Measuring the changes: how can a perceived cultural mega-event evidence its "value"? Insights from implementing evaluation methodologies for Coventry 2021

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Arts and the Market

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Measuring the changes: How can a perceived cultural mega-event evidence its 'value'? Insights from implementing evaluation methodologies for Coventry 2021

Abstract

Purpose

It is well known that culture is a catalyst for change, helping economies respond to societal problems and demands and that culture is where people turn to in moments of crisis. In this case study around designing and implementing evaluation methodologies/frameworks for Coventry UK City of Culture 2021, we suggest that in English public policy and within publicly invested arts there is a maturation of thinking around recognising/measuring the public value of culture including its social value. The authors chart recent policy of justifying cultural expenditure with social value claims and highlight challenges for evaluating activity within Coventry 2021.

Design/methodology/approach

This paper provides creative insights into the design and implementation of the evaluation methodologies/frameworks for Coventry UK City of Culture 2021. The authors of this paper as the collective team undertaking the evaluation of Coventry's year as UK City of Culture 2021 bring first-hand experiences of challenges faced and the need for a cultural mega-event to evidence its value.

Findings

The case study aims to address the concepts of measuring value within cultural events and argues that a paradigm shift is occurring in methods and concepts for evidencing the aforementioned value.

Research limitations/implications

The case study within this paper focuses on the build-up period to the UK City of Culture 2021 year and the thinking and logic behind the creation of the evaluation/measurement framework and therefore does not include findings from the actual cultural year.

Originality

It is acknowledged that there are papers examining measuring and evidencing the 'value' of cultural mega-events, the authors bring real-life first-hand experience of the concepts being

utilised by them on the ground in the delivery and evaluation design of Coventry, UK City of Culture 2021.

Measuring the changes: How can a perceived cultural mega-event evidence its 'value'?

Insights from implementing evaluation methodologies for Coventry 2021

Culture can be a catalyst for change, helping economies respond to societal problems and demands (Belfiore, 2010), (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008). People can turn to Culture in moments of crisis (Ottone, 2020). Using creative insights which the authors have gained through the design and implementation period and the development of evaluation methodologies and frameworks for Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 (the authors of this paper are the team responsible for the evaluation of Coventry 2021), we suggest that in English public policy and the wider publicly invested arts and cultural sector there is a growing and discernible trajectory towards recognising and measuring the public value of art and culture including its social value (Arts Council England, 2020). For example, in determining what are and the full array of benefits which accrue from wider participation in a range of cultural activities (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016), (McAvoy, 2019). The trajectory includes ensuring publicly invested arts and culture are reflective and representative of the society to which they serve and take place within. Within this paper, we chart the recent policy history of justifying art and culture expenditure with a social value claim and highlight the challenges it has raised for the evaluation of cultural activity within Coventry's year as UK City of Culture 2021 (UK CoC 2021) and how it has impacted thinking and decisions in the evaluation design and implementation.

Reviewing documentary evidence of publicly invested cultural priorities in England, we can demonstrate how social impact as a justification for cultural expenditure and intervention has

emerged in part due to broader temporal iterations of what the benefits of arts and culture are,

who produces arts and culture, who ultimately benefits from arts and culture, and where and

how these benefits are to be delivered. In recent times, the value of arts and culture as

depicted through a social value narrative has been tied also to supporting the resilience of

individuals, communities, and society through periods of economic/political instability (i.e.,

culture has been integral to helping society alleviate the pressures brought on by COVID-19)

(OECD, 2020), (Artwork Archive, 2021), (Radermecker, 2021). Cumulatively, these shifts in

justification of the public value of arts and culture have led to widespread acceptance that in

order to fully realise the public benefits, conceptions of culture need to be more inclusive of a

diverse understanding of cultural identity and creativity (Brook, et al., 2020), (Neelands, et

al., 2015), (O'Brien & Oakley, 2015). In the design and implementation of the evaluation

methodologies and frameworks for the UK CoC 2021, these shifts in the articulation of the

value of, and justification of publicly invested cultural priorities and initiatives were at the

forefront of our mind. Our argument in this paper is that in response to these developments,

the ability of the cultural sector to capture and justify the social value of arts and culture is

testing the traditional evaluation methods utilised within the sector. Our paper contributes to

advancing the conversation by sharing creative insights from the period of development of

the evaluation for the UK CoC 2021 and how it will be monitored and evaluated with these

precise challenges in mind. More specifically, the evaluation approach we are utilising in

Coventry is seeking to experiment with and develop the novel impact measurement

approaches and techniques (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014), (Beer & Micheli, 2018), (Ebrahim,

2019), (Rowhouser, et al., 2017) which are used to capture and express cultural engagement,

cultural participation, and the breadth of benefits they bring to society. We conclude from our

experiences, with implications for the arts and cultural sector's quest to be more inclusive and socially impactful.

Policy context: 'the times they are a-changin'

UK Cities of Culture will reflect, to a certain extent, the temporal priorities of policy makers and funders to deliver place-based programmes of change through large scale cultural interventions. A closer look at how these priorities change over time in response to broader societal and economic pressures as well as developments and priorities within the arts and cultural sector helps to position the values and programme of previous UK Cities of Culture in Derry-Londonderry (2013), Hull (2017) and Coventry (2021). For some, the value of a programme like a UK City of Culture can be aligned to Bourdieu's theorising on the social construction of cultural tastes. Certain audiences expect that what they perceive to be high-art which wouldn't normally take place within the place to form a key part of the programme. Bourdieu acknowledges that the high status of – or value attributed to – certain cultural genres or objects is not naturally occurring or based on objective artistic merit, but is rather a socially stratified choice (Bourdieu, 1987). In the context of Coventry UK CoC 2021, this is interesting as the policy environment in which it is taking place does not align to this view – co-creation and cultural democracy with communities sit at the heart of Coventry's model.

Arts Council England (ACE) is an arms-length non-departmental public body of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) with major responsibility for funding the arts in England. The body disburses public money from grant-in-aid and National Lottery funding through three streams of work: National Portfolio organisations; National

Lottery Project Grants and Development funds. In the 2018/19 period it disbursed £659m

(Arts Council England, 2019), representing approximately 59% of public funding of the arts

in England.[1] ACE also provides strategic guidance on priorities and objectives to guide the

use of public funding to support its remit to invest in '*arts and culture for the benefit of the*

English public' (Arts Council England, 2020). The public and sectoral face of this strategic

guidance is presented in 10-year annual strategies. The first of these was from 2010-2020

launched as the world emerged from the Great Recession of 2007-2009; and the second from

2020-2030 as the world economy entered a synchronised slowdown from 2019, followed by

deep global economic uncertainty and a pandemic of historical proportions from 2020.

These strategies propose 10-year objectives and actions for arts and culture which are also

deeply inflected by wider political, social, and economic realities. ACE is accountable to the

UK Government's Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and is required

to both measure progress towards its outcomes as defined in the ACE strategy documents and

use data driven tools to increase the benefits of arts and culture to the wider public. HM

Treasury requires ACE to demonstrate value for money from the use of public funds – as it

does with all arms-length non-department public bodies spending public funds in any policy

domain. In turn the DCMS relies on these data driven tools to support its economic case for

public funding in the arts within Spending Reviews from the Treasury.

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[1] Analysis of 56,309 grants from 107 funders where the project relates specifically to arts and culture. Source: GrantNav

If the ACE strategies are considered as authoritative policy documents that shape and

rationalise the publicly funded benefits of the arts to the public, they provide evidence of how

public policy evolves over time in response to both cultural and non-cultural developments.

The strategies provide insight into important conceptual and practical evolutions in the policy

context for arts and culture. Firstly, of the way in which the benefits offered by arts and

culture to the English public are described; and secondly, the arguments provided to support

ACE's priority to maintain levels of funding and build resilience in the publicly funded

cultural economy (Upchurch, 2016). On a practical level, the strategies also inform arts and

cultural practice taking place on the ground as individuals and organisations adapt to utilising

principles from the strategy to meet the aims and to be in a position to draw down funding.

The same can be said for a UK City of Culture, for Coventry this meant that evaluation

outputs had to demonstrate and present evidence to support the ethos and themes of the 2020-

2030 strategy as will the title holders for UK CoC 2025 and 2029. Measuring the value in this

changing context especially in terms of social value in a setting of cultural democracy should

be central to evaluation practices.

Great Art and Culture for Everyone – impact framed as audience reach and growth

There are a number of interesting shifts identifiable between the positioning of cultural policy

objectives during the two strategic periods. In the 2010-2020 the _Great Art and Culture for_

Everyone strategy (Arts Council England, 2013), the benefit to the public was expressed as:

'[to] create the conditions in which great art and culture can be presented and produced,

experienced and appreciated by as many people in this country as possible. It will enable us

to focus our investment where it can achieve the greatest impact. It will support the

development of world-class museums and great libraries that engage diverse audiences. It will sustain us as we work to maintain and enhance England's status as a leading cultural force in the world.' Plus, one of its goals was: *'Everyone has the opportunity to experience and to be inspired by the arts, museums and libraries.'* Throughout the strategy there is the strong sense that 'great' art is made by those in receipt of some level of public subsidy and takes place in publicly funded cultural institutions. The public are the audiences who will benefit from the intrinsic value of appreciating and being inspired by such great art and heritage – and that this needs to be taken to as many people as possible: *Every taxpayer, every lottery ticketholder, every donor, and every reader, theatre-patron and concertgoer is a stakeholder in our world-class arts and culture.* Within the realms of evaluation this means the capturing of metrics of volume, numbers of tickets issued, attendances and reach of the work as opposed to specifically how the work has changed the lives of audiences and beneficiaries.

There are challenges in the strategy to the sector in terms of widening audiences for 'great art', diversifying cultural leadership and increasing income streams to be less dependent on the 'risk' of public funding. But the premise remains, in this strategy, that the core objective for publicly funded arts organisations is to extend their reach and increase their audiences. In other words, the assumption is that the great art and culture produced in traditional venues is for everyone and the objective is to make more people aware of this offer and attracted to it through improved marketing, pricing, and outreach strategies.

To support cultural organisations in this endeavour ACE provided funding to The Audience Agency in order for them to be a Sector Support Organisation. Part of their remit was to collect booker data from all ACE funded National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) to construct a geo-demographic audience segmentation tool, Audience Spectrum. Based on this booker data collected, Audience Spectrum segmented audiences on the basis of expected participation with culture from different populations and post codes in order to inform the programming and marketing strategies for publicly funded venues and organisations. It was designed to identify the location of potential target audiences for products and services offered by mainstream venues rather than to identify the distinctive population characteristics and cultural preferences of a place. This tended, then, towards marketing strategies based on products and the location of particular segments which may take into account the expected size of an audience based on drive time for instance rather than local considerations. As of mid-2021, over four hundred cultural organisations use Audience Spectrum as a marketing tool to identify areas of 'high' and 'low' participation in publicly funded culture based on the premise of the first strategy that great art and culture is for everyone and is sited in publicly funded venues and organisations.

When designing and implementing evaluation methodologies and frameworks for the UK CoC 2021, data from Audience Spectrum for Coventry proved challenging in the understanding of cultural participation in the city. Coventry has historically been an area of low public investment in the arts. For the 2015-2018 NPO funding round, the city had just three NPOs, following the win of the UK CoC 2021 title in December 2017, this number increased to five in the 2018-2022 funding round. A model built on data is only as strong as

the data going in. With a relatively small number of NPOs in Coventry, data which was being

fed into Audience Spectrum was limited.

At the mid-point of 2010-2020 strategy, there were a number of political and societal

challenges to the idea that access to great art was equitably distributed across regions and

communities across England. It was a time when regional imbalances and inequities in terms

of cultural access were becoming part of political concerns about a broader range of social

and economic inequalities between especially London and the other regions of England and

the four nations (Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), 2017), (Pidd, 2020).

The Localism Act 2011 began to bring greater devolved powers to regions through the

instigation of Metro Mayors for combined authority areas – these mayors would lead a

diverse portfolio including arts and culture as well as transport and other key services - and

growth deals. By 2019, initiatives under this system had included a full cultural strategy for

the Greater Manchester region and the founding of the London Borough of Culture with the

first borough Waltham Forest holding the title in 2019. Both projects put arts and culture at

the centre of the new levelling up agenda, interestingly at a local level first before looking

nationally and reflecting on the need to level up within externally defined geographies

(Cooper, 2020). The focus on 'localism' and increasing regional agency also drew attention

to the extent to which cultural funding benefited London's cultural infrastructure and

audiences at the expense of the regions. *Rebalancing our Cultural Capital* (Stark, et al., 2013)

for example, showed that 90% of DCMS funding for major 'national' cultural organisations

benefitted the public of London. It showed that in 2012/2013 the benefit per head of public

funding in the rest of England was at 6.6% of London levels. These stark figures were

compounded by the effects of austerity on Local Government funding for the arts with a 60%

decrease in grant-in-aid between 2010-2015. Given that local authorities are, by far, the

biggest funders of arts and culture in England, bigger than the Arts Council and national

museums combined, this has had a disproportionate effect on arts and culture in places with

few established and ACE funded arts organisations (Harvey, 2016).

During the period covered by the first strategy there was an increasing awareness of the need

for urgent action on diversity and widening participation for arts and culture leaders,

programming and artists and audiences.[2] In the 2013 refresh of the first 10-year strategy,

Alan Davy then Executive Director of ACE wrote: *we want the models of provision to be*

resilient, and the leadership and workforce to be truly diverse, reflecting the population and

able to support the right talent to make great art for the country (Arts Council England, 2013).

In 2015, the Warwick Commission's *Enriching Britain; Culture, Creativity and Growth*

(Neelands, et al., 2015) reported research by Mark Taylor into the ACE *Taking Part* survey

that showed the wealthiest, better educated and least ethnically diverse 8% of the population

formed the most culturally active segment of all and concluded that *'low engagement is more*

the effect of a mismatch between the public's taste and the publicly funded cultural offer'.

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[2] ACE have had a longstanding stated commitment to creating a more inclusive sector and have focussed for several years in investing in diverse organisations. Subsequently leading to the monitoring and publicising of levels of diversity in the cultural workforce of National Portfolio Organisations and ACE itself through the Creative Case for Diversity.

The Warwick Commission also presented stark evidence on the lack of diversity in terms of ethnicity, class and (dis)ability amongst cultural leaders, programmers and artists employed by publicly funded arts organisations. In 2015, O'Brien and Oakley published a review of cultural value and inequality that there suggests an 'undeniable' connection between cultural value and inequality (O'Brien & Oakley, 2015).

Since 2015, there have been a number of ACE projects designed to respond to these and other challenges during the first strategy period. These include *Creative People and Places, Great Places, Cultural Development Fund* and the pro-active monitoring of the diversity of leadership, programming and funding in the publicly funded Arts through the Creative Case for Diversity (Arts Council England, 2020). During the period covered by the first strategy, ACE also stressed the importance and value of the arts and culture beyond the intrinsic value of experiencing and being inspired by the arts, museums and libraries. Increasingly the benefits of the arts have been associated with a wide range of instrumental economic and social impacts including culture-led place making and economic regeneration as well as health and wellbeing, social cohesion and the environment (Belfiore, 2020), (Throsby, 2010).

In the timeframe of the first strategy, there were lively debates in the cultural sector and associated discourses in defence of the idea that the 'public good' stemmed from the intrinsic, aesthetic, and immeasurable value of the arts in and of themselves in the face of what some commentators perceived to be an increasingly instrumental agenda driven by neo-liberal economic requirements (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016) (Rancière, 2010), (Hewison, 2014), (Holden, 2006). Yet, the persistently narrow geo-demographic reach and appeal of the

publicly funded arts presented and still presents a significant challenge to the DCMS in

making a market failure argument to the Treasury on the basis that the arts are a 'public

good' (Throsby, 2010). The argument that the public 'value' of the arts lies in their 'benefits'

to society rather than in their economic profitability is undermined both by data that

continues to show that these 'benefits' are not equitably distributed and available to all and

by a lack of the Treasury's Green Book standard for evidence to support the claims made for

cultural impact on non-cultural outcomes including economic recovery and health and

wellbeing (What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth, 2016).

Let's Create – the challenge to orthodoxies of cultural value and measurement.

The second 10-year strategy _Let's Create – A Country Transformed by Culture_ takes a very

different position from the first strategy that reflects broader temporal iterations between

2010-2020 of what the benefits of the arts are, who the producers and beneficiaries are and

where and how these benefits are to be delivered. Its mission statement is: _By 2030, we want_

England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance

to flourish, and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality

cultural experiences. The Arts are subsumed within the category of culture, but with the

proviso that _'Culture' means many things to many people and is often used to refer to food,_

religion and other forms of heritage. The term 'artists' is dropped in favour of _creative_

_practitio_ners. The public are now more than audiences for great art. They may experience

culture as co-creators, active participants both in their own everyday cultural lives and in

publicly funded artmaking (Arts Council England, 2020).

The goals for the strategy capture the trajectory from the first to second 10-year strategies:

1. **Creative people:** *Everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life*

2. **Cultural communities:** *Villages, towns and cities thrive through a collaborative approach to culture*

3. **A creative and cultural country:** *England's cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international*

Whilst embracing a wider definition of what counts as culture and artmaking, *Let's Create* adds the caveat that: *we use culture to mean all those areas of activity associated with the artforms and organisations that Arts Council England supports: collections, combined arts, dance, libraries, literature, museums, music, theatre and the visual arts*. So, in this policy context 'culture' remains limited to those forms of culture and heritage supported by public investment through ACE. This limitation of which forms of culture are supported by public investment provides a new construction of Public Culture – those forms of culture supported by the public purse and lottery funding - as a public service which should be available and accessible to all in the same way in which we talk of public health and public education. In this sense of service this also implies a service as based on needs – and the corollary of needs analysis - rather than audiences.

Let's Create recognises that in a modern, diverse UK there are many cultures and an expanding universe of activities and practitioners that claim to be 'art' with artists from fashion to food. Why, how, and where people engage with culture is moving away from a focus on live attendance in established arts and heritage venues and with ACE funded art

forms. This is particularly so for those who may feel that these venues and forms are not part

of their own cultural identity, experience, legitimacy, and do not represent them or offer them

the opportunity to be seen and heard through recognised artistic expressions of their own

cultures and place.

The emphases on place, people as co-creators of art and culture and the social value of

investing in areas of historically and currently 'low' levels of engagement in *Let's Create* are

influenced by ACE's investment since 2016 in Creative People and Places (CPP) projects

that are *based in areas where there are fewer opportunities to get involved with the arts* as

defined by ACE.[3] These projects and their populations have devolved funding to invest in

local cultural 'tastes', local people and their needs, local outcomes that are collectively

negotiated between the practitioner and the communities in which they are working.[4] Their

intention is to bring arts and culture into local places and lives and here is an assumption in

the CPP literature that the social value of these projects may exceed their economic value.

The shift in emphases in *Let's Create* from the intrinsic benefits and economic value of the

arts and culture, expressed in the 2010-2020 strategy, towards their social value to those

people and communities who benefit least from public investment in the arts poses a number

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[3] https://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/

[4] See for example:

https://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/sites/default/files/CPP%20Evidence%20Review%20and%20Evaluatio
n%20Report%2016_19_0.pdf and

https://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/sites/default/files/Power_Up_think_piece_Chrissie_Tiller.pdf

of problems in terms of measurable accountability and robust methods for evaluating the

broader social, economic, health and environmental benefits of the arts and culture that

characterise CPP and other place and people focussed public investments. The shift also

challenges the primacy of Audience Spectrum as a marketing and programming tool. As

noted, the Audience Spectrum was developed in response to the objectives of the first period

of ACE strategy and based on identifying and reaching audiences for mainstream cultural

activity provided by established venues and organisations. It was not designed to identify

levels of participation in a broader range of cultural activity often based in place and the local

characteristics of its population. The shift challenges the language of 'low' and high' levels

of cultural participation. What Audience Spectrum does is to identify high and low levels of

participation in publicly funded culture rather than total cultural participation in a broader

range of activities and places than those funded by public culture, including commercial,

digital and neighbourhood cultural participation.

The sources of data developed between 2010-2020 can only give a partial measurement of

'cultural engagement', as they do not include engagement beyond the ACE remit, and only

audience data is captured and aggregated from Creative People and Places, which is not an

accurate measure of total participation, engagement, and impact from these projects. For a

city like Coventry with only five NPOs, the data being supplied by The Audience Agency is

limited compared to other cities with a greater number of NPOs and wider range of publicly

funded cultural activity. This is where challenges arise, especially when designing hyper-

local place-based initiatives as presumptions are made due to limited data available including

the evaluation frameworks to measure this activity. In recent work on the development of an

Audience Strategy for the West Midlands Combined Authority,[5] captured data from publicly

invested arts and culture was combined with other sources of commercial ticketed events at

commercial music events and venues amongst others to give a broader perspective on cultural

participation. Subsequent analysis demonstrated that Audience Spectrum is not the most

consistent measure for predicting patterns of 'actual attendance' at cultural events beyond the

publicly subsidised domain (Raines, et al., 2021). While Audience Spectrum is useful as a

way of understanding different types of audience, it is not in itself an estimate of cultural

engagement (Raines, et al., 2021, p. 59).

Let's Create also embraces a broader understanding of the value of the benefits of arts and

culture as a 'public good'. From the DCMS perspective there are challenges to identifying

and determining economic value based on social and other non-cultural impacts.[6] How can

social value be captured, measured, and then monetised to provide the Treasury with the data

required to make a conventional economic case for maintaining and expanding current levels

of public investment. If a project leads to improved levels of wellbeing for instance, or an

increase in civic pride how are these to be identified, measured, and monetised? For the

Treasury what is required is a methodology which can be unilaterally rolled out across the

country using established metrics much like the methodology described in the *Green Book*.

As ideas and practices about what counts as arts and culture and cultural participation are

evolving, we suggest that we do not yet have the scope or scale of research methods to

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[5] https://beta.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/west-midlands-cultural-sector-research-project/

[6] See for instance https://whatworksgrowth.org/public/files/Policy_Reviews/16-06-

15_Culture_and_Sport_Updated.pdf

provide more accurate assessments and understandings of total cultural participation. Current

cultural engagement data cannot provide the full story behind the inequalities that exist

between areas of low and high engagement in public culture - inequalities that are cultural,

but also socio-economic, infrastructural, educational, health, ethnic cultural heritages etc.

This lack of a more accurate assessment and understanding is problematic when devising any

evaluation framework – how can you accurately establish a baseline to measure against and

then understand any changes in cultural participation. While this is problematic in any

evaluation, it is even more so for a UK City of Culture where there is increased scrutiny due

to the perceived scales of investment and size of the event.

Measuring cultural engagement 'across the piece': The Coventry approach

In alignment with the key objectives for *Let's Create,* the mission statement for Coventry UK

City of Culture 2021 is to reimagine the role of culture in a diverse, modern Britain,

demonstrating that culture is a force that changes lives, moving Coventry and the region

forward (Coventry City of Culture Trust, 2020)*.* In 2020, the Coventry City of Culture Trust

published its *Performance Measurement and Evaluation Strategy 2020-2024* (Neelands, et al.,

2019) to evaluate to what extent to which the UK CoC 2021 *will engage the youthfulness and*

diversity of the city both in its cultural offer and in shaping and leading the city.

At a National Cultural Policy and Evaluation Summit held in Coventry in mid-2021, Franco

Bianchini who has been the principal investigator for the AHRC Cites of Culture Network

suggested that: *With Coventry we are seeing a new type of City of Culture, with still of*

course a focus on economic development but with a much greater focus on social capital,

social impact, human rights, intercultural dialogues, diversity, inequality, health and well-being, and young people (Knell, 2021).

As such, the authors who are the team responsible for the evaluation of Coventry's year as UK CoC 2021 are having to develop new tools to understand at a very granular level how to target cultural investments and measure their impact. We will first look at the ways the city has traditionally captured cultural participation and engagement, and then present details on the way these have been experimented with in pursuit of a more holistic understanding, including reflections on what insight that has enabled.

A UK City of Culture just by its nature is often perceived as a cultural mega-event, a large-scale cultural festival/programme often with heavy public funding supporting it. Bidding for the title brings together the populace of a place and sees them working towards a common goal. However, it can be argued that actually the scale and scope of a UK City of Culture does not actually meet the detailed criteria which has been established through research and analysis of post-event findings to be a mega-event (Müller, 2014), this is particularly true for Coventry which through the focus on co-creation meant that many events in the overall programme were smaller in scale but firmly rooted in communities and place. What these amounts to is many smaller events coming together to form a major event and not a mega-event as it is widely claimed to be. Early UK Cities of Culture have emerged as important vehicles in the realisation of the promise of culture-led regeneration (Garcia, 2005), however the question raised in the planning of Coventry's year, is can this be done when the primary focus is on hyper-local smaller scale co-created events designed to benefit citizens involved?

An element of this is scaling down of planned activity due to the COVID-19 pandemic and

having to rethink what a mega-event would look like in times of uncertainty (Di Vita &

Wilson, 2021). At the time of writing, a record number of bids have been received by the

DCMS for the UK CoC 2025 title, demonstrating that cultural mega-events remain

increasingly popular due to the transformational change in a place which can be achieved

(Jones, 2020). Coventry's directional change for a UK CoC is making it clear that

participation needs to be understood beyond audience development and engagement, by

exploring co-creation and cultural democracy (Tommarchi, 2021).

Coventry City Council collects cultural participation data through its biennial Household

Survey (HHS) alongside a wide range of non-cultural questions and ONS data to understand

how citizens engage with culture. This makes the survey unique as other local authorities do

not ask cultural questions as standard practice. This further links into the wider cultural

picture within the city and city's Cultural Strategy which was launched in 2017. The HHS

provides a rich tool for the City Council and for organisations working within the city to have

a deep understanding of the city's population which aids in the planning and delivery of

services. In 2013 Coventry became a Marmot city to address the socioeconomic

circumstances behind the city's health inequalities.[7] The premise is that health inequalities

intersect with other multiple inequalities including access to public culture. The HHS has

become essential in driving forward place-based initiatives within the city to improve health,

wellbeing, and the life chances of the people of Coventry, this includes being essential in the

evaluation of the UK CoC 2021. Where someone is born, where they live, whether they work

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[7] https://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/176/policy/2457/coventry_a_marmot_city

or not and what they do all affect life expectancy, how healthy they will be and what quality

of life they will experience. Shaping the city's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, HHS data

drives planning and partnership working to ensure the strongest outcomes for the citizens of

the city.

The Coventry HHS asks a weighted sample of residents if they have participated at least three

times in a range of cultural activities that include theatre, museums and galleries and music

but also faith and community-based activities and pubs, clubs, and cinemas. The same

question is also asked relating to any children in the household. The HHS gives two measures

for cultural participation, total, and excluding pubs, clubs and cinemas to get a proxy for

engagement in publicly invested arts as defined by policymakers and funding bodies. This

proxy allows for a local comparison to the national picture as it uses the indicators from

Active Lives and Taking Part (now the DCMS Participation Survey) national surveys as the

foundation for the question. The data therefore can be compared as both include visiting

museums, galleries and theatre. In addition, the survey asks social cohesion metrics which

can in some form be attributed to the measuring of value for cultural events which is key to

the underlying data for evaluating Coventry 2021.

Analysis of the data from the 2018 HHS undertaken at the time of the survey shows that there

are significant geo-demographic gaps between the two measures. For instance, Foleshill, a

ward in Coventry where 86% of schoolchildren have an ethnic background other than White

British[8], scores 77% on total participation, but one MSOA[9] in the ward (Upper Foleshill) has only an 11% proxy score for cultural participation (excluding pubs, clubs, and cinema). In middle-class professional majority white Earlsdon we get 86% and 69% respectively. The IMD score for Foleshill is 41.6 with a gap between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy of 21.4 years compared with a citywide average of 15.4 years for males, and 28.3 years vs 18.9 years for females – meaning people spend a larger proportion of their lives in poor health (Coventry City Council, 2019). In Earlsdon the IMD score is 10.1 and the gap between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy is 12.1 years for males and 15.1 years for females — meaning people spend less years in poor health.

The evidence reveals the cultural inequalities within a city with an estimated population of 371,521[10] people and how these are mirrored in other inequalities. Starting from a place of traditional analysis which utilises conventional and established arts marketing strategies including segmentation built on participation as mentioned earlier and drive times, the Coventry model was able to gain a basic understanding of the city's population and its cultural engagement, albeit incomplete. This provides a useful starting block, however, is not a fully inclusive model for the reasons highlighted previously. When you apply additional data not related to culture here such as metrics held by Coventry City Council, the richness

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[8] Data collected through the School Census, Spring 2021.

[9] Middle Layer Super Output Area (MSOA) is a geographic hierarchy designed to improve the reporting of small area statistics in England and Wales, allowing data to be presented in more granular detail. An MSOA generally represents between 5000-7000 residents.

[10]

https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland

comes through, and you can begin to see other useful data, for example participation in faith-

based activities which are often rooted in culture but not defined as such. Public Health and

the provision of key services from local authorities and other key third-sector organisations

relies on accurate data about populations, this data is critical in underpinning decision making

and delivery of services and even more key for the UK CoC 2021 which was rooted in the

communities of the city with delivery often being in partnership with key third-sector

organisations.

Developing an inclusive and outcomes-based approach.

In keeping with the City's commitment to a Marmot agenda, the Trust and its partners have

developed a Cultural Place Profiler that combines both measures of cultural participation data

with HHS, JSNA and ONS data so that levels of cultural participation can be understood at

the MSOA level in the context of age, ethnicity, average income, levels of deprivation and

social data on levels of satisfaction with neighbourhoods, safety at night and levels of

perceived influence on decision making and willingness to be involved in the community.[11]

All factors likely to influence personal and social agency in terms of the *Let's Create*

objectives that everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life and that

villages, towns and cities thrive through a collaborative approach to culture. This data

provides the basis for investments in public culture to be planned and proportionate to

personal and local needs. In evaluation terms, changes to these metrics will be key in

understanding the change within citizens in the city. As part of the Coventry approach, to

truly understand the value in which arts and culture plays in communities, the Trust has

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[11] https://coventry.culturalplaceprofiler.co.uk/indicators/

commissioned a Social Return On Investment assessment which will consist of a deep-dive into various projects and be stakeholder-led with participants and beneficiaries defining the outcomes which matter to them. This collaborative approach to evaluation begins with a 'Story of Change' workshop which is the opportunity for stakeholders to define what is important to them and what they wish the outcomes to be.

Crucial to understanding is the linking of all data sets through the collection of the respondent's postcode. Understanding where people live, how they engage and what they think at a local neighbourhood level is essential for the establishment and development of evidence-led and outcome-based specific programmes. The creation of the Cultural Place Profiler supports the delivery of the outcomes within the Trust's Theory of Change through supporting planning and delivery of activities leading to outputs through the use of data. Being able to look through profiler tools such as the Cultural Place Profiler can often illustrate stark realities which are sometimes hidden in data. In an early precursor to the Cultural Place Profiler, Coventry City Council were able to highlight using ONS and Public Health England data that in 2014 if you were male, you would lose ten years of your life expectancy moving across the different locations of the Bus Route 10 in Coventry. Using Public Health data, Coventry City Council identified the Wood End area of the city as a priority neighbourhood in 2015, In response using existing audience data, the city's Belgrade Theatre concentrated ticket initiatives and outreach work into this area of the city, 43% of tickets issued by the Belgrade in 2017/18 went to people living in priority postcode areas in the city (Belgrade Theatre Trust (Coventry), 2018). Consequently, by the time of the 2018 HHS, the Wood End, Henley & Manor Farm MSOA had total cultural participation and

participation excluding pubs, clubs, and cinemas levels above the city average. This is despite

the area having one of the highest deprivation scores in the city and an average household

income of around £8,000 lower than the city average. The area has also seen increases in how

citizens feel they can influence and shape their local area. While this increase in cultural

participation and other social cohesion metric cannot be claimed directly to the work of the

Belgrade theatre, it is a contributing factor. Identifying and understanding changes in the

metrics like this feeds into the measurement of value.

However, identifying these narratives and trends is not just a case of correlating data together

based on common geographical locators. From a technical level all data sets must provide

accurate data which forms a representative sample across geographies and demographics for

the city. This is done to ensure that the data is representative and true to the city's population

within an established and acceptable margin of error. By doing this, decisions can be made

from accurate data for the greatest benefit to the place, decision which often contribute

towards locally defined outcomes. Having a tool such as the Cultural Place Profiler which is

modelled around statistical robustness and rigour allows for partners and other stakeholders

have a clear view of the issues facing the city without being unduly swayed by a potential

vocal minority. As alluded to earlier, the current range of cultural data does not stand up to

this statistical robustness which can impact on the technical rigour of any evaluation – the

numbers will mean nothing if they can not be substantiated within acceptable statistical

margins of error. The survey is a powerful tool, however major world events can impact on

metrics, a 2021 version of the Household Survey has demonstrated decreases in social

cohesion and cultural participation due to COVID-19. When the survey is repeated in late

2022 any further changes will need to be carefully considered within the evaluation and could

potentially lead to metrics not passing baseline levels.

From theory to story of change.

The evaluation for Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 is built on a theory of change model

(Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007) and after consultation with stakeholders the wider evaluation

strategy was established in 2019. The theory of change established an ex-ante logic model to

guide how investments would be used to generate arts and culture activity to produce outputs

that would contribute to a broad range of cultural and non-cultural outcomes and impacts.

Supported by fifteen outcomes the four impact areas of the theory of change look at

improving civic, social, economic and external perceptions of the city. The model places

Coventry at the heart of driving change in not just the city but also the region. Developed

through consultation with communities, stakeholders and other interested beneficiaries the

theory of change provides a road map for the Coventry City of Culture Trust and for artists,

cultural organisations and non-cultural organisations in the city. Underpinning the fifteen

outcomes are established metrics which have been in use in the city since 2016 and in some

cases earlier through the HHS providing a representative and robust dataset highlighting the

views and feelings of citizens.

The monitoring of these baselines and key performance indicators for the outputs and

outcomes of UK City of Culture 2021 create the foundations for the ex-post evaluation. What

will be Coventry's story of change based on its theory of change?

Figure 1 – From theory of change to story of change, logic model demonstrating the elements of the theory of change.

In this model there are significant tensions for the cultural sector and the autonomy of artists. A city of culture that emphasises what culture can do for the city, is built on the expectation that investments in creative activity are dependent on the extent to which the outputs will be aligned to and logically contribute to the agreed outcomes. This tension is implicit in the shift of emphasis between the two ACE Strategies from 'professional' artmaking which is of public value in and of itself to art which is directed at social change.

In the 'Great Art for Everyone' model investments are made in artists to produce artworks that will benefit the public. In the 'Let's Create' model the expectation is that through processes of co-creation and devolved leadership, artmaking will respond to locally determined needs often agreed in partnership across a number of local stakeholders. The tension then is between the autonomy and integrity for artists who may resist having a fixed idea of outcomes at the point of investment and investment to produce art that is designed to contribute to a locally agreed outcome (Matarasso, 2019). In the latter, the challenge for artists is to work collectively with communities when they are publicly funded towards an outcome and not towards a singular artist led artistic vision.

In the Coventry model being exemplified by the Coventry City of Culture Trust and partners, all programming, commissioning and evaluation of outputs is aligned with the outcomes of the Theory/Story of Change. Programme proposals state their priority outcome and are

assessed on the extent to which they will make a contribution to the outcome. As well as

providing a perceived cultural mega-event that is highly focussed on social change and

collective endeavour, the outcomes are, in part, evaluated against HHS benchmarks.

For instance,

Table 1 – Table showing example of how the elements of the logic model lead towards

impact – the change which is sought.

Focusing on inequality.

Early activity in the build-up programme for Coventry's year as City of Culture has taken this

new model and applied public health principles to planning and delivery of cultural activity.

One such example of this is the *Carnival of Lights,* which was focussed in the Foleshill area

of the city. As alluded to earlier, Foleshill is an area of Coventry not without challenge with

the vast majority of its neighbourhoods amongst England's 10% most deprived areas, and

large numbers of people living in poor health as a result of preventable causes of health

inequality. The neighbourhood of Upper Foleshill within the electoral ward is even more

contrasted with a cultural participation rate of 11% compared to the ward average of 43% and

the city average of 51%.[12] It is acknowledged by the World Health Organisation (WHO) that

vulnerable populations often lack the opportunity to be involved with wellbeing studies

(Napier, et al., 2017). However due to the randomised weighted nature of the HHS in

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[12] Cultural participation is based on engagement of three or more times in a twelve-month period excluding
pubs, clubs and attending cinema.

Coventry a clear understanding of wellbeing is available at city, ward, and neighbourhood

level. Upper Foleshill had a mean WEMWBS score of 42 (the lowest in the city) compared to

52 across the city (based on data from the HHS 2018).

Taking all of these factors into consideration the Coventry City of Culture Trust planned and

delivered a carnival event based on themes of light and Diwali situated in Upper Foleshill and

processing into the city centre. Wraparound activities also took place to encourage

participation all of which challenged the notion of what culture is. If you were to talk to a

resident from Upper Foleshill they themselves would talk about many events which they

participate in. However, these are events linked to people's faiths, beliefs, and cultural

identity – and not typically captured when looking at publicly funded art and culture.

Framing an event around themes of light and Diwali encourages these citizens to participate

on terms in which they understand - and having a rich and deep population data set allows for

a paradigm shift. In the evaluation responses from the event responses talked about the event

being encouraging as they could see themselves and their communities being represented,

and the community involvement and co-creation aspects allowed for participation on terms

meaningful to them.

Unlocking knowledge and insight into a city's population in this way also allows for an

intrinsic shift in the ways of evaluating aspects of a City of Culture and to also measure its

value. Highly detailed intelligence allows for survey methodology, metrics, and indicators to

all be developed at a local level. Partly this is done through the Trust's developed theory of

change model which details fifteen outcomes and four impact areas which is the change

sought in the city but on the most part is drawn from local knowledge from within the

community which has shaped data collection methods. This enables trust to be brokered

between communities and the Trust. In addition, using data and metrics in this way allows for

correlations of data at a citywide, ward, and neighbourhood level. This will allow for almost

real time tracking of the progress towards outcomes against the city's population and

demographics. To do this a survey platform has been procured which has surveys built in

which respond to the needs of funders by containing questions related to the metrics and

indicators being used to show progress towards outcomes. This dynamic approach allows for

the evaluators to actively contribute to programme planning and delivery through active

formative evaluation.

The challenge with this is how you upscale from small events to the overall major event as

this paper argues. One of the challenges is how to scale up the understanding of the value

from a small event and aggregate upwards to the overall major event of the UK CoC 2021.

To do this successfully it is imperative that all projects and programmes within the overall

mix are outcomes focussed. In the selection and approval process for the programme, projects

must demonstrate coverage of all outcomes collectively, this ensures that overall, the projects

and programmes in any upward aggregation can demonstrate the impact of the change

desired. As projects develop and new projects start over the course of time, local intelligence,

information, and learnings need to be factored in to ensure the work is benefitting the diverse

communities that it serves. When this happens, it is important to ensure double counting does

not occur.

In summary, this paper has traced developments in how justification of public funding of culture has developed through the most influential funder of English cultural activity, namely ACE. Moving from 'great arts and institutions to be engaged with' to 'helping to flourish everyday myriad moments of creativity across the spaces and communities of England', this paradigm shift in 'what counts' has challenged substantially the aims, scope and scale of current data collection and research methods in England around cultural participation and the benefits it brings (Arts Council England, 2013), (Arts Council England, 2020).

Drawing from the on-going experience of evaluation of Coventry UK City of Culture 2021, the paper moved on to seek to illustrate and demonstrate the nature, tools, and expectations of data collection under this new paradigm of cultural activity and participation. This paper also notes that how an event is perceived in terms of scale, mega-event or major event is linked to its value. A paradigm which if it seeks cultural democracy outcomes needs to demonstrate participation in its fullest form, as the basis for understanding if inclusivity and equity as democracy is being achieved and, in turn, as the basis for capturing the full social value of culture and the enhanced investment case that should follow to sit alongside other often more tangible policy business cases entering the doors of the Treasury. Understanding the value of cultural activity and how to measure it is critical in a UK CoC, where the nature of cultural activity shifts and evolves in relation to public policy.

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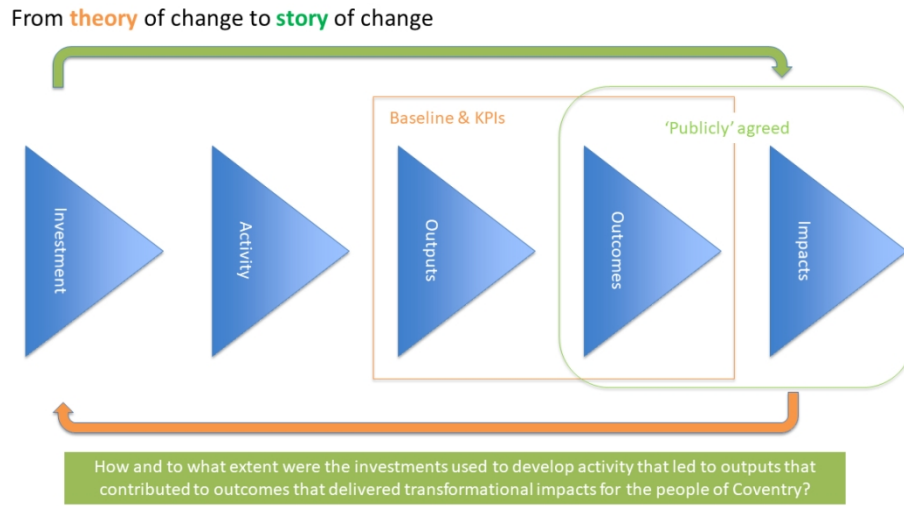41
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From **theory** of change to **story** of change

Baseline & KPIs

'Publicly' agreed

Investment

Activity

Outputs

Outcomes

Impacts

How and to what extent were the investments used to develop activity that led to outputs that contributed to outcomes that delivered transformational impacts for the people of Coventry?

Figure 1 – From theory of change to story of change, logic model demonstrating the elements of the theory of change.

855x481mm (38 x 38 DPI)

Output	Output indicators	Outcome	Outcome indicators	Impact
Programmes, planning and production of events involving Coventry communities	*No. of community participants/volunteers involved in planning and execution of the programme and events* *No. of events actively involving communities in planning and execution*	**Increase in civic pride**	**Increase in levels of neighbourhood and city centre satisfaction from HHS.** **Events distributed across city** **Programme is representative of the city's population from HHS and ONS** **% of residents engaged in local community arts and cultural events from HHS** **Increase in cultural participation in all neighbourhoods and under-represented groups from HHS**	**Coventry Citizens positively influence and shape the city they want to live in**