Chatham's disused Grade II listed Police Section House[46] into an industry-leading hub for digital production.

Set to open by Autumn 2026, the development of the site is a partnership-based project involving The University of Kent's Institute of Cultural and Creative Industries (iCCi), Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust (CHDT) and Medway Council.

CHDT will acquire the headlease for the building; iCCi will manage the facility and service the network of local community sites that will form the local digital ecosystem with DS at its heart. Medway Council, on the other hand, have received £5.6 million of Levelling Up funding (awarded in Round 1 in 2021) to part-finance the refurbishment of Police Section House and the development of the new facility.

Once the development is complete, DS will include studios, teaching spaces, co-working spaces, a gallery and a café. Envisioned for the benefit of students, businesses and local creative communities, a new state-of-the-art facility, built behind the original building, will host a digital production studio. Furthermore, satellite sites in local libraries and adult learning centres aim to embed the technology more broadly across the towns.

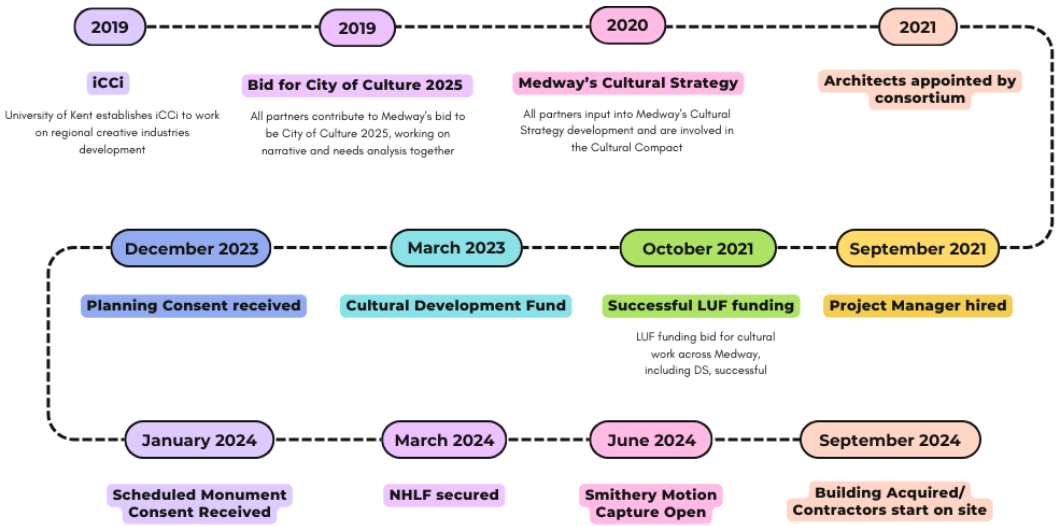


Figure 1: Timeline of Docking Station project

[46] Historic England (n.d.) 'Police Section House, East Road', 'National Heritage List for England'. Available at: [https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1378642] (Accessed: 7 March 2025)

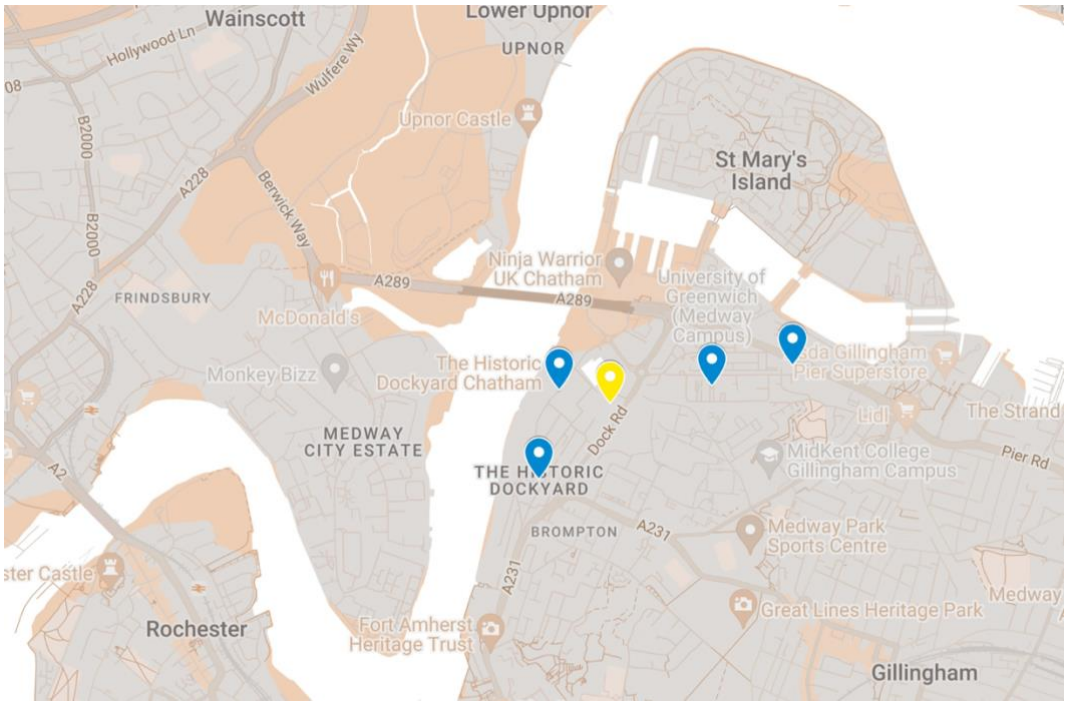


Figure 2: Map of Medway towns, showing location of Docking Station (in yellow). Credits: Google Maps 2024.


Figure 3: Rendering of Docking Station. Credits: The University of Kent https://www.kent.ac.uk/institute-cultural-creative-industries/dockingstation

At the heart of Docking Station project is the partnership's ambition to create a strong connection with the local creative and cultural ecosystem, while generating economic growth for the local area through upskilling and opening up new career pathways.

Given Medway's designation as a 'Priority Place' by both UK Government and Arts Council England, the project will aim to address the historical lack of investment for the creative, cultural and heritage sectors – both in Medway and for the surrounding county.

The building is in the vicinity of The University of Kent's Medway Campus, while the main campus is in Canterbury. This means that although the project is university-led, the student body is one of the local communities the project seeks to serve. In a research interview for this paper, the DS Project Manager reflected on the role of the building: "It's not just a student building. It's much more about the local creative community – so local small businesses, freelancers, start-ups, those are the people that it's really for".[47]

Beyond restoring the Grade II listed building, DS aims to be a catalyst for the local creative community by creating jobs and training opportunities in digital technology. As the DS Project Manager stated: "The building was empty and available; there was an opportunity to find a purpose for it".[48] At the time of writing, the project is poised to break ground, having attracted sufficient funding to begin building work, while the various heritage and technology engagement off-site programmes are well under way. Once constructed, the DS will transform into an incubator space, catering to local small businesses, creatives, students and communities alongside its commercial capacity.

While plans are underway for the introduction of new undergraduate courses, in the short-term, DS will offer short professional development courses for people seeking to upskill and enhance their digital proficiency. This is expected to address workforce skill gaps in the sector, staging an opportunity for DS to become an industry-leading hub for the region. Emphasis is being placed on creating new avenues for young people into digital production.

Since its inception, the DS project has taken an ecosystem approach, developing in partnership with other institutions and local organisations.

[47] Caroline Dennis, Interview by Lucrezia Gigante, MS Teams, 1 May 2024.
[48] Ibid.

While the principles of this approach have been shaped by the project's core ambition to benefit local creative communities, in practice, to some extent, this has been influenced by the requirements and structures of the funding schemes supporting the project (in this case Levelling Up Fund, Cultural Development Fund and National Lottery Heritage Fund). For example, the National Lottery Heritage Fund's requirement for a "Heritage Activity Plan" prompted the partnership team to design an extensive engagement programme with local museums, community groups and creative businesses to co-deliver heritage activities and implement interpretation plans.

The DS Heritage and Engagement Officer emphasised how in writing the Activity Plan, they purposefully did not define the outcomes, wanting the programme to reflect the community's input. Consultation processes have included an online public survey to gather people's appetite for digital production and activities with local organisations and schools. The team have also attended a number of festivals showcasing immersive technology and exhibiting the DS project to the public.

While at the time of writing, the main community engagement programme is still in the planning stages, the off-site delivery of initial engagement work in the community and in other places on the Dockyard site will continue through until the opening of the DS building, when engagement activities will be housed inside the facility itself. In the meantime, a small amount of the Regional Innovation Fund[49] acquired by the university, has been secured to work on a smartphone digital placemaking project with young people.

Alongside the outreach programme, the project team implemented a Digital Satellite Sites Model, collaborating with three accessible public venues in areas of multiple deprivation – Lordswood Library,[50] The Brook Theatre[51] and Medway Learning and Skills Hub.[52] This has been created in recognition of both the tech skills poverty of the area and the relative inaccessibility of the DS site compared to those builds based in town centres. Planned from the start and giving rise to

[49] UK Government (2025) 'New £60 million Regional Innovation Fund among measures to boost research and development'. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-60-million-regional-innovation-fund-among-measures-to-boost-research-and-development [Accessed: 7 March 2025].
[50] Medway Council (n.d.) 'Lordswood Library'. Available at: https://www.medway.gov.uk/directory_record/27/lordswood_library. [Accessed: 7 March 2025].
[51] Medway Tickets Live (n.d.) 'Brook Theatre'. Available at: https://www.medwayticket [Accessed: 7 March 2025].
[52] Medway Adult Education (n.d.) 'Medway Learning and Skills Hub', Available at: https://www.medwayadulteducation.co.uk/info/56/medway-lea [Accessed: 7 March 2025].

the name “Docking Station” as a digital hub, it aims significantly to increase digital skills and confidence among hyperlocal communities.

In the words of the DS Project Manager, the ambitions of the DS projects are directly linked to those of the Cultural Development Fund, which supports projects to deliver economic growth within the creative industries. To date, the DS work with the ‘satellite sites’ has featured training in the use of new immersive technology (Motion Capture and Virtual Reality sets) and has supported the organisation to engage with their communities through this new technology.

The partnership approach created opportunities for cross-sector learning and development support, but it also presented the project team with challenges.

On a practical level, these were at times some challenges with communication between different entities. This led to what has been described as “unwieldy governance” procedures, especially keenly felt with funding reporting lines and lease agreements.

Furthermore, as the sole grant recipient, The University of Kent had to shoulder all responsibilities and risks for the financial viability of the project and the successful delivery of planned activities, while counting on a relatively small delivery team.

On this note, the Project Manager recognised that all the grant application processes had required a greater amount of time and capacity than had been planned for, placing significant pressure on team members. Similarly, the Heritage and Engagement Officer highlighted that the consultation process for the National Lottery Heritage Fund would have benefited from longer periods of engagement with community stakeholders or more resources, emphasising the challenges of delivering “a major project with major funding” when the core team was “tiny”.[53]

Overall, the partnership ethos has been pivotal in driving the project’s development and has been acknowledged as one of its key successes and enablers.

[53] Esther Lutman, Interview by Lucrezia Gigante, MS Teams, 1 May 2024.

They added: “We're going to be meeting with a local MP soon because we need some intervention at a political level. Again, the partnership weighs in to enable that and to really drive some of that, so I think that is a massive success.”[54]

Established relationships with Medway Council, the Cultural Education Partnership (that iCCi co-chairs), Creative Medway, the Cultural Compact (on which it is the Post-18 Education Lead) and local organisations such as Electric Medway,[55] have played a vital role in fostering a supportive environment where the project could be locally endorsed and championed.

Hosted by iCCi, Creative Estuary[56], which is a consortium of public sector and cultural organisations, is committed to supporting creative-led innovation along the Thames Estuary. It has provided assistance in the form of small pots of capital expenditure for feasibility studies and ‘door-opening’ during the project’s initial stage. While community partners were seen as important to bringing relevance and legitimacy to the project, the core partners have been critical in securing funding.

With Police Section House being a Grade II listed building and a Scheduled Ancient Monument, Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust – as experts in the heritage sector – assisted with liaison with Historic England[57] on the heritage planning aspects of the development and helped to raise the project’s profile locally. Medway Council has also been instrumental in championing the project across the region and affording political support.

While the engagement between partners has been described as “light touch”, nevertheless its effectiveness is recognised in providing specialist expertise and political capital.

In summary, the reuse of a heritage building has been important to the type of funding attracted by the project team, and in turn, this appears to have defined the focus of community engagement activities to some extent. It has led to exploration of its history as Police Section House, work with relevant museum collections, and some oral histories of the later periods of occupation of the

[54] Dennis, Interview, 2024.
[55] Electric Medway (n.d.) ‘Electric Medway’. Available at: https://www.electricmedway.org [Accessed: 7 March 2025].
[56] Creative Estuary are a programme partner in ‘the future of local cultural decision making’.
[57] Historic England are a programme partner in ‘the future of local cultural decision making’.

building. It has also arguably shaped the balance of the partnership, through the expertise brought by each of the partners.

Also significant to shaping the offer has been the physical location of the building: a little outside the town centre, on the other side of the main Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust site. The distance from the centre of the town and the use of digital technology underpins a hub and spoke approach to engagement (with the digital equipping of community spaces outside the main site but within the wider geography of the Medway ecosystem) that has taken place thus far.

Case Study 2: Harmony Works, Sheffield

Harmony Works (HW) is a capital redevelopment project aiming to restore and revitalise the currently unused Canada House, a 29,000 sq ft Grade II listed building, to create a musical education hub in the heart of Sheffield's city centre.

The HW project was borne out of the need to find a physical location to deliver music education that could be accessible to students across the city and the region. It was founded originally by Sheffield Music Hub[58] and Sheffield Music Academy[59], with Brass Bands England and Music in the Round also becoming partners later. Beyond the core partners, the "collaborative powerhouse"', as the project is described, is backed by Sheffield City Council, South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, several major public funders, Sheffield's Culture Collective,[60] The Castlegate Partnership and Sheffield's universities.

As a former 'Sheffield United Gas Light Company' Victorian building located near the main train station for the city, Canada House provided an ideal strategic location for a music education hub for over 15,000 of Sheffield's children and young people.

With a variety of spaces specifically designed for teaching, practising and performing every genre of music and music-inspired culture, HW will provide spaces to rent for local, regional and national music education providers and a café open to the local community.

It is important to emphasise that Sheffield City Council supported the redevelopment of Canada House as part of the government's Levelling Up Fund project to transform the Castlegate area, where the site is located.[61]

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[58] Sheffield Music Hub (n.d.) 'Sheffield Music Hub'. Available at: https://www.sheffieldmusichub.org [Accessed: 7 March 2025].
[59] Sheffield Music Academy (n.d.) 'Sheffield Music Academy'. Available at: https://www.sheffieldmusicacademy.org [Accessed: 7 March 2025].
[60] Sheffield's Culture Collective are a programme partner in 'the future of local cultural decision making'.
[61] UK Government (2023.) 'Castlegate's £20 million regeneration', GOV.UK. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/castlegates-20-million-regeneration [Accessed: 7 March 2025].

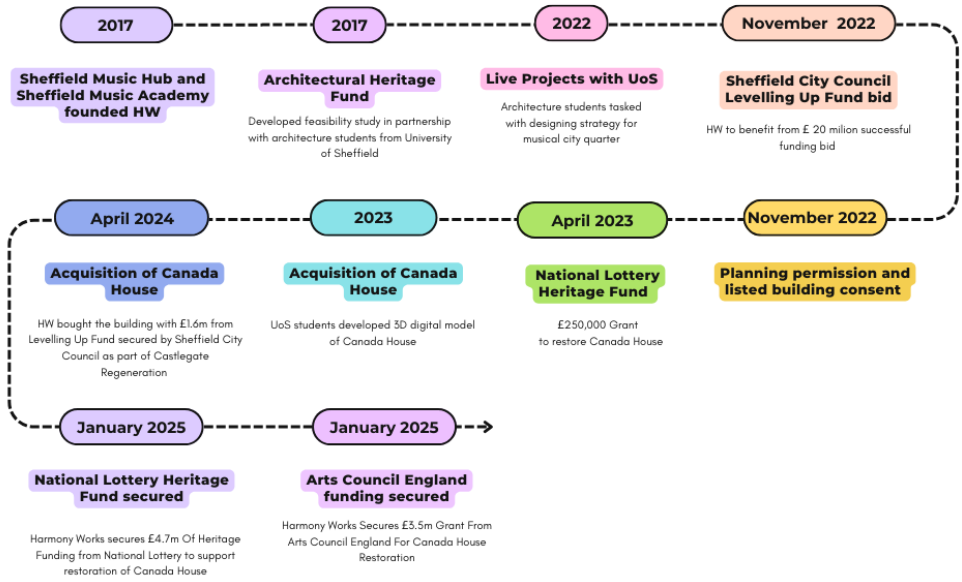

Figure 4: Timeline of Harmony Works project

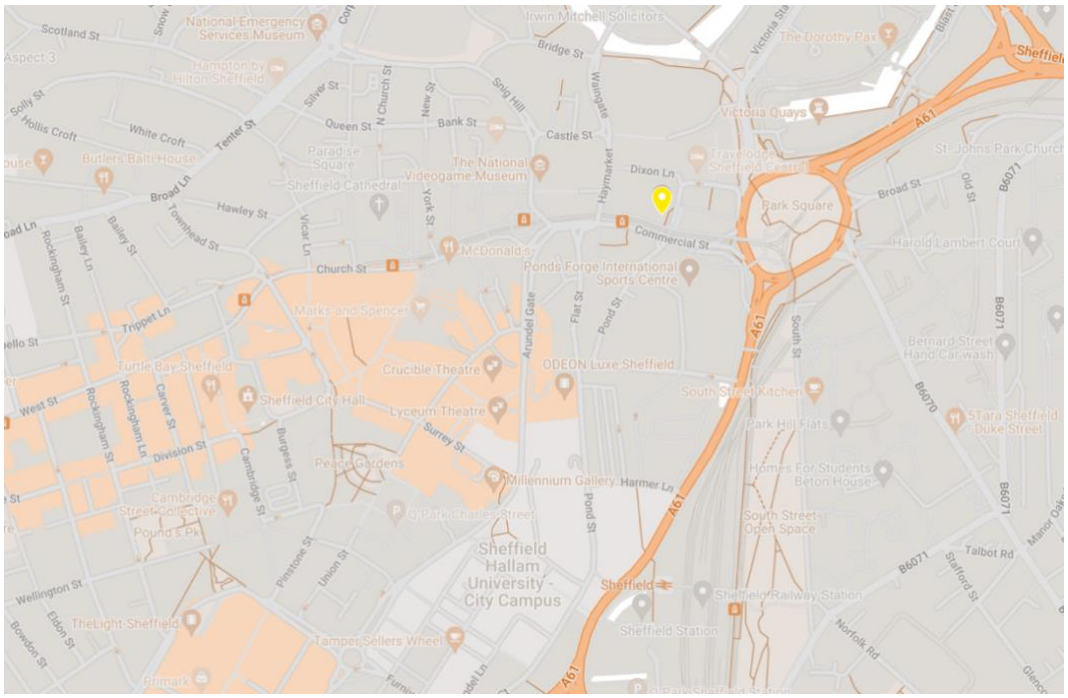

Figure 5: Map of Sheffield City Centre showing location of Canada House (in yellow). Credit: Google Maps 2024.

In an interview for this paper, Project Director Emily Pieters said: "...physical location has been really important. And also, that kind of placemaking opportunity that a singular place brings where young people can co-locate that also is alongside other things happening out in the community and out in schools".[62]

It is hoped that HW will function as an umbrella organisation where the tenants who rent the spaces will "co-locate" and deliver music education, while also continuing their off-site educational activities in their respective communities.

Through this centrally managed operating model with a networked development programme, HW intends to be a local, regional and national hub for music education.

Conceived as a fundamentally educational project, engagement with children and young people has been a core thread through the development phase of the project. In practice, this has meant not only addressing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) as a priority agenda item in every board meeting but also embedding consultation activities with young people in different ways and at different stages throughout.

Since inception, the development phase has been delivered alongside young people.

With initial funding that came via the Architectural Heritage Fund[63] in 2017, the project team activated a series of live projects with the School of Architecture and Landscape at The University of Sheffield (UoS) to do some early groundwork that would support the planning application. The postgraduate students were tasked with a speculative study which helped with initial plans and estimates for consideration by the project team.[64]

Further iterations of the live projects (in 2022) looked at developing a vision for the future of Canada House to connect the building with the wider regeneration of the Castlegate area taking place in the vicinity. In 2022, The University of Sheffield's architecture Master's students were tasked with designing a strategy for a musical city quarter that would support the local council's funding applications and tie HW into the regeneration plans for Castlegate. Facilitated by Sheffield Music Hub and Sheffield Music Academy (the initiators of the development project), students visited schools to consult with children and young

[62] Emily Pieters, Interview by Lucrezia Gigante, MS Teams, 9 May 2024.
[63] Architectural Heritage Fund (n.d.), 'AHF'. Available at: https://ahfund.org.uk [Accessed: 7 March 2025].
[64] SSOA Live Projects (2017) 'Harmony Works'. Available at: https://liveprojects.ssoa.info/2017/harmony-works/ [Accessed: 7 March 2025].

people. In 2023, they developed a 3D digital model of Canada House as a creative and inclusive tool to communicate proposals and engage the wider community in the design process.[65]

The partnership with higher education institutions has grown to involve students from The University of Sheffield's Departments of Music as well as Civil and Structural Engineering,[66] and from Sheffield Hallam University. In line with the ethos of the project, this was seen as both an opportunity for the young professionals to gain educational development and for the project to be led by the young people it seeks to serve.

Some engagement activities with young people have also been carried out by the core project team and resident organisations, such as the recent PromsInThePlayground project, for which HW obtained funding from Arts Council England and The James Neill Trust Fund. The project involved bringing brass bands and singing to schools with low engagement with music education to enhance the project's overall outreach.

However, while young people are the primary target stakeholders, HW also seeks dialogue with the communities that are physically close to Canada House to embed the project at the local level.

This is addressed through relationships with the Castlegate Partnership, a network of local stakeholders invested in the Levelling Up-funded regeneration project of the Castlegate area, which includes landowners, local organisations and creative industry professionals, and seeks to spotlight the vibrant cultural scene of the area.

Speaking to local organisations about how they would want to use Canada House alongside the educational partners who will deliver the music education, was regarded as important to ensure that HW is "working with those that are currently already doing brilliant things in the area, ensuring that there is a thread and a seam that kind of continue through".[67] For this purpose, the design of the building will include a café open to all.

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[65] Harmony Works (n.d.) 'Students at Sheffield University School of Architecture create digital engagement model for young people'. Available at: https://harmonyworks.org.uk/students-at-sheffield-university-school-of-architecture-create-digital-engagement-model-for-young-people/ [Accessed: 7 March 2025]. My Matterport (n.d.) 'Digital engagement model for young people'. Available at: https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=vqb9wYvDDDN [Accessed: 7 March 2025].
[66] https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/city-region/enhancing-cultural-vibrancy/harmony-works-developing-heritage-asset-community-use [Accessed: 7 March 2025].
[67] Emily Pieters, Interview by Lucrezia Gigante, MS Teams, 9 May 2024.

While there is concern that the wider regeneration project taking place in Castlegate (of which HW is part) may disrupt the area's authentic character, ongoing conversations with local stakeholders have sought to counteract this risk by platforming local communities in placemaking dialogues.

Moving beyond the hyperlocal, HW also took part in festivals and events to communicate the project as widely as possible, with the aim of establishing its presence at the local and regional level. This is not only to engage with wider young populations but also to evidence impact and align to local and regional policy – both strategically important moves to secure funding. Pieters explained: "It's very difficult for a project to succeed without being able to evidence where it sits within political, local and regional policy."[68]

As seen in the Docking Station case study, the support of local authorities was seen by Pieters as crucial to the success of a project, whether this translates into funding or "strong advocacy, both at officer level and political level".[69] In the case of HW, the support of the local council had been fundamental, for example, to applying for the National Heritage Lottery Fund, through which they have been able to do valuable development work and now have a £4.7 million grant for the capital phase.

Further, establishing positive relationships with local authorities enabled the project team to share challenges and failures and seek expert advice or support.

> We were able to go to the city council and say, 'Look, this was a no, but we think if we're able to do this, we might have a chance of getting it'. So that sharing the times that don't go so well with the council has worked, [...] not having that view that 'Oh, yes, we can do it all alone. We can manage it ourselves. It's all fine'. Actually being able to share with certain key stakeholders, 'this didn't go so well for us. Can you help us?'. And share and be very clear with them where it's been difficult.

As also evidenced in the literature,[70] small pots of money were recognised as great levers for the project, acting as springboards. The initial funding from the Architectural Heritage Fund mentioned above, for example, allowed the project team to develop visuals and estimates that were key to subsequent funding applications and wider stakeholder conversations within the city council.

[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Janchovich, Gigante and Burnill-Maier, 2024.

Echoing findings from the Docking Station case study, the main challenges for this project were identified in the governance, staff capacity and funding timescales.

Being big, ambitious projects delivered through a partnership approach, it was observed that they "don't always rest within an existing organisation".[71] This can result in practical challenges and create a perception of risk from funders that undermines their confidence in investing. Pieters highlighted that "managing that alongside making sure that the partners that you engage with are aligned to the aims and objectives of the project" was key to the project's viability, together with a solid VAT strategy and being able as a team to always identify the next priority.

Resources in terms of capacity and funding were also recognised as important barriers and to some extent interconnected. Pieters acknowledged that, while these are often "passion projects" taken forward thanks to the enthusiasm and belief of a "tiny team", core funding would help secure continuity within the delivery team but also expand it and cover for those periods of uncertainty between funding applications.[72] In this sense, the challenge of applying for funding across different scheme timelines can pose significant threats to projects like HW – what Pieters referred to as "a three-dimensional jigsaw".

HW's approach to capital redevelopment created what Pieters defined as a "sequential and growing set of interrelationships" bringing together different stakeholder groups.

Again here, the use of a historic building – "a piece of Sheffield's story, where the city's history began'[73] – has been important in the broad offer of engagement, inviting local communities. Its central location has been important too, but balanced by a programme of outreach that moved out of the hyperlocal and into the regional. The partnership with higher education institutions, local authorities and local actors has laid the groundwork for long-term vision and large-scale investments, notwithstanding the challenges that project-based funding has created for the small core project team in the initial phases.

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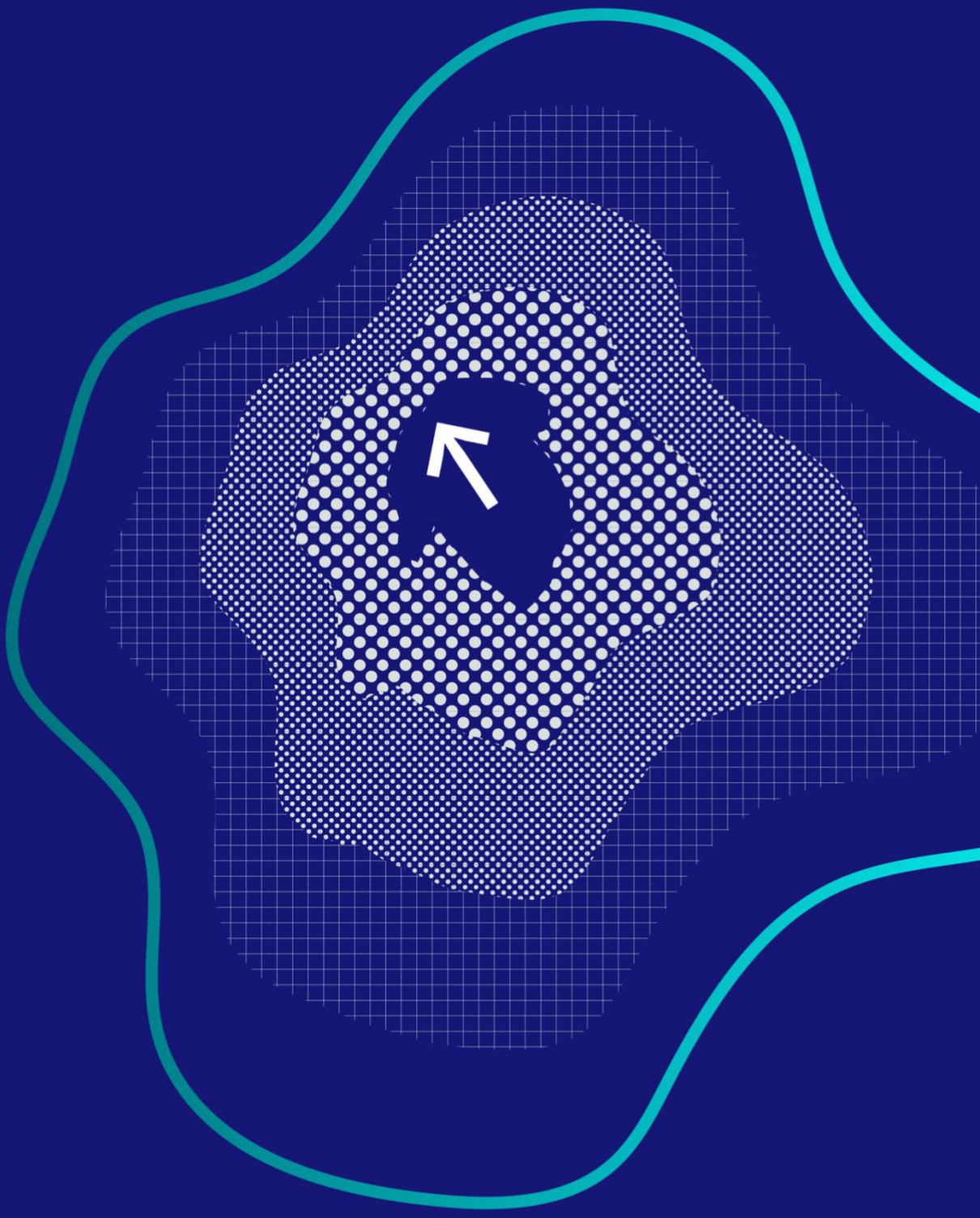
[71] Pieters, Interview, 2024.
[72] See Catherine Walker, "Place-Based Giving Schemes: Funding, Engaging and Creating Stronger Communities", Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2018, p. 40, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b9944dfed915d666ca7d0b3/Place-based_giving_schemes_in_England__final_.pdf
[73] Harmony Works (n.d.) 'Canada House', Harmony Works. Available at: https://harmonyworks.org.uk/canada-house/ [Accessed: 7 March 2025].



Discussion

Opportunities and Challenges of Partnership Models

Delivery teams involved in the culture-led development schemes, identified as case studies for this paper, were broadly positive about the multi-sector partnership approaches they are taking. Each brings together different parts of the local creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem, collaborating and exchanging knowledge — for example, with Harmony Works sharing 'failures' with the local council and getting expert support.

Collaborations seem to have brought different combinations of skills and expertise to the table — for example, at Docking Station, education and research specialists working alongside historic building and heritage managers as well as local community and regeneration experts. Evidence suggests that partnerships with local authorities can provide ambitious culture-led capital projects with credibility and political capital that can 'crowd in' funding and support from wider sector, local and national stakeholders. For example, these collaborations have resulted in significant tranches of funding coming from national funding pots focused on local development with the support of local authorities.

Alongside our findings, research tells us that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and local authorities are well-placed to act as "anchors" for community-focused placemaking projects. Bailey (2024)[74] emphasises the lifelong learning that these kinds of partnerships can bring about, not only seeing capabilities not only mobilised but the conditions to develop these capabilities being established too. Similarly, Dent et al. (2023)[75] speak of the role that HEIs (and particularly capital investment in their facilities) can have in supporting the wider local creative economy in sustainable ways. Led by Culture Commons (2024)[76], an evaluation of a series of live projects delivered by The University of Kent in Chatham, Medway, highlights the potential of local partnerships to bridge local planning, local voice and HEIs for new forms of integrated placemaking.

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[74] Bailey, R. (2024) 'Working in Collaboration: universities, local authorities and place-based cultural development', in Universities, Local Authorities and Culture-based Partnerships: Case studies, reflections and evidence from REF impact case studies, NCACE Report, pp. 31-41.
[75] Dent, T., England, L. and Comunian, R. (2024) 'The challenges of developing sustainable cultural and creative ecosystems and the role of higher education institutions: Lessons from Dundee and Chatham, UK', Industry and Higher Education, 38(1), pp. 40–50. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/09504222231186367.
[76] Culture Commons (2024) 'New Approaches to Integrated Place-Shaping, Evaluation Report'. Available at https://www.culturecommons.uk/publications/new-approaches-to-integrated-place-shaping.

One potential drawback of these otherwise rewarding partnerships seems to be the 'unwieldy governance' and the fact that, while a partnership approach makes for a rich ensemble of perspectives, it can also generate challenging decision-making dynamics. The teams of both projects are quite small and often overstretched in trying to deliver on ambitious outcomes, including refurbishment and/or building projects of considerable magnitude.

The Harmony Works team spoke of the challenges to keep these 'passion projects' running when you have a tiny core team. Docking Station teams also talked about the challenges of working with a small delivery team. Paradoxically, while partnership approaches understandably give funders more confidence to invest at the application and planning stages of a development project, this can inadvertently cause decision-making difficulties once multiple partners move into the delivery phase of a development scheme. What could be beneficial is an enabling fund for core teams to facilitate a new phase of partnership working, recognising that rather than being about 'economising', it is actually much more time consuming when done properly.

The Current Limitations of Place-based Funding

The projects are all seen as part of a clearly articulated placemaking agenda linked to a larger programme of civic regeneration and skills development ambitions. The Docking Station had a long lead-in phase, actively building on partnerships that coalesced around an unsuccessful bid to be the UK City of Culture in 2025, then renewed through relationships brokered via Creative Medway (the local Cultural Compact). The clear articulation of concentric circles of engagement in the interviews suggests this may be an asset to both projects; Harmony Works' sense of the hyperlocal to regional significance of their work is very strong, for instance.

The relationship between large-scale capital funding and smaller pots of money for discrete parts of the wider whole, with different audiences, is a feature of both case studies. Initial pump-priming from the Architectural Heritage Fund for Harmony Works and Creative Estuary (via DCMS) for the development of Docking Station helped both projects to evidence needs and potential gains, as well as clarify detailed future plans.

Securing funding for long-term local engagement work alongside capital build appears to be problematic for both projects. Engagement activities often utilise smaller pots of money sitting alongside the main development programme as it develops, directed towards discrete projects for different audiences. Docking

Station's phased engagement reflects the way the project has also been phased in tandem with the funding schedule.

Questions remain around how coherent engagement approaches can be funded and scaled up as programmes near completion and open to the public; at present, managing funds can be like dealing with "a three-dimensional jigsaw' as Pieters put it. More stable funding specifically for engagement activities, perhaps less directly linked to individual phases or elements of specific capital development or engagement activities, could be beneficial: a fund for engagement that sits outside the main thrust of the programme could therefore be useful.

Building Communities

Both case studies are not just standalone building projects – they are also proving to be nodes in their respective wider creative, cultural and heritage ecosystems. By observing the stakeholder engagement delivered by the project teams of both case studies, it is clear that capital projects benefit from a wide range of participation that achieves different goals. We observed involvement of local schools, co-design through live projects with higher education institutions, co-creation with the end-users of the building, consultation with local communities, collaboration with local authorities, co-location, and networked partnerships with cultural organisations at local, regional and national levels.

Several elements of our case studies are orientated towards engaging children and young people (CYP) and do so through off-site engagement with local schools to communicate the ambitions of the projects. The work at Docking Station around Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality technologies has engaged young people in exploring heritage aspects of their town with which they were previously unfamiliar; and in Sheffield, university students have consulted with young people about music education needs, alongside the outreach activities carried out by the core project team and the resident organisations. For HW, the team has also created a digital model of the building involved, to be used in the design process itself.

Both projects show links to higher education settings. The HW team have extensively developed plans and activities with university students across many different departments (engineering, architecture, music and visual arts) from two institutions in the city. For DS, the team involved architecture students in the planning phase and then sought to cater to the professional development of young people once open. The partnership between HW and the HEIs created the conditions for a mutually beneficial relationship resulting in local skills

development. This can contribute to building civic aspiration and cultural leadership among the CYP groups with which the development projects are working.

In HW and DS, where there is a pedagogical imperative (music and digital skills development, linked to their work with local universities and schools), the physical space has also been designed to bring together different communities of practice and interest – e.g. the students, the general public, local creative practitioners and industry leaders. As Pieters put it, for Sheffield, they "co-located" to mutual benefit. They aim to produce a particularly rich kind of 'social space' (Lefebvre 1974[77] – space as a set of human relations) that brings together different constituencies in placemaking. While smaller-scale enterprises do not have the physical, economic or organisational capacity to undertake such multi-faceted work, culture-led capital development projects seem able to do so.

Both DS and HW have seen the involvement of local groups in discussion around the build development (Castlegate Partnership; Creative Medway). However, the projects exhibit different balances between consultancy and grassroots involvement at different points along their respective journeys. When they have reached the stage of completion, it will be important to review how these differing approaches have influenced the perception of shared public culture in their areas.

Think Ecosystems, Not Just Buildings

The findings in this paper demonstrate that heritage assets can serve as powerful focal points for community involvement. The reuse of an urban heritage asset is significant in different ways in each case.

In Sheffield, Canada House is located in the city centre, next to tram lines, and the main bus and train stations. A building located centrally that is familiar to its surrounding communities provides a central hub in which the new placemaking offer can either be activated and made visible. By contrast, in Chatham, Docking Station sits just outside the town, but the team have developed a networked approach, using digital technology to connect the satellite hubs (The Brook Theatre, the library and the community hub) with DS.

In publicly available literature, we observe an emphasis on the role that these new buildings have had in the wider history of the areas they are part of, and on their connections to processes of social and cultural change. In some cases, we

[77] Lefebvre H. (1974) La production de l'espace. Paris: Anthropos.

observe the role that emergent technologies have played in the histories of these buildings; for example, Canada House, a Grade II* listed building, is described as playing "a crucial role in the technological revolution that swept across the UK – where the use of gas for heating and lighting homes was becoming more and more widespread".[78]

The offer that the project teams make for these revitalised assets appears to be a balance of 'old and new', which seems pitched at a young audience through a narrative of historical regeneration and restoration:

> Our plans to restore and revitalise Canada House are exciting. We will make the most of the building's space, retaining its unique heritage features, whilst making sure that it is equipped with the very best acoustic design and facilities for performance, to meet the needs of our diverse and talented young musicians.

Knowledge of the area and its history and heritage focused on the built environment has been significant in each case, irrespective of the final uses of the buildings or the focus of the schemes. This knowledge was gained through engagement with the bodies responsible for protecting the building who, for example, in the case of Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust, had a deep knowledge of it and archival materials relating to it. This knowledge was deepened through further research conducted as part of the wider public engagement process. In the example of Sheffield, this expertise was also contributed to through engagements with the Castlegate Partnership, leading the wider regeneration works in the area.

Implications for Policy

Based on our findings, we propose five key areas for potential policy development that could significantly enhance the effectiveness of culture-led capital projects in supporting local decision-making.

Firstly, partnership development and core team support could be better prioritised through dedicated funding streams. This should include explicit support for the transition from partnership formation to delivery phases, alongside resources for project management and professional development to make this possible. Current funding structures inadequately support the complex reality of multi-stakeholder partnerships moving from planning to delivery; new

[78] Harmony Works (n.d.) 'Canada House', Harmony Works. Available at: https://harmonyworks.org.uk/canada-house/ [Accessed: 7 March 2025].

frameworks to enable more flexible governance processes while maintaining accountability could now be tested.

Secondly, engagement programming associated with culture-led development schemes may benefit from restructuring. Community engagement funding should be ring-fenced from capital costs and sustained throughout development life cycles. This longer-term approach would enable more strategic planning and deeper community relationships, moving away from the current fragmented, project-based model toward sustained community involvement.

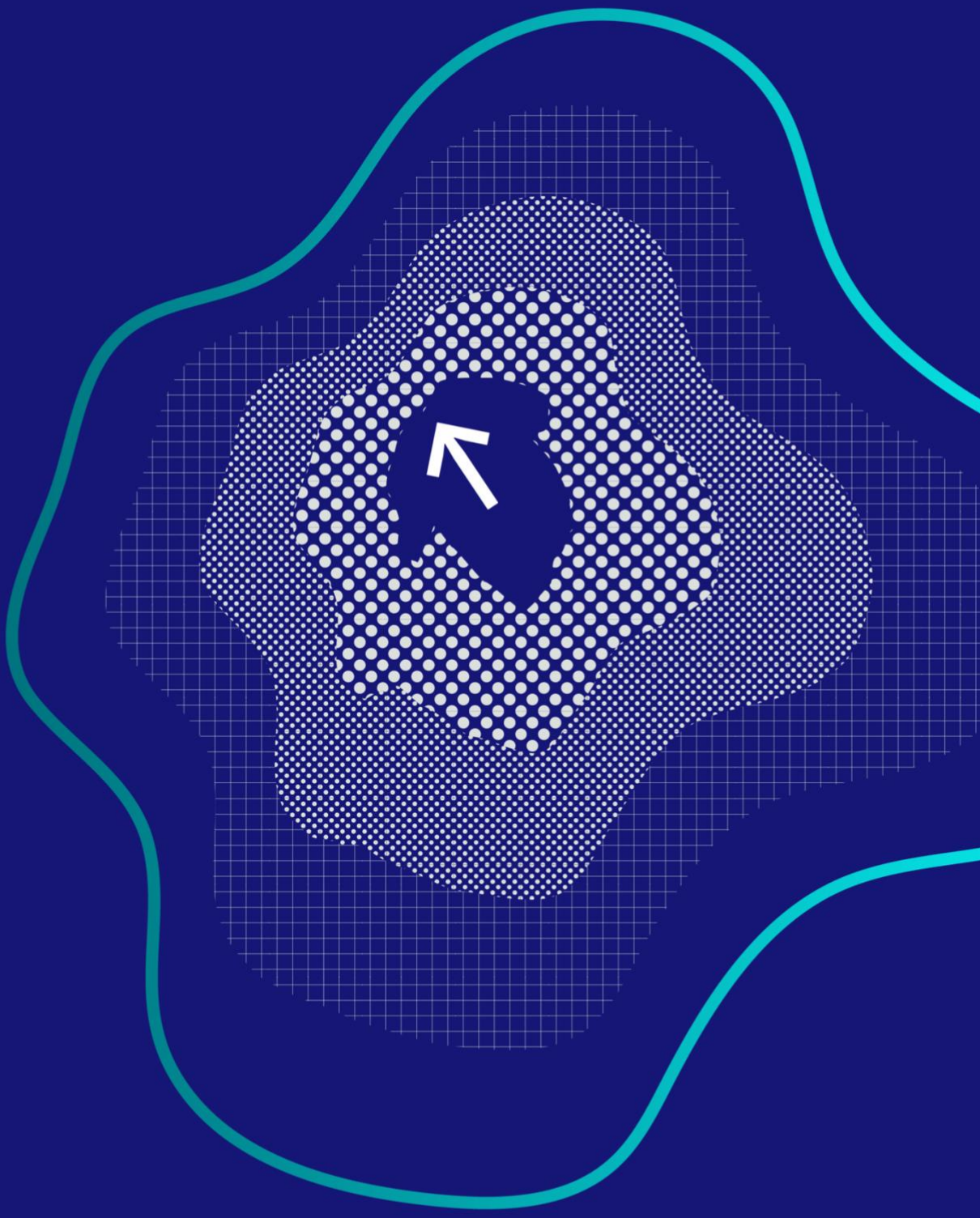
Thirdly, investment in cultural leadership and skills development is clearly crucial to the success of large-scale capital projects. Policy frameworks could better support the development of local cultural leaders through mentoring schemes, apprenticeships and knowledge-sharing networks that have a focus on development schemes of the kind we have examined as part of this paper. Particular attention should also be paid to creating pathways for young people into cultural governance roles, ensuring future sustainability of local decision-making.

Fourthly, the reuse of heritage assets requires carefully balanced approaches. Our case studies demonstrate specific tensions between conservation requirements and contemporary cultural use – for example, in Docking Station where Grade II listing requirements had to be reconciled with the need for state-of-the-art digital production facilities, and in Harmony Works where acoustic requirements for music education needed to work within the constraints of a Victorian building. The evidence shows that successful projects depend on early collaboration between heritage experts and cultural partners – as seen in Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust's vital role in liaising with Historic England, and in Sheffield's partnership approach to building adaptation. Both cases highlight the need for policy frameworks that can support this type of collaborative planning while protecting heritage value.

Our findings suggest the need for:

- Funding streams that specifically support the early stages of heritage adaptation planning
- Guidance on balancing conservation with cultural infrastructure requirements
- Support for partnerships between heritage bodies and cultural organisations
- New frameworks for sustainable operating models in heritage settings

Finally, culture-led development projects require sustained support for the wider creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem in their areas. This means funding for mapping and analysis of local cultural ecosystems, connecting capital projects with existing infrastructures, and developing frameworks for measuring impact. Crucially, this ecosystem approach should inform funding models, enabling more sustainable, long-term development of local cultural infrastructure.



Conclusions: Towards Local Cultural Leadership

This research demonstrates how recent culture-led capital projects, enabled by place-based funding schemes, are creating new possibilities for localised cultural decision making. These projects represent much more than just building renovations; they are emerging as vital nodes within complex cultural ecosystems, bridging traditional divides between creative industries, publicly funded arts and community engagement.

Our analysis reveals these spaces offer distinctive opportunities for community decision making through their connection of physical infrastructure with social and cultural practice. Their success appears to rest on three key elements: first, their ability to foster meaningful partnerships across sectors; second, their capacity to engage diverse audiences through both traditional and digital means; and third, their potential to develop local cultural leadership.

The case studies demonstrate that while strong partnerships often predate these projects, the implementation phase of culture-led development projects may require new approaches and support mechanisms to ensure success. Current funding structures do not facilitate teams to transition from planning to delivery adequately; this must now be addressed.

A significant finding is the relationship between programming associated with local stakeholder engagement and overall project success. Often piecemeal and phase-specific, current approaches to engagement funding fail to support the continuous, holistic engagement needed for genuine community involvement. A more sustainable model would ring-fence engagement funding separate from capital costs, enabling longer-term planning and deeper community relationships.

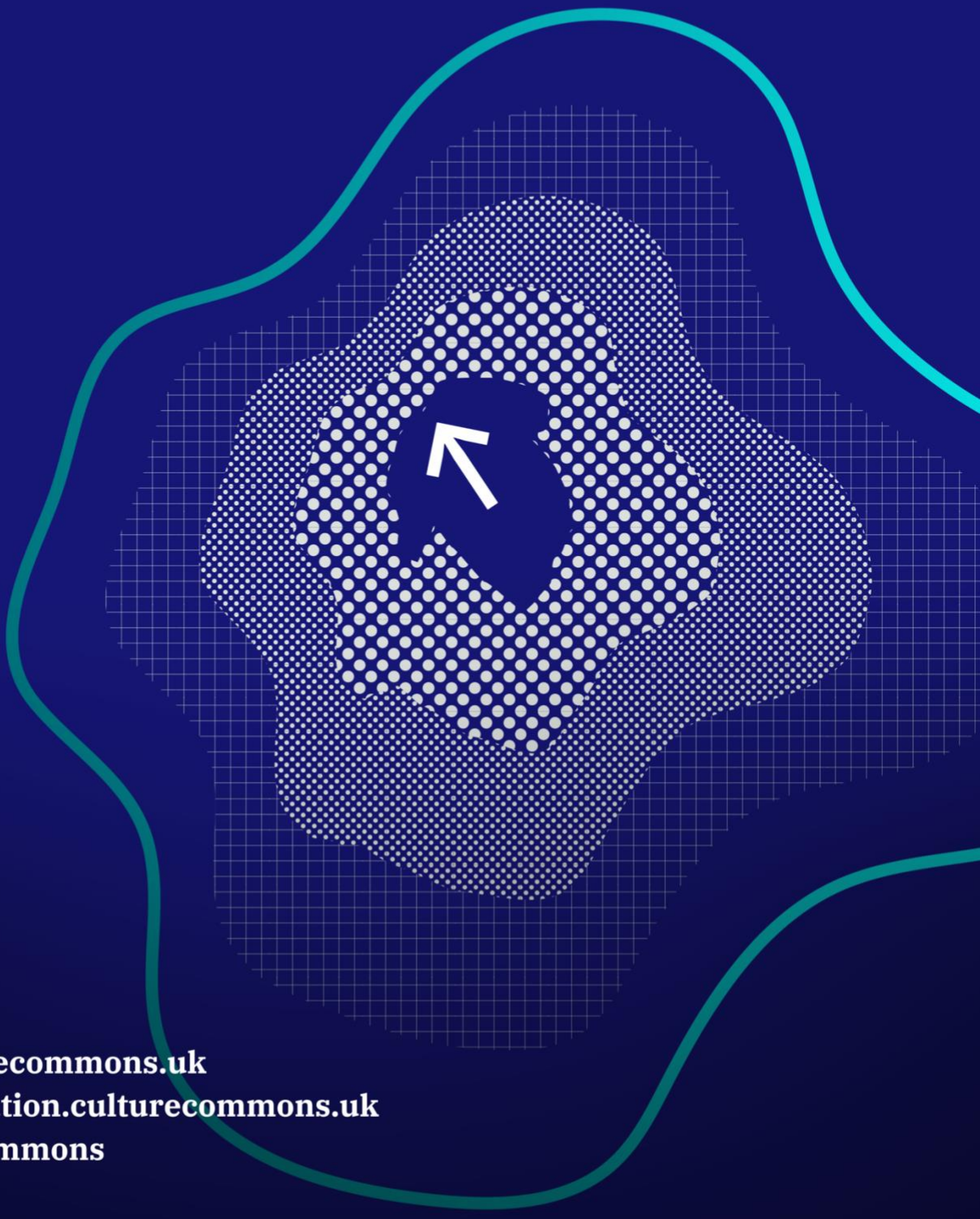
The research particularly highlights the beneficial role of digital engagement in reaching new audiences – especially young people. While traditional face-to-face methods remain valuable, digital tools have shown remarkable success in breaking down barriers to participation and visualising complex development proposals. However, this brings its own challenges, particularly around organisational capacity and the availability digital infrastructure and technical skills.

Importantly, these projects demonstrate how heritage assets can be reimagined as spaces for contemporary practices associated with the creative, cultural and heritage ecosystem; the combination of historic architecture with cutting-edge digital technology creates unique opportunities for multi-generational engagement and skills development. This synthesis of old and new appears particularly effective in fostering community ownership and pride.

Looking forward, this research suggests several priority areas for policy development: supporting the transition from partnership formation to delivery; establishing sustainable engagement funding models; building digital capacity within organisations; and developing frameworks for heritage adaptation that balance preservation with innovation. The findings in this paper will feed into the wider open policy development programme and its co-designed evidence-based policy recommendations.

The findings could have significant implications for future place-based funding programmes. They suggest that successful culture-led regeneration requires not just capital investment, but sustained support for the human and organisational infrastructure that enables genuine community participation. Future policy frameworks should therefore consider how funding can better facilitate the full life cycle of these projects, from initial partnership formation through to sustainable operation.

The evidence presented here indicates that when properly supported, culture-led capital projects can indeed serve as catalysts for enhanced local decision making. However, realising this potential requires a more nuanced understanding of how these projects function within their wider cultural ecosystems and how policy can better support their development as genuine platforms for community voice and cultural leadership.



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