



SURF'S RESPONSE TO THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S CULTURAL STRATEGY CONSULTATION

Culture and Place

Art and culture have a vital role in supporting sustainable responses to social, physical and economic problems in poor communities across Scotland. As the nation's regeneration forum, SURF has a long-standing interest in enhancing the mutually beneficial links between the culture and place-based regeneration policy agendas.

SURF wants to see more places that people want to live in, and more communities that nourish the quality of life for everyone within their sphere of influence. We think that artists and arts organisations in Scotland are an important part of everyone's way of life, at all levels of society.

At the community level, community arts groups in poor places provide meaningful opportunities for people to build confidence, skills, social connections and knowledge of local heritage & assets. These activities also contribute to significant increases in pride of place and mental wellbeing, as demonstrated by winners of the [SURF Awards](#)' 'Creative Regeneration' category, such as North Edinburgh Arts, The Portal (Govan, Glasgow), RIG Arts (Greenock) & The Stove Network (Dumfries).

In our town centres & high streets, creative activities such as 'pop up' exhibition, performance and workshop spaces are among those that have provided a positive counterweight to existing trends towards trading decline and more vacant buildings, helping generate investment, tourism and new collaborations. Celebrations like East Lothian's Three Harbours Arts Festival, Wigtown Book Festival and Ullapool's Loopallu Music Festival provide evidence of a rich cultural life in our towns and villages.

UNESCO recognises Dundee as a City of Design, Edinburgh as a City of Literature and Glasgow as a City of Music. Impact assessments on the major arts festivals our cities accommodate – Edinburgh Festivals, Celtic Connections and TRNSMT among them – demonstrate their important economic value in terms of income generation and job creation.

Furthermore, 'City of Culture' bidding processes – and the development of major cultural attractions such as Ayr Gaiety Theatre, Glasgow's Emirates Arena, Falkirk's Kelpies, the recently restored Perth Theatre and the forthcoming Dundee V&A Museum – have been successfully used to attract major public & private investments in wider physical regeneration masterplans.

Nationally, according to the Scottish Government, the creative industries is worth £5bn and accounts for more than 15k businesses and 70k jobs in Scotland, while VisitScotland surveys indicate that culture & heritage is cited by tourists as the second top motivation for visiting.

Scotland's busy cultural sector also benefits from reasonable levels of arts funding, in the context of international comparators, and a dedicated national agency. Creative Scotland is a long-term SURF partner, and shares our enthusiasm towards the greater use of culture in place-based regeneration.

Cultural Strategy Priorities

As the continued pressure on public funds works its way into the arts sectors, SURF urges the Scottish Government to pay particular attention to the capacity of socially and economically challenged areas to connect meaningfully with Scotland's cultural assets.

Every place in Scotland should have the means to collaborate with talented artists and cultural organisations, and to include them in local regeneration and development strategies.

A SURF report on [Bridging Culture and Regeneration](#) and SURF's [2016 Manifesto for Community Regeneration](#) documented a number of existing challenges preventing increased collaboration between arts and regeneration practitioners in the SURF network.

One of these challenges is that the role of cultural organisations as strategic partners in place-based regeneration is seriously underdeveloped in Scotland, despite the efforts of some players, including Creative Scotland. [Dundee's 2015-25 Cultural Strategy](#) presents a useful template others could follow, and there are benefits to the potential of the nation's 32 Community Planning Partnerships each forming a Cultural Plan for their respective region.

If culture is to play its full role in social regeneration, there is a need for knowledgeable and expert cultural coordination at the local level. Local authorities in Scotland have shed valuable arts development posts in recent austerity-driven policies. These posts played a key role in ensuring culture was part of the mix in all areas of local regeneration, from development of the built environment to supporting the health and wellbeing of local people.

SURF can point to some notable, but sporadic, examples of the strong added value created when arts stakeholders and public sector teams for leisure, tourism, and economic development work together holistically. We would like this to become regular practice in all local authority regions.

SURF welcomes the Scottish Government's [2018-19 draft budget plans](#) to increase the funding it provides to Creative Scotland's 2018-21 regular funding budget. Despite the pressures on public budgets, and falling lottery income allocated to good causes, reduced support for cultural activity is a false economy.

A related concern is the general shift in arts support away from collective efforts and towards individual artists. SURF would like to see a rebalancing of this shift, as arts groups tend to be better-placed to make a stronger contribution to place-based regeneration than those working individually.

More could also be done to make best use of the less tangible benefits of culture in provoking debate, raising awareness and interest in social issues, and increasing and diversifying community participation. SURF can point to some effective and intelligent use of creative cultural activities in generating fresh ideas, energy and support towards greater and more authentic community engagement in renewal processes in marginalised Scottish places.

Leading Scottish writers including James Robertson, Alan Bissett, Ian Pattison and the late William McIlvanney have spoken passionately at SURF events on the importance of shared cultural experiences. Artists' contributions like these have inspired wider appreciation and support for the role of culture in sustaining social cohesion, highlighting social justice issues and identifying positive opportunities in communities damaged by macroeconomic changes beyond their control.

Additional challenges and opportunities include:

- Some areas of public policy and service, such as primary school education, are relatively enthusiastic about culture, others less so. The aims and operation of all public institutions can benefit from active engagement with cultural activity.
- Cultural poverty and geo-demographic disconnections are still not being adequately recognised or addressed in policy-making and resource investments.
- Notwithstanding some good examples, we could generally make more, and more creative use of existing cultural assets, such as libraries, cinemas and museums.
- Scotland could do more to learn from international exemplars in cultural regeneration.
- In the long term, implementation of the radical [Basic Income](#) policy could lead to a significantly beneficial increase in the rate of creative industry start-ups, and art production and consumption.

Finally, culture should not be seen as a 'pleasant' but ultimately inessential part of modern Scotland. It is a fundamental component of our shared efforts towards better outcomes in inclusive economic growth, education, health & wellbeing, social justice and place-making.

Derek Rankine, Policy and Participation Manager, SURF (derek@surf.scot, 0141 440 6393); December 2017

SURF Scotland's Regeneration Forum. Orkney Street Enterprise Centre, 18-20 Orkney Street, Glasgow G51 2BX
Tel: 0141 440 0122 / Email: info@surf.scot / Website: www.surf.scot

SURF is a registered charity (no. SC 047 438) and a company limited by guarantee (no. SC 154 598). Registered in Scotland as 'Scotregen Ltd'. VAT reg. no. 735 2880 21.

Supported by: Aberdeen City Council, Capital City Partnership, City of Edinburgh Council, Clyde Gateway, Creative Scotland, Dundee Partnership, Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Housing Association, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, Jobs & Business Glasgow, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, the Scottish Government, and Skills Development Scotland.