

Scottish Parliament: Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Call for Evidence: Culture in Communities

From: Festivals Edinburgh

Date: 31 March 2023

Background

In March-April 2023, the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee held an open call for evidence on 'place-based' approaches to culture, as part of the development of the Scottish Government Cultural Strategy (deadline 7th of April 2023).

The Committee was looking to find out more about cultural provision currently being undertaken in community settings across Scotland, with a view to informing research into the following questions:

- how do national and local layers of government, along with the third sector, complement each other to ensure that communities have opportunities to take part in cultural activities?
- how is unmet cultural need determined? And who decides this?
- what does good 'place-based' cultural policy look like in practice?

About Us

Festivals Edinburgh is the high-level organisations, created and driven by the directors of Edinburgh's 11 major international festivals. Festivals Edinburgh does not lead directly on organising cultural activities for audiences, and instead works with our 11 member festivals to help understand and develop the outputs and impacts of cultural activity taking place for and with local communities.

Festivals Edinburgh has engaged with our 11 member festivals through a working group model, to understand the work being delivered by the festivals and identify collective action to respond to collective challenges and opportunities.

Our Submission

Three key areas of Festivals Edinburgh activity concerning community access to cultural activity have been:

1. Platforms for Creative Excellence Programme (2019-2023)

1.1. Festivals Edinburgh played a key role in securing the Platforms for Creative Excellence (PlaCE) fund, which is a three-way long term funding partnership between the Scottish Government, the City of Edinburgh Council and the Edinburgh Festivals. The programme supports proposals for strategic development activity across Edinburgh's festivals, taking place over a three-five year timeframe. It is open to applications from Festivals Edinburgh members, and Festivals Edinburgh itself (when applying on behalf of all the festivals) only.

1.2. The introduction of the in-principle five-year commitment of the Platforms for Creative Excellence Programme creates a strategic approach to evolving the future direction of the festivals and long-term developments and collaborations with global as well as Scottish partners. The fund offered 5 years of secured funding split across 10 member festivals, supporting a range of creative and community projects.

- 1.3. The PlaCE fund has 3 key activity streams: Sustained and strengthened programming innovation; Increased creative development opportunities across Scotland; Improved lives for citizens and communities through cultural engagement.
- 1.4. **The transformative benefit of the PlaCE programme has been the long term commitment to funding over five years.** This has enabled festivals to work together on a shared agenda, to create cultural activity in local communities, which is led by and informed by gauging community need and appetite. An unexpected benefit was that festivals were able to utilise PlaCE to provide stability within their community facing cultural activities through the pandemic. In 2021, evaluation into the PlaCE programme indicated that the festivals' connections with schools had risen by 72% through the programme to date, and co-created PlaCE activities and initiatives increased by 360%, indicating that models of collaboration have developed positively with creative partners and local communities.
- 1.5. The festivals themselves have created a multitude of different participatory cultural programmes, including writing groups, ticketing initiatives, artist led school residencies, community led art works such as parades and wellbeing focused workshops, amongst many more. Community voice has been highlighted and enshrined within strategic planning, and the resilience offered by multi-year funding has allowed for authentic engagement with local communities in cultural provision.

2. Festivals & Communities Map

- 2.1. Festivals Edinburgh has worked with University of Edinburgh's Data & Society in Science, Technology and Innovation Studies department to produce the Edinburgh Festivals & Communities map. **The mapping project recognised that there was a real need for data gathering to better understand where communities have access to cultural activity and opportunities and improve targeting of activity.** The festivals wished to identify where there was a high concentration of activity and where there were gaps, along with how ticket buying data could be compared against participatory programmes and their reach.
- 2.2. The mapping project has allowed festivals to evidence and interrogate some of the assumptions that had previously been made regarding the festivals' community cultural reach. Data recognised that there were ticket buyers in every ward of the city, and that festivals were systematically working to deliver participatory activity with community-based partners in areas of lower ticket buyers. Postcode data shows that this activity is well matched to need as defined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.
- 2.3. The Festivals and Community mapping project is currently undergoing further updates to bring it in line with post-pandemic delivery of activity and continues to be a useful tool for festivals to monitor reach and plan the provision of targeted community cultural activity.

3. Connect Project

- 3.1. The Connect project is a practice-based research project delivered in partnership between Festivals Edinburgh and Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council (EVOC). **It aims to explore a new model of collaborative cultural planning and engagement involving multiple festivals responding to a needs assessment led by the community.** Funding is often short-

term and tied to specific outputs, making long-term collaborative approaches challenging, so this pilot project is an experiment in what are the advantages and barriers to developing such an approach.

3.2. The Connect Development Worker (hosted by EVOC) has now been in post since August 2022 (part-time) and has spent this time researching festivals and wider place-based partnerships in Edinburgh. Utilising the University of Edinburgh Cultural Mapping research, an area with low engagement was selected and an invitation for expressions of interest issued to EVOC members. Through this process, a Community Centre has been identified to partner on the project, who will receive funding to cover their costs.

3.3. Five festivals have come together in the project - Edinburgh Science, Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival, Edinburgh International Festival, Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society and Scottish International Storytelling Festival -to co-design a consultation format which empowers young people in the community partner organisation to feed into cultural planning and partnerships located in and for the benefit of their community.