



# BRIDGING CULTURE AND REGENERATION

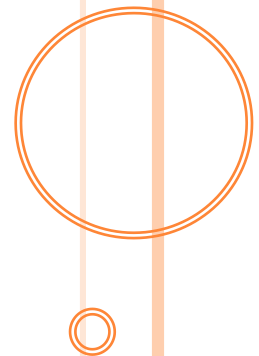
## *A SURF seminar outcomes report*

SURF used its unique regeneration role and networks to organise a consultative cross-sector seminar to share knowledge and perceptions of the productive links between creative culture and regeneration and how they might be further enhanced.

25 relevant and influential cross-sector SURF contacts participated in order to explore policy and practice connections and trends.

They were asked to consider what useful role SURF could potentially play through any longer-term facilitation and activities programme.

The seminar, which was supported by the Scottish Government's Learning Networks Challenge Fund, was held in Dundee Contemporary Arts on 5 November 2014. This is a summary of the main elements of discussion and agreement.



# Bridging Culture and Regeneration

*A SURF seminar outcomes report*

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## INTRODUCTION

The impacts of the banking crisis and the current recession continue to limit and damage conventional regeneration resources and strategies. Regressive austerity policies are adding to the challenges faced by already disadvantaged people and communities.

While SURF works with others to identify and challenge the drivers of poverty and inequality, we are also keen to make the most of the potential for using creative cultural approaches to bridge divides in understanding, opportunity and cooperation.

Initial discussions with various relevant partners across the SURF network indicated the potential of building on evident shared interests in **'Bridging Culture and Regeneration'**.

SURF then invited a range of key contacts already working in relevant fields and geographies to this seminar to help us test whether there is a sufficiently practical and useful role for SURF in supporting collaboration and policy development, and what it might involve.

The purpose of the event was to explore:

- What shared interests and mutually supportive policy agendas could be more closely and productively connected;
- Interest in, and options for, developing cross-border learning and networking on this theme with other UK nations and elsewhere in Europe;
- Relevant policy considerations/recommendations for potential inclusion in a [Manifesto for Regeneration](#) that SURF will be developing for dissemination to political parties in advance of the May 2016 Scottish Parliament elections.

To help establish the conceptual context, SURF invited two relevant and experienced guest speakers from the University of Dundee and Dundee City Council to provide academic and practice-based introductory presentations.

## PRESENTATION SUMMARY: ‘LINKING THE EVIDENCE’

Prof Deborah Peel, Chair of Architecture & Planning, University of Dundee

Some of the main points made by Deborah Peel in her presentation are as follows:

- Culture is one of the richest words. Food, nationality, football, family background, opera *etc.* are all part of our culture. In regeneration, the definition of culture is made more problematic by being fluid; constantly changing while encompassing a wide variety of disparate concepts. The development of arts-led regeneration, cultural quarters and creative industries, for example, all refer to diverse processes that require different approaches and investments.
- The Scottish Government’s national purpose states ‘increased cultural engagement’ as a key performance target, with the main indicator being the % of adults who have attended a cultural event or participated in a cultural activity in the past 12 months. This is a logical approach. There is strong evidence that cultural engagement impacts positively on general wellbeing, supports resilience in difficult times, and brings benefits in learning, education, good health and satisfaction with life. It also contributes to economic growth, through employment and investment opportunities in tourism and the creative industries, as well as encouraging the re-use of vacant buildings and increased pride of place.
- However, while few experts would dispute the role and value that culture has in regeneration, not enough is understood about the effects that different types of cultural intervention produce in the short and longer term. As with many general regeneration programme outcomes, more evidence and assessment of cultural activities is required.
- There are other dimensions of cultural regeneration that we fail to adequately evaluate and address, such as pioneering artists and artistic activity engendering local cultural and economic regeneration, before being subsequently displaced by ensuing gentrification.
- Finally, we can do more to learn from international exemplars in cultural regeneration, such as Liverpool and Lille, which used

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innovative partnership approaches to emerge from post-industrial challenges as confident 'capitals' of culture.

## PRESENTATION SUMMARY: 'POLICY AND PRACTICE'

Stewart Murdoch, Director of Leisure & Communities, Dundee City Council

Some of the main points made by Stewart Murdoch in his presentation are as follows:

Dundee is an ideal base for this seminar and its 'bridging' metaphor. Many of the city's iconic physical bridges have fascinating histories that have something to tell us about the links between culture and regeneration. Examples include:

- **Linlathen Bridge (1796):** a wrought iron bridge over the Dighty river, recently restored by the SURF Award winning DightyConnect creative regeneration initiative. It originally served as a key link between Dundee city and the rural region to the north, an early instance of the city's outward-looking mentality.
- **1<sup>st</sup>Tay Rail Bridge (1878):** Well-known for its collapse in 1879 ("Tay Bridge Disaster"), the bridge was privately financed – the huge capital investment being offset against future economic gain. It has served as crossing point for the royal family and the US President Ulysses S. Grant, who commented that it was "a mighty long bridge for such a small town." Parts of the substructure pillars are visible to this day in certain parts of the river.
- **Hird Bridge (1879):** On a completely different scale, this bridge was built immediately after the above disaster for commemorative purposes. It is a small vanity bridge in Balgay public park, and serves no practical purpose, but demonstrates the value of using cultural features to raise aspirations and lift spirits.
- **2<sup>nd</sup>Tay Rail Bridge (1887):** Opened just nine years after the first one was destroyed, this is a staggering achievement, bravely constructed with new technology, steel, instead of the then-common brick. It is testament to Victorian goals of 'dominating' nature, and truly linked Dundee to the world.



*Linlathen Bridge crosses Dundee's River Dighty*

These all serve as strong examples of efforts to bridge culture-led regeneration with place-based regeneration. Large scale, iconic cultural projects present an ideal base for raising the shared aspirations, energy and demand that is required for large scale physical regeneration.

This is the approach Dundee is currently taking by marrying the £1bn development of the city centre waterfront to the installation of a Victoria and Albert Museum.

Dundee is looking forward to building on its Europe-wide reputation as a city proud of its cultural assets and its continuing regeneration.

## OPEN DISCUSSION

Team based 'bridge-building' collaborations were followed by a facilitated open discussion. The main points emerging from the discussion included:

### Recessionary Context

- Austerity policies are hindering creative regeneration, with arts budgets under pressure in both Scotland and north-east England.
- National and local government tends to consider culture after, rather than part of, education & skills, job creation, and health priorities.
- Local authorities in Scotland have shed knowledgeable people, and valuable posts, in recent austerity-driven policies. These include town centre managers that have a more holistic view of the contribution of cultural activities and facilities.
- Despite the cuts, we still have a busy cultural sector, and reasonable levels of arts funding as compared with many other European countries. We are not doing enough, however, to link these assets and resources into the broader activities and strategies of local authorities.

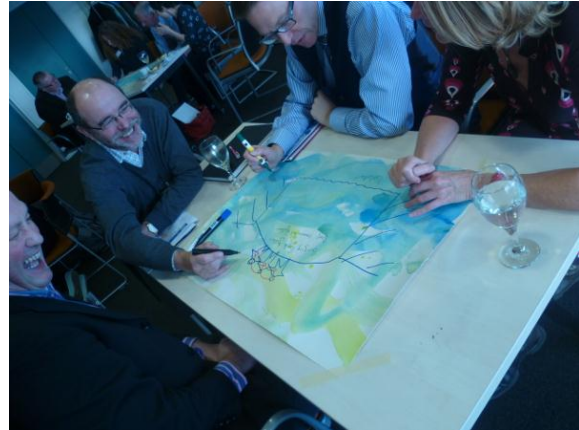
### Existing Assets

- Culture is organic – it grows.
- Arts and culture is everywhere. It exists within individuals and communities rather than in the remit of institutions or arts development officers.
- We still don't place enough value on existing cultural assets, such as libraries and museums. Too often, we think we have to build new infrastructure. Libraries continue to lack sufficient political and development support, despite their substantial community presence.
- Alongside libraries, science represents a major cultural asset that we often fail to make the most of and the best connections with. There are now 17 science centres in Scotland.
- Too many arts activities, especially in education, are about doing things to an audience. It is participation that is most important in culture and regeneration.
- Metaphorically speaking, public and voluntary bodies seeking to raise cultural engagement should be offering people an education in gardening, rather than simply providing gardens for them.
- Cultural assets provide welcome 'headlines' to signal and stimulate economic growth. They act as a 'bridge' from social to economic spheres, engaging citizens' awareness and involvement in a wide range of issues, such as infrastructure projects and economic development.
- Creative cultural regeneration activities should be, at heart, creative and fun. Pop-up cinemas present good examples. Such footloose activities don't always need years of planning, the development of funding applications, or the diplomatic bureaucracy of big partnerships.
- As in other areas of activity, early intervention is key to nurturing culturally engaged citizens. For example, Dundee Contemporary Arts provides the city's primary school children with an early introduction to world cinema.

“TOO MANY ARTS ACTIVITIES ARE ABOUT *DOING THINGS TO AN AUDIENCE. IT IS PARTICIPATION THAT IS MOST IMPORTANT.*”

## Public Policy Challenges

- Some areas of public policy and service are relatively enthusiastic about culture, such as education, others appear less so. All public institutions should be engaged with cultural activities and the wider community.
- Do our public officials, with the possible exception of teachers in some subjects, feel comfortable in saying they promote creativity?
- The focus of the Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee is skewed greatly towards education, to the detriment of arts and culture.
- Sectoral problems play both ways: distinct policy fields are encouraged to defend their boundaries and many lack expertise around culture and creativity. More needs to be done to assist, rather than attack, those with a 'silo' mentality. City partnerships and other formal frameworks have made progress in driving local government towards greater community engagement. The same route could potentially work for arts and culture.
- The Scottish Government is generally supportive of the creative arts and community-led engagement, but there are questions around levels of investment, scale and applicability – especially in places that have the greatest economic/social challenges.
- Economic poverty and cultural poverty are not the same. They have different root causes and different methods are required to address them.
- Currently, we use regeneration as a 'medicine' for a social and economic malaise, *i.e.* in response to degeneration. The impacts of severe and sustained degeneration are too big for conventional regeneration processes to do much about. This same situation may be as true for cultural degeneration.
- We tend to tell two stories about what impacts our work is having: one in a professional context, where we focus on positive impacts, and another informally, in cafes and pubs, where we share a more frank assessment of the challenges and institutions. We need to find a way to 'bridge' these two narratives and present a more honest, and therefore useful, picture of present situations and opportunities.



*The seminar featured a practical bridge-building exercise*

## International Lessons

- We should take more opportunities to compare Scottish outcomes on cultural engagement and those in reasonably comparable countries? Perhaps we are doing better than we think in many areas.
- Cross-border learning and networking between Scotland, north east England and Northern Ireland is welcome, but there are some place specific dynamics to be aware of. For example, Derry/Londonderry is a tremendous city of culture, but the 'cultural' Protestant/Catholic divide is so deep that 'ownership' of the symbolic peace bridge is, ironically, contested across sectarian lines.
- Scotland could be more active in seeking resources and networking with partners elsewhere in the European Union. Some opportunities have been lost in the absence of attention to the possibilities in the 2014-2020 EU funding streams.



*One group's bridge emphasized the need to provide arts opportunities for local people of all ages*

- We pay too much attention to west Europe and the USA, when more of what Scotland could usefully learn about cultural regeneration comes from developing countries. For example, in Venezuela, the home of the original 'Big Noise' community orchestra, there is widespread poverty. But the levels of cultural engagement are much higher in a typical economically deprived Venezuelan community as compared with a Scottish one.

## WHAT'S NEXT

SURF will be using the outcomes of the discussion to inform its thinking towards a potential 2015-17 activities programme on 'Bridging Culture and Regeneration'. At this stage, it would have three broad goals:

- **Enhanced awareness of policy and practice** synergies between the two sectors, and how these might be further developed to add greater value in future plans, investments and activities;
- **Increased networking across sectors** and between the rapidly evolving Scottish, north east English, Welsh and Northern Irish policy and practice contexts;
- **Shared experience and transferable learning** to the benefit of improved policy and practice in regeneration, and resultant enhancement of community participation and sustainability.

Some relevant post-seminar activity:

- Janet Archer, Chief Executive of Creative Scotland, made a presentation to the SURF Board of Directors and participated in a linked open discussion on shared priorities and opportunities for increased cooperation.
- Aileen McKechnie, Director of Culture and Heritage for the Scottish Government, met with SURF Chief Executive Andy Milne to be briefed the outcome of the Dundee seminar and to discuss evolving opportunities for more closely linking cultural policies and assets with regeneration strategies.
- Sarah Davidson, the Scottish Government's Director General for Communities, will visit Govan in January 2015 to discuss creative culture/regeneration links with local projects active within [SURF's Alliance for Action programme](#) on place-based regeneration.

Keep up-to-date on programme activities by:

Visiting the 'Bridging Culture and Regeneration' webpage:  
[www.scotregen.co.uk/bridging-culture-and-regeneration/](http://www.scotregen.co.uk/bridging-culture-and-regeneration/)

Signing up to SURF's e-bulletin mailing list:  
[www.scotregen.co.uk/stay-informed/](http://www.scotregen.co.uk/stay-informed/)

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### End of summary paper

*Derek Rankine, SURF Events & Communications Manager, December 2014*

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