

Reimagining where we live: Cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda

Evidence from Spirit of 2012

Introduction

Spirit of 2012 welcomes the decision of the DCMS Select Committee to hold an inquiry on the DCMS role in levelling up and cultural placemaking. This inquiry is particularly timely given the recent publication of the Levelling Up white paper, alongside large-scale investments in public arts this year through Unboxed, the cultural programme of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and the decision on the location of the 2025 UK City of Culture.

Spirit of 2012 is the London 2012 Games legacy funder and was founded with an endowment from the National Lottery Community Fund. It was set up to recreate the pride and positivity that defined the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Spirit of 2012 operates throughout the UK and since its inception has funded projects that use arts and culture, physical activity and volunteering to build lasting social legacies. Its grants have included projects that form part of the Hull and Coventry Cities of Culture and the Glasgow and Birmingham Commonwealth Games. Of its funding allocated to projects working in a specific location, 97% of its grants are to organisations working outside London. Examples of projects that Spirit of 2012 has funded are included in this evidence.

How can culture reanimate our public spaces and shopping streets?

Spirit of 2012 is encouraged by the ambition of the Levelling Up white paper. If implemented, we believe its proposals will help transform communities and address the place-based inequalities – between North and South, between and within towns and cities - that have characterised the UK in recent years. We also welcome the emphasis given to the social aspects of levelling up, and the need to build human and social capital, as well as increase innovation and infrastructural investment.

Placemaking and levelling up are processes that involve:

- Addressing economic and social inequalities, including in people's levels of wellbeing.
- Building people's pride and sense of belong to the place they live and improving perceptions of local areas as good places to live, study or work.
- Developing connected and cohesive communities where people share things in common
- Increasing people's skills and improving their career progression and job opportunities.
- Growing public and private investment to areas and regenerating public space

It is to be welcomed that the white paper sees culture playing an important role in levelling up. This position is backed up by a great deal of evidence. For example, evaluations of arts

festivals¹², including Liverpool European City of Culture, Derry/Londonderry and Hull UK Cities of Culture have shown that culture plays a role in levelling up by:

- Attracting public and private sector investment to an area, including to high streets and town centres.
- Increasing the number of local people and visitors who come to town centres. In turn, this creates new jobs in the visitor economy.
- Creating new jobs in the cultural economy. By encouraging arts organisations, galleries and museums to relocate in vacant retail space in high streets and town centres, although it is essential that cultural organisations are sustainable in the long-term.
- Increasing people's pride in the place they live and sense of belonging to their locality.
- Encouraging volunteering, with many events and most arts and heritage organisations outside the largest conurbations heavily dependent on volunteers. In turn, volunteering can improve individual wellbeing, as well as improve people's confidence, skills and career prospects. Volunteering also helps to build cohesive communities; It brings people of different backgrounds together, strengthening community relations and building relationships of trust.

The evaluation of Hull UK City of Culture suggests that it created 800 new jobs in the cultural and visitor economy and brought in £676m of new public and private investment. Some 90% of local people took part in the year of events, which boosted civic pride and changed perceptions of Hull as a good place to live, work, study and visit³. Of the 2,100 people who gave their time to be Hull UK City of Culture volunteers, 850 people remain active in the legacy volunteering programme⁴. The legacy volunteering programme has been funded by Spirit of 2012 and is managed by Visit Hull and East Riding, a partnership involving the two councils in the area. As a local authority run project, the volunteering scheme has forged good links with other volunteering schemes in the area

Positive impact can be felt many years after the event or festival has ended, although evaluations of cultural activities tend to be conducted in the year after the event. This means that the long-term positive impacts of culture may not be understood by policymakers. Spirit of 2012 believes that cultural events need to be seen as long-term projects, with evaluations conducted over a longer time period.

Spirit of 2012 has funded a number of other cultural projects that have had levelling up as an aim. In partnership with Barnardo's and Whitley Bay Big Local, BayCreate brings together local residents from different ages and backgrounds to work on cultural projects inspired by the landscape and shared heritage of Whitley Bay. People who have taken part in the project have held an exhibition displaying pieces inspired by the local coastline and created by local residents aged between six and 80 years. During 2022, BayCreate is creating further public art, with the aim of establishing a cultural trail in Whitley Bay, reflecting what the seaside town and the Northumberland coastline mean to the local community.

For some of these social impacts to be felt – particularly around civic pride and social connection, the cultural offer has to be relevant and accessible to individuals who do not visit

¹ University of Hull (2018) *Cultural Transformations: the impact of Hull UK City of Culture 2017*, Hull: University of Hull Culture, Place and Policy Institute.

² Institute of Cultural Capital (2018) *Liverpool as European Capital of Culture, Longitudinal Impact*, Liverpool: University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University.

³ University of Hull (2018) *Cultural Transformations: the impact of Hull UK City of Culture 2017*, Hull: University of Hull Culture, Place and Policy Institute.

⁴ Spirit of 2012 impact data.

or participate in cultural events, including around a third of people who feel that the arts are not for people like me⁵. Culture-led regeneration has to be for everyone, otherwise it can divide communities and lead to accusations of gentrification. That 90% of the population of Hull took part in its City of Culture events was an impressive achievement of this year of activities. Free public performances, using a range of art forms, good publicity and co-produced events that involve community partners are ways of reaching a wider audience. This community engagement needs to take place before the event or festival and needs to be funded.

An example of a project that engaged communities less likely to participate in cultural activities was the 'Caring City' component of Coventry 2021 UK City of Culture. This work was funded by Spirit of 2012. Four producers working with civil society organisations and their service users to put on events as part of City of Culture. The organisations involved in this project were (i) Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre (ii) the Central England Law Centre and its homeless clients (iii) Positive Youth Foundation which works with young people not in education, employment and training and (iv) Grapevine which works with older people, over-65s, care home residents, people experiencing loneliness and mental illness. The Caring City programme followed a 12-month pilot, also funded by Spirit of 2012, where the producers worked with the same organisations to build relationships of trust and develop the 2021 activities. Evaluation data from Coventry City of Culture showed that 43% of its event ticketholders were from lower income households and events have taken place in every local government ward.

How can creatives contribute to local decision-making and planning of place?

Local authorities are obliged to consult on their local plans, as well any large scale regeneration projects. Design codes are also being used to set the rules for new building development. There is an opportunity for creatives and arts and heritage organisations to be involved in the consultation process involved in drawing up local plans and design codes. Spirit of 2012 would like to see DCMS working with DLUHC and the Office for Place to draw up good practice guidelines on the involvement of creatives in the planning system.

There are examples of this taking place already, for example, local residents worked with professional artists to create the Blackpool Treasure Trove, a heritage resource of seven pop-up museums. The artists and local residents later went on to be involved in planning the new Museum of Blackpool⁶.

Spirit of 2012 has also funded an artistic programme that influenced town centre redevelopment. The Emerge Festival was run in a number of West Midland locations by Mighty Creatives in collaboration with Arts Connect and UK Young Artists. This project ran over a three-year period and involved nearly 1,000 young people in the organisation of 24 festivals on or around 23 April to mark the anniversary of William Shakespeare's birth and death. In Cannock, one of the locations of this project, over 3,000 people visited the Emerge Festival. It was seen as an opportunity to test the potential of community arts festivals to revitalise the town centre by attracting local people and visitors. The festival was used as a testbed for culture-led regeneration. It enabled the Town Centre Partnership to be confident in incorporating arts events as a part of a new programme of regeneration⁷.

⁵ Polling cited in a 2019 British Future report suggested that 35% of people agreed with the statement "I feel that arts and culture in the UK are generally not for people like me." See Rutter, J. and Katwala, S. (2019) *Crossing Divides: how arts and heritage can bring us together*, London: British Future.

⁶ Local Government Association (2017) *People, Culture, Place: the role of culture in placemaking*, London: LGA.

⁷ Consilium Research and Rocket Science (2019) *Emerge Programme Final Evaluation*, London: Consilium Research.

How can the Government support places without established artistic infrastructure to take full advantage of the opportunities that the levelling up agenda provides?

This ambition can be achieved by (i) encouraging greater collaboration between larger and national arts and heritage organisations and smaller volunteer-led organisations (ii) increasing the number of people who volunteer in arts and heritage organisations outside the largest cities and towns.

Partnership: Greater partnership between established arts and cultural organisations and organisations in areas without a large artistic infrastructure overcomes the difficulties of delivering cultural programmes outside the UK's largest towns and cities. This already takes place to some extent, with 14-18 NOW, the arts programme for the First World War centenary, for example, involving national-local collaboration. Spirit of 2012 has funded a number of projects that have had partnership building as a key aim. For example, the Playing Out project is a partnership between Warwick Arts Centre and residents' groups in Canley, a suburb of Coventry. The project is bringing people of different backgrounds together in visual and performing arts workshops and to create part of a parade that will be included in the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Cultural Programme.

We welcome the commitment in the Levelling Up white paper to exploring how "*more national cultural institutions can support the strength of our historic cultural heritage in great cities such as Stoke and Manchester*", but this partnership needs to be extended to towns and rural areas. We would like to see more loans of art and heritage objects from national museums and galleries, to museums and galleries across the UK.

Mayors have a role to play in encouraging partnership across combined authorities. Spirit of 2012 welcomes the Liverpool City Region's cultural strategy, which includes a boroughs of culture programme, rotated around the six local authorities. Established arts and heritage organisations have partnered with smaller (and often volunteer-run) organisations to deliver cultural events and exhibitions. Greater London also has a borough of culture programme. Devolution deals offer the opportunity for more of such partnership and collaboration across combined authorities.

Spirit of 2012 welcomes the changes made to the UK City of Culture 2025 programme to open up the competition to regions and consortia of towns. This has helped open up the competition to a broader range of places. However, it is an approach that will need monitoring carefully: the success of Hull 2017 and Coventry 2021 is in part down to a strong sense of identity within these places, and we do not know if that can be replicated outside a city model.

Volunteering: Most arts organisations outside cities and large towns are largely or exclusively run by volunteers. Similarly, the Heritage Volunteering Group estimated that in 2019 nearly half of the UK's accredited museums and heritage organisations depend on volunteers to run their day-to-day operations. Some 12.4 million people offered their time to help out during the pandemic. A survey undertaken in September 2021 for Spirit of 2012 suggests that 4.8 million people - 9% of the adult population of the UK - volunteer more than once a month⁸. However, there is often a mismatch between the supply of volunteer and the demand for them.

⁸ Cited in Hughes-Hallett, T. (2021) *How events can boost volunteering: launch report of the Inquiry into how events can help build, happy, thriving and connected communities*, London: Spirit of 2012.

In areas that do not have an 'established' or securely funded artistic infrastructure, government policy should also focus on growing the number of people who can volunteer in arts and heritage organisations. However, neither the Levelling Up white paper, nor the DCMS's response to the Danny Kruger report of 2020 give adequate recognition of the role that volunteers can play in levelling up, including in the arts and heritage sectors, nor make any proposals to build on the volunteering surge of 2020.

England has no national volunteering strategy, despite the positive impacts it can have on individuals and the organisations that work with volunteers. Spirit of 2012 would like to see the government and combined and local authorities put in place volunteering strategies that have levelling up as their aim. As the department that holds the remit for charities and the voluntary sector, DCMS has the remit for volunteering. Both government and organisations that work with volunteers need to make a stronger case for volunteering. Better use could be made of digital technology to recruit volunteers, reduce placement delays and provide a record of volunteers' training and experiences. Although the monies involved are not large, there is a need for a funded local volunteering infrastructure, as volunteers need travel expenses to be paid, and training and support. Sometimes those who stand the most to gain from volunteering - in relation to their skills and confidence - often face barriers that prevent them from taking part.

How should Government build on existing schemes, such as the UK City of Culture, to level up funding for arts and culture?

Spirit of 2012 welcomes the commitment made in the Levelling Up white paper to address disparities in arts and heritage funding and to increase the spend outside London. The decision to award 100% of the 2021 Arts Council England funding uplift to institutions outside London is a welcome first step, as is the decision to identify 100 levelling up priority places for additional Arts Council England investment. But there are other interventions which could also level up funding - and participation - in the arts and culture, both through the City of Culture programme and more widely.

Demarcated budgets for impact: the three UK Cities of Culture have all had positive impacts on levelling up. Despite the successes of Hull UK City of Culture set out above, there is no demarcated 'impact' or legacy funding within the city of culture programme, or in other arts programmes or events such as the Unboxed Festival. Spirit of 2012 believes that cultural events should only receive public subsidies if organisers set out detailed delivery plans for securing positive impacts on society, including through volunteering. There should be demarcated funding for legacy volunteering projects in Government, and philanthropic support for sporting and cultural events, including future UK Cities of Culture.

Use the City of Culture bidding process as a catalyst for culture-led regeneration:

There can only be one winner in a City of Culture round, but we know that some bidders have used the process of bidding for City of Culture to develop further their plans for culture-led regeneration, while others have not. For example, Stoke-on-Trent's 2017 City of Culture bid brought the cultural sector together in the city and new projects have developed out of this process. A better understanding of how bidding for City of Culture can catalyse culture-led regeneration is needed on the part of DCMS, with a view to including guidance in future bidding rounds.

While bidding for City of Culture can bring benefits, putting together a bid is still an expensive process. We welcome DCMS's decision to award the eight 2025 longlisted cities £40,000 to support the development of their applications, and hope such funding is a feature of future competitions.

DCMS should also increase its role as a broker for other funding for all bidding cities. Spirit of 2012 has recently been working with DCMS on a programme to support volunteering among the twenty 2025 City of Culture bidders, with Spirit of 2012 making grants of up to £250,000 available to three of the 20 bidders to enable them to develop their arts and cultural volunteering programmes.

Conducting a fair funding review for the arts: Spirit of 2012 welcomes the white paper's commitment to a more even distribution of Arts Council England funding for the period 2023-2026. However, Spirit of 2012 believes that this commitment should be underpinned by a comprehensive review of fairer funding in the arts and heritage, including the arts in schools and local music services. Such a review should involve DLUHC and DfE as well as DCMS. A fair funding review needs to strike a balance between maintaining national institutions, many of which are based in London, and channelling a higher proportion of funding to northern England and to towns. In future, arts organisations that receive public funding should be obliged to show how they are addressing lower participation rates in more deprived communities.

For further information, please contact Jill Rutter, Policy and Research Manager at Spirit of 2012. Jill.Rutter@Spiritof2012.org.uk Organisations funded by Spirit of 2012 may be willing to host parliamentary visits; please contact Jill Rutter about this in the first instance.