

Feeling more part of Dublin:

Evidencing the impact of participation in cultural projects

May 2022

Contents

- Contents 1
- Introduction..... 2
 - Aim 2
 - Concepts and terminology 2
 - Scope and limitations 3
 - Methodology 4
 - The projects..... 4
- What impacts does Dublin City Council seek? 8
 - Economic development 8
 - Social development 8
- Do the projects with a focus on cultural participation contribute to achieving the City’s overarching goals? 12
 - Economic development 12
 - Social development 13
 - Partnership 14
 - Liveability and placemaking 15
 - Vibrancy 15
 - Active citizenship 15
- What are the factors that ensure the delivery of these impacts? 17
 - Values 17
 - Respect for participants..... 17
 - Engaging communities 18
 - Strategic approach..... 19
 - Working in partnership 19
- Conclusion 20

Introduction

Aim

The overall aim of this study is to evidence the extent to which the work of Dublin City Council’s department of Planning and Property Development and Culture, Recreation and Economic Services contributes to the achievement of Dublin City Council’s overarching goals through participation in culture in its broadest sense.

Concepts and terminology

Culture: This study uses the 2001 UNESCO definition of culture. UNESCO defines culture as, “...the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature, but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs”¹, or, as Brian Eno put it, “...everything that you don’t have to do”². This study covers archaeology, arts, festivals, food, built heritage, history, literature and sport.

Participants: In the context of this study ‘participant’ is used to describe the people taking part or participating (be that actively or passively), or who are otherwise interacting or involved in a project, programme or activity. It does not include people involved in projects in any kind of professional capacity (such as the project lead, delivery partners or any cultural leads).

Participation/Engagement: These two words are considered as having the same definition and describe the act of taking part or participating as defined for ‘participants’ above.

Outcomes and Outputs: This study works with definitions of these two phrases that are distinct. Outputs is used to describe any ‘thing’ that is caused to exist or happen during or as a direct result of a project or programme while we use Matarasso’s description of ‘outcomes’, being those consequences, direct or indirect, of a project or programme. It should be noted that this study consciously seeks to define this term in the broadest sense possible and, like Matarasso, works with a broad spectrum of understanding of what constitutes an ‘outcome’ that includes all “*the ways [humans] meet our needs*”³.

Impact/Legacy: This study seeks to identify and give definition to the concept of the ‘impact’ by exploring the link between impact and Dublin City Council’s overarching goals. At the outset of

¹ UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity: Adopted by the 31st Session of the General Conference of UNESCO, Paris, 2nd November 2001. See:

http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/5_Cultural_Diversity_EN.pdf

² <http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/6music/johnpeellectures/brian-eno-john-peel-lecture.pdf> (accessed Nov 2020)

³ <https://arestlessart.files.wordpress.com/2019/03/2019-a-restless-art.pdf>, p.83 (accessed Nov 2020).

the project, our understanding of ‘impact’ was similar to ‘outcome’ in that it describes types of consequence, direct or indirect, of a project or programme. The term implies, “...*that something changes as a result of a cultural experience, at least temporarily*”⁴. ‘Impact’ can be either positive or negative and where it occurs over the longer term, the word ‘legacy’ is used. Gordon-Nesbitt describes impact as being made up of several elements which include, ‘*social support, social participation and networks, and trust and reciprocity*’⁵ and these ideas are explored further as part of the research.

Scope and limitations

Geographic scope of this study: The geographical scope of this study is Dublin insofar as the case study projects will all be derived from Dublin City Council activity, although this will not apply to the analysis of the data gathered as it applies to the concepts outlined above.

Dublin City Council Sections included within this study: The scope of the study is the sections within Dublin City Council’s Planning and Property Development and Culture, Recreation and Economic Services Department undertakes an area of activity that involves the general public in order to contribute the aims or ambitions expressed in at least one of the following overarching Dublin City Council policies or plans:

- Climate Change Action Plan
- Corporate Plan 2015-2019
- Draft Development Plan 2022-2028
- Integration Plan 2016-2021
- Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021
- Local Economic and Community Plan Action Plan 2018

Projects: We restricted the study to projects that involved a substantial proportion of adults either in groups or as individuals. In part this was owing to ethical considerations around the involvement of children in research and in part because they are likely to have less agency over their activities which may restrict the impact of participation in a project.

Timeframe: The timeframe of the majority of this study is 2016 to the end of 2019, because this correlates to the timeframe of the last City Development Plan, gives enough time for impacts to become apparent and excludes the disruption to engagement by City residents caused by the Covid-19 virus pandemic from 2020 onwards. Two projects from 2021 have been included to give an indication of how sections have adapted their methodology in response to this disruption.

Participants: It proved difficult to reach the participants involved in projects as the restrictions in place because of the Covid pandemic meant the majority of the groups they belonged to did not meet either in person or online while this study was undertaken. All but one focus group took

⁴ [Understanding the Value and Impacts of Cultural Experiences.pdf](#), p.9 (accessed Nov 2020).

⁵ <https://www.artsforhealth.org/research/artsengagementandhealth/> (accessed Nov 2020), as discussed here: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/publications/cultural-value-project-final-report/> p.60 (accessed Nov 2020).

place online because of the restrictions in place or because participants had grown more anxious about meeting in person as the pandemic progressed. There were technological, skills-based and attitudinal barriers that prevented some participants from engaging online.

Methodology

We invited each section in Dublin City Council's Planning and Property Development and Culture, Recreation and Economic Services Department to participate in this study. A small number were unable to get involved owing to workload.

We held discussions with participating sections to jointly identify which was the most appropriate of their projects to study. For each of these projects, we identified a single staff or team member most closely involved in the strategic development, planning and implementation of each project - the project lead - and its cultural leads which include a variety of roles such as archaeologists, architects, artists etc.

We carried out semi-structured depth interviews online with the project lead and one or more of the cultural leads. (See appendix for a list of interviewees). The depth interviews and focus groups were piloted with the project leads, cultural lead and participants in the ALIGHT! project.

Where possible, we facilitated focus groups and interviews with project participants. These involved participants in the following projects:

- ALIGHT!
- Conserve Your Period Home
- Weaving in the Liberties
- St Thomas' Abbey
- Creative Writing Programme
- Story on Your Door.

There was some anxiety among participants that criticism of projects would result in fewer opportunities to engage in future so we agreed they would not be identified in any reports.

The projects

ALIGHT!

Arts

This storytelling, dance, performance and art project was directed by choreographer Muirne Bloomer and visual artist Vanessa Daws, ALIGHT! was led by CoisCéim BROADREACH and coordinated by Dublin's Culture Connects (now Dublin City Council Culture Company). It was created by community groups and individuals from Ringsend, Irishtown, Pearse Street and Sandymount

ALIGHT! was about promoting, developing and improving social and cultural access. An inclusive participation project, its aims were to inspire and connect communities and their national institutions in a lasting and meaningful way. The ALIGHT! activities and events were developed by the participants under the mentorship of professional artists, resulting in a series of creative responses that celebrate the natural choreography of daily life on and around the orange double decker project bus.

Change for Life

Sport and Wellbeing

Now in its eighth year, Change for Life is an 8-week programme focused on giving people from all ages and abilities a clear pathway to sustainable improved health and wellbeing. It is delivered through the Dublin City Sports and Wellbeing Partnership and funded by Healthy Ireland and Healthy Dublin. The programme focuses on promoting opportunities for communities to get sustainably active and create a greater awareness of how some small changes can influence big results. Giving participants opportunities to become more active and stay social over a wide variety of activities, promoting and educating nutrition and lifestyle management along with assessing and monitoring people's body composition the project gives people a toolkit for improved physical and mental health.

Conserve Your Period Home

Heritage

For the past 11 years, Dublin City Council has worked in partnership with the Irish Georgian Society to deliver a series of talks that provides high quality information on care and conservation to owners of protected structures and buildings and to the whole range of professionals and trades people those owners might employ to work on them. The lectures cover all periods and types of houses from the modest Edwardian artisan dwelling to the substantial red-bricks of the Victorian suburbs and the fine townhouses of our Georgian city squares. The series aims to increase understanding of the history and significance of Dublin's period buildings and to give practical technical advice on their conservation including the resources available with the goal of ensure owners are better informed to make decisions that will have a positive impact on the City's architectural heritage.

Creative Writing Programme

Writers in residence

For many years, Dublin City's libraries have hosted writing groups. The Creative Writing Programme project aims to increase the number of writing groups and to improve the quality of their writing. It has included large scale projects to widen engagement such as 2016's *Dublin in the Coming Times* with Fighting Words, regular evenings bringing the different writing groups together to share their work, publications and, in 2018, two writers-in-residence, Declan Burke and Elizabeth Rigby, working with four groups under the UNESCO City of Literature designation.

Eat the Streets!

Climate Action

In 2021, Eat the Streets! aimed to engage communities with schools, farmers, urban growers, chefs and food producers to celebrate Dublin's food heritage, culminating in a ten-day festival. It focused on exploring issues around food and climate change, looking at the 43 fruit and vegetables are grown in Ireland and how residents can grow them too, reducing food waste and the carbon footprint of food, how to set up a food business, creating and sharing recipes and food art and exploring Dublin's food culture.

Hotter than July

Events

Hotter than July is an annual celebration of Dublin's cultural diversity through music and dance from around the world, funded by Dublin City Council's Events section and programmed and delivered by Improvised Music Company. A full programme of upbeat music and dance over a weekend in July, it is high quality event that is accessible to all. It offers a kaleidoscope of joyful music including performances and participatory workshops from around the world in an event that everyone can enjoy.

The first festival was in Temple Bar in 2013 but as it developed the Events team, one of whose core goals is to increase footfall across the city centre, saw its potential to grow and supported its move to Smithfield. It attracts large audiences but alongside this Improvised Music Company undertakes a substantial programme of activity to engage a wide range of local communities in partnership with local groups and organisations and ensures the festival benefits local businesses.

People's College Lecture Series

Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane

The People's College's partnership with The Hugh Lane Gallery is now in its 27th year. The Art Appreciation lecture series is over-subscribed each year. Participants come to the Gallery on Saturday mornings to look at the diverse range of influences, subject matter and artistic movements explored by some of the most innovative artists from the 19th to the 21st centuries.

The course draws on The Hugh Lane's temporary exhibitions and on works from the permanent collection. The illustrated lectures are programmed by gallery to offer the opportunity for exploring wide-ranging themes from art history to contemporary visual art practice, to wider societal concerns explored by artists nationally and internationally. After each lecture participants have themselves developed the habit of debating the issues over a cup of coffee.

St Thomas' Abbey

Archaeology

Construction projects around Cork Street in The Liberties led to the discovery of the lost site of Dublin's great St Thomas' Abbey. The multi-stranded project that aimed to animate the site sprang from a conversation between the City Archaeologist and the Area Manager. Initial research revealed that the Abbey's story hadn't been progressed in historical studies for about 100 years so they set up a steering group and commissioned a medieval history specialist to do a background study. From this, a specialist team created a narrative and physical reconstruction of the Abbey in around 15AD. This reconstruction was the chief tool used by South Central Area's community development team to

engage local people in dialogue around the changing landscape of their neighbourhood. Local communities created artworks, storytelling projects and a street parade. An academic conference happened locally in St Catherine's Church and made accessible to the community. Around 200 people participated, half of whom were local residents. Until the funds are available to fully excavate it the site now houses allotments and a community garden which do not impact on the archaeology below and a hidden story of international importance has been claimed and owned by the local community.

Story on Your Door

Arts

This project was conceived by the Arts Office as a way of bringing theatre to new spaces in spite of the restrictions in place because of the Covid pandemic. It started as a conversation between an Assistant Arts Office and the South West Inner City Community Development Manager about how many social housing complexes were built like amphitheatres. They wondered if this would be a way of bringing communities together again through socially-distanced theatre, with families watching from their balconies, at a time when people were not allowed to congregate. A close-collaboration between the sections resulted in a series of performances of Breadline's My First Holy Covid, which responded to the intense frustration caused by the cancellation of so many first Communion. The positive response from residents has led to requests for similar events and to them doing their own performances in the same format.

Weaving in the Liberties

Historians in residence

Conceived by Dublin City Libraries and funded as a Decade of Commemoration project, historians were attached to each City Area with a brief to connect with communities through history and link them with the resources available in their local libraries. The many strands of the Weaving in the Liberties was just one element of activity in the South Central Area initiated as a result of the residency there. It started with a series of talks tracing the history of weaving in the Liberties, for example through local street names. This sparked a community development project with weavers in partnership with the Area Office and community organisations such as SOLAS that drew in a wide spectrum of residents. This in turn developed into a series of accredited weaving courses offered in partnership with City of Dublin Education Training Board, relationships with local organisations including the Hyatt Liberties Hotel focusing on tourism and economic development, partnerships with community gardens and the establishment of an independent community group, Liberties Weavers.

What impacts does Dublin City Council seek?

The objectives and actions in the key Dublin City Council policy documents that provide the focus for this study are framed by higher level, cross-cutting goals. These are impacts driven by a strong vision and clear values. In monitoring and evaluating specific objectives and actions, these overarching impacts are often lost from view owing to the necessity of focusing on quantifiable outputs rather than the qualitative outcomes these outputs are intended to deliver. This study seeks to add a qualitative dimension by evaluating the extent to which a series of projects with cultural engagement as their focus contribute towards the achievement of Dublin City Council’s overarching goals. These goals are outlined below.

Economic development

Dublin City Council’s economic development goals are expressed in terms of:

- the development of a strong and resilient economy
- recovery from the pandemic
- sustaining and developing Dublin’s attractiveness as a place to live, work and visit
- improving its competitiveness as a capital city for tourism and investment.

In their strategic plans, some of its partners⁶ tend to talk about poverty reduction but the Council places poverty in a wider context of disadvantage. A key concept is that economic development is *balanced and sustainable*.

The United Nations Economic and Social Council defines balanced development as ‘the creation of equal opportunities for all people to participate in, contribute to and benefit from development.’⁷ The Draft Development Plan 2022-2028 refers to ‘the principles of equality and diversity’ as important factors in ensuring the city’s economy works for the benefit of all the people of Dublin.’ This is reflected in Dublin City Council’s goals around inclusive growth, access to employment, the development of specific elements of the economy such as start ups, social enterprises and micro- and small businesses and the focus on a ‘just transition’ to a low carbon economy that ensures the burden of change is fairly distributed, among others.

UNESCO defines sustainable development as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’.⁸ This is apparent in goals around carbon reduction, climate resilience, biodiversity, the transition to a circular economy and the green economy.

Social development

⁶ e.g. Dublin City Community Cooperative and Northside Partnership,

⁷ Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Policy Issues for the ESCAP Region: Balanced Development of Urban and Rural Areas and Regions Within the Countries of Asia and the Pacific United Nations Economic and Social Council*, (Bangkok: 2001), p. 1

⁸ <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development/what-is-esd/sd> [accessed 1 November 2022]

The headline goal in Dublin City Council’s draft Development Plan 2022-2028 is for inclusive development that improves residents’ quality of life. Across all the key strategy documents this is manifested in goals around:

- the elimination of social exclusion including the promotion of social cohesion
- the elimination of inequality by ensuring access and relevance for all
- sustainable neighbourhoods in terms of the social infrastructure and the economic, social and cultural mix
- improved health and wellbeing
- ensuring people feel safe
- cultural vibrancy

Some key concepts emerge.

Dublin City Council recognises that many of its strategies cannot be achieved by the Council alone. It makes specific references to working in multi-agency *partnerships* in relation to goals around social inclusion, promoting participation, integration and intercultural dialogue, developing cultural assets, delivering events, protecting built heritage, climate action, community safety, influencing travel behaviour, delivering opportunities for sport and recreation and ensuring the dissemination of information to residents and visitors. These collaborations are described as involving a wide range of partners such as residents, community organisations and networks, social enterprises, public sector agencies, private sector businesses, professional bodies and networks and neighbouring local authorities among many others.

The terms *liveability* and *liveable* are used 31 times in the key strategy documents. The attributes that contribute to a liveable city are that they are attractive, distinctive, inclusive, safe, accessible and healthy. The idea of distinctiveness, sometimes described in the documents as ‘local character’, springs from the importance of residents feeling a sense of place that promotes a connection with their community.

Vibrant and *vibrancy* are used 84 times in the key strategies across a wide range of social and economic goals. The terms are not defined either in Dublin City Council’s strategy documents nor in the National Planning Framework or National Development Plan 2021-2030 where they are also repeatedly used. Australia’s urban design protocol was developed through a collaboration between all three levels of government, community organisations and professional associations.⁹ It defines vibrant places as those where you can see other people around, people are enjoying themselves and each other’s company by interacting, playing, exploring and unwinding and that people want to experience or live in.

Placemaking is one of the important strategies Dublin City Council uses to promote connectedness to and ownership of the city. The Draft Development Plan 2022-2028 defines this as ‘[capitalising] on a local community’s assets, inspiration, and potential, with the intention of creating public spaces that promote people’s health, happiness, and well-being.’ The key tool in achieving this is seen as good

⁹ *Creating Places for People: an urban design protocol for Australian cities*, <https://urbandesign.org.au/protocol-framework/principles/vibrant/> [accessed 13 April 2022]

urban design and a responsiveness to the needs of local communities. The concept of Dublin as a 15 minute city based around urban villages puts an increased emphasis on placemaking.

The need for *behaviour change* by residents is referred to in the context of goals around health and wellbeing, climate action, environmental protection, biodiversity and heritage.

The strategies repeatedly emphasise the important contributions of residents in achieving goals such as those around social inclusion, healthy living, community safety, climate action, tourism, engagement with the city's amenities and resources, bringing about local events and the provision of local amenities. The Draft Development Plan 2022-2028 includes fostering local action as one of seven strategies to underpin its policies and objectives and the Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021 defines community development as affording 'the right to communities (both geographical and communities of interest) to act for positive social change and to address issues in their own communities and in wider society'.

Within the key strategies, this kind of active participation in their communities is seen as essential to improving residents' quality of life. The strategies refer to it as *civic engagement* and *active citizenship* encompassing active participation in local decision-making, community leadership, democratic processes, formal and informal volunteering and participating in the cultural life of their neighbourhood and city.

The Wheel, Ireland's national association of community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises, defines active citizenship as people 'quite simply doing anything to express their values or working to achieve something for the common good.'¹⁰ They are clear that 'anyone in Ireland, regardless of nationality or residency status, can be an active citizen.'¹¹ It describes both individual activity such as caring for a neighbour and collective activity through formal organisations and networks such as helping out at a sports club or being a member of a residents' association. It also encompasses the active expression of a set of values in a more ad hoc way, for example taking action to reduce your own carbon footprint. Active citizenship therefore covers a broad spectrum of activity. As the European Economic and Social Committee's 2012 report states: 'Active citizenship is the glue that keeps society together' with the 'welfare of society' at its heart.¹²

Concepts similar to active citizenship are variously labelled engaged citizenship, civic action, civic virtue and civic engagement, with the skills and knowledge necessary for active citizenship referred to as civic competence.

The Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021 comments that 'there is huge opportunity to leverage further community engagement in local and citywide activity'¹³

¹⁰ Ivan Cooper, *Participating People: enabling active citizenship in Twenty-first Century Ireland*, (Dublin: The Wheel, 2019), p. 33

¹¹ <https://www.wheel.ie/policy-and-research/issues/active-citizenship> [accessed 12 November 2020]

¹² <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/eesc-2011-35-en.pdf>, p. 4 [accessed 12 November 2020]

¹³ p. 20

Dublin City Council's goals recognise that prerequisites of active citizenship are:

- full participation in the life of the city
- citizen involvement in decision making through bottom-up, local community centred approaches
- a sense of identity involving connectedness to and ownership of the city.

Some of Dublin City Council's partners have undertaken research to identify the blocks to active citizenship. These tend to be endemic and can include:

- little or no community infrastructure
- no strong community structures that look after their local area
- difficulty of engaging with individuals who are not already part of community networks
- lack of local activities that bring the community together
- lack of informal public spaces that encourage interaction between residents
- few opportunities for interaction across generations
- lack of coordination between service providers
- low voter registration
- lack of information
- poor public transport.

Dublin City Council's key strategy documents identify a range of factors that enable active citizenship. They include:

- Socially balanced neighbourhoods
- Adequate community infrastructure
- Building capacity within the community e.g. organisational capacity
- Neighbourhood pride
- Residents' knowledge, information and awareness around the issues affecting their neighbourhood and city
- A close relationship and channels for dialogue between residents and the Council
- Channels for dialogue between communities
- Active processes of engagement
- Access to employment
- Support for social innovation, entrepreneurship and enterprise development
- Learning, skills and qualifications

Delivering impacts

Do the projects with a focus on cultural participation contribute to achieving the City's overarching goals?

Dublin's Draft Development Strategy 2022-2028 quotes the Government policy document *Culture 2025*, recognising that culture can 'contribute to social cohesion, reduce isolation and enrich all our lives'. This study asks whether participating in cultural projects can be shown to contribute to Dublin City Council's more specific, overarching goals as described in the previous section. As before, the term 'culture' is used in its broadest sense (see page 2).

The majority of projects in this study are contributing to more than one goal, with participation in culture as the catalyst. Hotter than July, for example, is helping to achieve economic development by driving footfall into the city centre, supporting local and creative businesses and making Dublin a more attractive place to live, work and visit; social development by placemaking through strengthening connectedness to and ownership of the neighbourhood and City; promoting social cohesion and integration, and increasing cultural vibrancy.

Some Dublin City Council sections have objectives across a wide range of overarching goals, so their projects often but not always have similarly broad goals, for example the City Library Service. Other sections are much more focused and their projects contribute to multiple goals almost as a by-product driven by the values of one or more external partners in the project or by the values of the individual Dublin City Council project lead or one or more of the creative leads.

Economic development

Some projects have core objectives around economic development, for example the Events section's Hotter Than July aims to increase footfall in the city centre. Other projects did achieve economic goals although their core goals were narrower, around cultural and community development and preservation, for example:

- The St Thomas' Abbey and Weaving in the Liberties projects were seeking to contribute to **balanced economic development** in regeneration areas where the local communities felt that they were not benefiting from the intense redevelopment of the area.
- Weaving in the Liberties developed a strand of accredited training and supported a start up enterprise and local businesses and social enterprises.
- Several participants in ALIGHT! are reported to have gone on to train as cultural professionals as a result of the project and its legacy activity.
- Conserve Your Period Home supports small and micro businesses by enabling homeowners to find tradespeople with the necessary specialist conservation skills to work on their properties.

In these projects, the economic outcomes were planned but they emerged during rather than before the project in direct response to the needs of the communities involved and with the full support of the participants.

These are small-scale, local contributions to large-scale goals but are indicative of the potential across the total number of culturally driven projects within the Department each year.

Other projects contributed to **sustainable development** goals by exploring themes around themes of climate resilience, carbon reduction and biodiversity, for example the St Thomas' Abbey site is now a community garden and allotments enabling local residents to grow their own food and play a part in the greening of the area to encourage biodiversity. Weaving in the Liberties collaborated with a community garden to grow plants that provided dyes for the accredited weaving courses and social enterprise start-up. Eat the Streets' core theme was climate action.

Social development

All the projects in this study had as a core goal **widening and deepening engagement** both with the particular cultural focus and with the participants' communities, whether that was a geographic community (Story on Your Door, St Thomas' Abbey, Change for Life, Weaving in the Liberties, ALIGHT! and Hotter than July) or a community of interest (e.g. Conserve Your Period Home, Creative Writing Programme, Eat the Streets and the People's College Lecture Series).

Most of the projects ensured the **relevance and accessibility** of the project to all participants by beginning with a period of listening to participants and then planning the project in response. Although most of the projects had clear objectives and outcomes from the outset, the importance of responding to participants' needs and interests meant the outputs and processes were open, allowing the project to be flexible.

Several of the projects contributed to **social inclusion** with culture as the catalyst. Some participants were motivated to get involve for reasons that were not primarily cultural. The Class Rep, for example, reported that many participants in the People's College Art Appreciation lecture series at the Hugh Lane Gallery were seeking to reduce their isolation by venturing outside their house to join this friendly and welcoming group for whom the independent discussion over coffee after each lecture was an important part of the experience. Likewise, for some participants in the Creative Writing Programme, each meeting was primarily social and an opportunity for their voice to be heard by their peers. The group members were not interested in having their work published. The writer-in-residence asserted strongly that this did not demonstrate any kind of lack of ambition but instead evidenced the wider benefits of engaging with culture.

Story on Your Door was designed to **reconnect communities**, bringing disadvantaged neighbourhoods together after a long period of enforced isolation because of the Covid pandemic by finding a way to engage communities in theatre performances from their balconies.

Participation in a project could bring about quite major **shifts in attitude**. The focus group participants from ALIGHT! talked about the importance of their own engagement during and

following the project in persuading their children to get involved in cultural activities. They felt they had learned a lot from engaging with people from other cultural backgrounds through the project, saying, 'You appreciate what other people's talents are and what they can give to you.' Hotter Than July also seeks to enhance social cohesion and integration. The team do this by creating encounters between music, food and dance from different cultures that give insight into their similarities not just their differences.

There is evidence of **behaviour change** from several projects, including continuing to engage with culture after the project, engaging more deeply with a particular aspect of culture, joining different groups, engaging with new types of activity, and initiating activities themselves, for example the Story on Your Door participants in the focus group said that the experience had inspired their communities to create their own mini-performances for a doorstep audience.

Change for Life had core objectives around sustainable improvements to participants' **health and wellbeing** and nutrition was an important element of Eat the Streets. Participants in Story on Your Door said the project had a positive impact on their communities' mental health including highlighting the positive impact on one woman in particular who had not stepped outside her flat for over two years and was able to engage safely with the performance and the community beyond her immediate neighbours.

Several projects developed strands to **reduce crime and antisocial behaviour**, notably ALIGHT! with its strand of diversionary activities which developed into the Dockers and Demons festival at Halloween and Weaving in the Liberties which involved participants in one of SOLAS' youth intervention projects in building looms and are in the early stages of exploring ways of developing an accredited carpentry course around this following the model of the weaving courses.

Partnership

Most of the projects were delivered through a complex mosaic of partnerships across very different sectors, for example the Dublin City Education and Training Board's involvement in Weaving in the Liberties and the Health Service and Probation Service which refer participants to the People's College, some of whom participate in the Art Appreciation course at the Hugh Lane. Change for Life is delivered through the Dublin City Sports and Wellbeing Partnership which involves a wide range of stakeholders including Dublin City Council.

Some partnerships have been sustained over many years, eleven in the case of the collaboration between Dublin City Council's Heritage section and the Irish Georgian Society and 27 for that between the Hugh Lane Gallery and the People's College.

Key partnerships are those between different sections of Dublin City Council, notably the strong collaborations between the Assistant Arts Officer and Community Development Manager that led to Story on Your Door, between the City Archaeologist and the South Central Area Manager that widened and deepened the impact of the St Thomas' Abbey project, between the City Libraries' Historian-in-Residence and South Central's Community Development team that made such a multi-

stranded project possible, and between ALIGHT!'s creative lead and the then Community Development Manager for the South East Area that ensured such an extensive legacy for the project.

Liveability and placemaking

Conserve Your Period Home is primarily concerned with preserving the distinctiveness of Dublin's neighbourhoods by conserving its build heritage that contributes so much to residents' sense of place. Hotter Than July has the core objective of enhancing the experience of living in, working in and visiting Dublin's city centre.

In most of the focus groups and interviews, participant talked about feeling proud of their community as a result of the project saying, for example, 'It made me feel proud, being able to present something like [Story on Your Door] in the flats.'

Weaving in the Liberties sparked community pride through an understanding of the neighbourhood's historical importance to Dublin's economy and creativity. One participant said: '[It's] just the positive influence that it had on my connection to the rest of the city. Like it's made me feel more a part of Dublin. I don't feel like an outsider ... and it's just, I don't know how to explain it, it's very strange.'

Vibrancy

Enhancing the vibrancy of the neighbourhood was a key goal of several projects , notably St Thomas' Abbey's street parade that attracted numerous participants, large audiences and high profile media coverage. ALIGHT!'s orange bus travelling around the different communities encouraged engagement at the beginning of the project but by the end had become a symbol of community pride. Hotter Than July ensures that local residents can experience the free festival even if they don't feel confident enough to enter the performance area, by, for example, ensuring any barriers are low enough for everyone to see over.

Active citizenship

The impact of all the projects on active citizenship appears particularly strong. It is important to note, however, that participants, project leads and creative leads all talked about ways in which the communities involved already demonstrated active citizenship, for example by supporting people who were particularly isolated by Covid lockdowns. The impact of the projects in the study is on individual participants who were less actively engaged with their communities.

Factors linked to active citizenship such as a sense of place, a greater sense of connection with the community, community pride, engagement in community groups and initiating activities have been highlighted above.

Other impacts around active citizenship reported by participants include:

- Increased social skills
- Increased ability to empathise with others different to themselves
- Mutual support and trust between participants

- Connections made during the project that have continued afterwards
- Sharing experiences and spaces leading to feelings of belonging
- Feeling at home in unfamiliar spaces within the community
- Being more open to new experiences
- Having the confidence to express themselves
- Feeling empowered
- Feeling valued or validated
- Having a greater sense of self-worth
- Knowledge exchange
- Developing new leadership skills
- Increased levels of volunteering

What are the factors that ensure the delivery of these impacts?

Values

It was notable that, when asked for their stand-out or memorable moment from the project, almost every project lead and creative lead interviewed talked about the impact of the project on a specific participant, group of participants or member or members of the wider community observing the activity. Most could talk about participants by name, even if the project had taken place four years ago.

Some worked in sections with statutory obligations or core objectives that were not about community development. The interviewees' people-centred values, however, drove them to seek wider objectives that aligned with Dublin City Council's overarching goals for the city. In some projects, there was a sense that interviewees felt these wider outcomes were being achieved illicitly. They were certainly unrecognised. They were not evaluated because they were not the prime purpose of the project and some interviewees appeared to feel that they had to keep their heads below the parapet because if these outcomes were noticed, someone might stop the project.

The projects that involved senior staff from the Dublin City Council Area Offices were most likely to maximise the wider impacts of projects. These were the projects that developed multiple strands reaching out into many different sections of the community. This appeared to be because the remit of these staff members embraced the whole range of Dublin City Council's overarching goals and they had an in-depth knowledge of their communities and existing relationships with the whole range of community stakeholders. They were also willing to invest staff time and, in some cases, financial resources to achieve these wider outcomes.

Respect for participants

Most of the projects started by actively seeking out and listening to the wider community, whether or not they were potential participants. Consultation also involves listening to communities but this active community engagement was less structured, was concerned to find out what matters to the community and so had no set agenda. One interviewee described the difference as 'not just about hearing their views but understanding why they hold them and working out how they can be involved in what's happening so that the majority are happy.'

This responsive approach meant that project leads and creative leads needed to be flexible, listening, exploring and learning and then devising the project in response. It was therefore important that had no set outputs at the start. This is an alien concept for many cultural workers who are used to setting out with a clear artistic vision and outputs.

Having clear objectives (rather than outputs), however, was essential – there appeared to be a fine line between flexible and vague, with a creative lead on one project reporting that participants had no idea why he was in their meeting, leading to initial suspicion and hostility that meant it took much longer to build their trust.

This approach means giving up power to participants. These kinds of projects appear to work best when all partners, including participants, have an equal voice. This means that sometimes the project and creative leads have to accept decisions they don't agree with, for example naming the ALIGHT! project. This means participants have shared ownership of the outputs and outcomes. This is crucial when projects seek to develop a close relationship with communities. Participants in one focus group described a previous project in which a writer collected the life stories of community members. They were still angry that they were unable to get the resulting play performed in their communities because the writer had copyright over what they saw as their stories

Again, many cultural workers find this approach difficult – even those involved in community arts can be heard talking about 'my community-engaged practice. The point is that the outputs and processes are developed in response to participants and this dialogue continues throughout. This is how most of the projects in this study became relevant and accessible.

One project lead emphasised the importance of line managers providing support and direction to project and creative leads to ensure that the project delivery stays aligned to people-centred values and community-focused practice.

Two of the project leads described the potential for tension between this kind of democratic approach and cultural excellence. All the creative leads were concerned in helping participants achieve their full potential in cultural terms but most also focused on wider objectives than cultural excellence and so perceived the projects' excellence to be invested in the achievement of those broader goals.

All the creative leads and project leads sought to empower participants. Several, however, made a careful distinction that they felt ensured sustained empowerment. As one put it, 'We are not taking people on a journey. We are providing the motivational space for people to go on a journey themselves.'

Engaging communities

The projects in this study could not achieve their broader objectives without building trust with communities. Participants in the focus groups talked about the importance of finding the right space in which to bring people together and engender trust. Several felt that libraries were neutral spaces accessible to everyone.

One ongoing project in this study finds it difficult to extend its reach throughout its community of interest because it does not have the communications infrastructure to engage them proactively. Other projects are able to achieve this by working closely with internal or external partners, for example Dublin City Gallery, the Hugh Lane and the People's College.

Other important factors for successful community engagement are:

- Engaging communities at the earliest opportunity
- Involving communities in decision making
- Effective communication and continued dialogue

- Early involvement of Dublin City Council sections with in-depth knowledge of the area, existing relationships in the community and an understanding of specific sections of the community. For the projects in this study with a geographic focus, the Area Community Development teams and Social Inclusion section were particularly important. Dublin City Council's Sports Officers and coaches also had strong relationships with their local communities. Where projects focused on communities of interest, they formed partnerships with external organisations that had those strong relationships
- Ensuring the project is visible within the relevant communities, not just to participants

Strategic approach

Achieving outcomes that contribute to Dublin City Council's overarching goals rather than delivering outputs takes time. These goals can only be achieved through sustained relationships with city residents. As one project lead put it, 'It's not about a single project or about a single issue'. This means that it is essential that projects take place within a strategic context and, in projects with a geographic focus, it is usually the Area Office that is guardian of that strategy.

A strategic context which makes it clear how projects can contribute to overarching goals makes it more likely that the projects' impacts will be evaluated, not just its outputs.

Ensuring projects have a legacy is therefore even more important. The most impactful projects in this study had developed internal and external partnerships that were able to sustain relationships with communities when the project came to an end. Planning what participants could do as their next step avoids feelings of abandonment. The projects in this study, however, highlight that this legacy can be impeded by:

- Annual budgeting which means sections can't commit resources in the long term
- Changes in section priorities e.g. when managers change
- Difficulties in securing interdepartmental resourcing of projects
- Lack of staff resources in some sections

The ultimate goal is reaching people who are not already connected to their community. The projects that achieved this had to invest considerable amounts of staff time. Some of the project leads said that people need to trust you before they will persuade others to participate. Often the culmination of the project is highly visible and this creates new connections. Unless there is a legacy for the project, these new connections don't get an opportunity to engage.

Support for this collaborative and community-focused way of working from Dublin City Council's senior management seemed particularly important in developing this strategic context.

Working in partnership

Many of the projects in this study have developed complex networks of internal and external partners. Most interviewees talked about the way these partnerships enabled the project to have better outcomes. In all projects, partners committed staff time and in a few cases, partners funded the project collaboratively.

These often come about because of the project or creative lead's previous jobs in other Dublin City Council sections and external organisations. This enables them to understand their partners' goals and where they might overlap with their own and to see the project from their point of view. Other project leads and creative leads systematically initiated informal conversations beyond their own sections, listening rather than seeking to inform in order to find potential overlaps between their goals and the project.

Relationships in one project often become useful and productive for other projects. This experience also gives them an understanding of other models and ways of working which can be applied to projects.

Key factors in successful partnerships within this study are:

- Engaging partners in the project from the beginning
- The development of a shared understanding of the community and its needs
- Larger projects found a cross-sector steering group including community participants and external stakeholders to be useful
- Respect and trust between partners
- Project 'owner' being open to input from partners
- Partners being willing to share the credit
- Allowing room for partners to do their job
- Quality of leadership, particularly sustained and effective communication with partners, low key conflict resolution when necessary, providing stability and calm when the project is under pressure.

Conclusion

Projects with cultural engagement as their focus can contribute towards the achievement of Dublin City Council's overarching goals. Most of the projects in this study contributed to multiple goals.

The projects resulted in shifts in attitude and behaviour change.

They were particularly effective in:

- stimulating active citizenship
- promoting social inclusion
- enhancing liveability
- developing and sustaining complex stakeholder partnerships.

Key factors for success:

- Projects are rooted in an in-depth understanding of the needs and concerns of each specific community based on listening and responding
- They clearly define the desired outcomes from the start but keep outputs and processes flexible so they can respond to community needs and concerns
- They empower participants by sharing ownership of the project
- They are developed and delivered in partnership and within a strategic context that ensures a legacy.

Appendix

Interviewees

Alight!

Muirne Bloomer, choreographer and dancer

Iseult Byrne, CEO, Dublin City Council Culture Company

Cleo Fagan, Project Manager, Dublin City Council Culture Company

Declan Hayden, Community Development Manager, South East Area, Dublin City Council at the time of the project

Change for Life

Darren Taaffe, Citywide Sport Officer, Dublin City Council

Conserve Your Period Home

Charles Duggan, Heritage Officer, Dublin City Council

Susan Roundtree, conservation architect

Creative Writing Programme

Declan Burke, Writer-in-Residence

Anne-Marie Kelly, Divisional Librarian and then project manager of the Creative Writing Programme, Dublin City Council

Alison Lyons, Divisional Librarian and then Director Dublin UNESCO City of Literature, Dublin City Council

Eat the Streets

Sabrina Dekker, Climate Action Co-ordinator, Dublin City Council

Historian in Residence: Weaving in the Liberties

Tara Doyle, Senior Librarian and project manager Historian-in-Residence programme, Dublin City Council

Cathy Scuffil, Historian in Residence, South Central Area and South East Area

Hotter than July

Aoife Concannon, Marketing Director and Creative Producer, Improvised Music Company

Tom Doyle, Events Liaison - Acting Senior Staff Officer, Events Section, Dublin City Council

People's College Lecture Series

Tony Black, Class Rep, People's College

Dearbhla Coyle, People's College

Jessica O'Donnell, Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane

St Thomas' Abbey

Dr Ruth Johnson, City Archaeologist, Dublin City Council

Bruce Phillips, Area Manager, South Central Area, Dublin City Council

Story on Your Door

Mary Noonan, Community Development Manager, South Central Area, Dublin City Council

Kelly Hickey, Assistant Arts Officer, Dublin City Council