

WOR CULTURE: THE FUTURE OF WORK

Welcome to this reflection of our third *Wor Culture* event which focused on **The Future of Work**. Here, we'll give the key points from our presentations, reflect some of the discussions, provide some (hopefully) useful links and resources, and let you know what's happening next.

For those of you who couldn't be with us for our zoom gathering, further information on what *Wor Culture* is about can be found at the end of this document. Please get in touch if you'd like to contribute, have any suggestions, or would like to share any links or resources. We look forward to welcoming you to one of our events.

The #WorCulture team,

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PRESENTATIONS

Our event was kicked off with two presentations: firstly **Mark Robinson, Founder of Thinking Practice** on Culture Change; and then **Dr Harry Weeks from Newcastle University**, on the aesthetics of labour post-lockdown and the continuity of what's beneath the surface.

[If you click on the Presentation caption it will take you to You Tube where you can view presentations with or without subtitles]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WN7MOcZdSyQ&t=43s>

CHAT

During the event the chat function was used to allow people to share comments and ask questions. We've grouped some key points of discussion into the headings below:

CULTURE CHANGE AND VALUE:

Kate Craddock :I wanted to point to Gillie Kleiman's recent work, especially around encouraging cultural organisations to think about how they can approach the redistribution of power and earnings. <https://www.gilliekleiman.com/blog/>

Kate Craddock : It would be great to hear a little more from you Mark about your comment on the role of Trustees/boards in how cultural organisations should/could be supporting those organisations to better support their freelancers. (..Beyond the Freelance Task Force). I am not sure we have seen much leadership in this area - any examples to point to?

Mark Robinson : Thanks Kate. I think it's a number things - first deal with freelance contracts well. Open up training to 'your' freelancers (I think Sage may do this?), create opportunities for that part of your workforce as well as PAYE staff. ARC is - as in much else - a good example I think.

Charlie Dancer : Brilliant point about the Value of Culture and Value of the Arts to communities and society Mark. I worked on a piece of research towards the beginning of last year on Challenges for Musicians in the North of England and some of the most telling issues for

musicians in what we categorised as 'lesser developed urban areas' were the general perception of careers in music being seen as unfeasible and unobtainable, particularly for those from lower economic households.

Cinzia Hardy : I was at a very interesting discussion with David Jubb recently, where we talked about how there will need to be a shift to the role of building based arts organisations' artistic directors - shifting the model and skill set to leader as facilitator - facilitator of supporting emerging artists/creatives and working more and more with freelance creatives as well as supporting change that is already happening on a local level with surrounding communities. 'Strike a Light' theatre company in Devon currently have a very interesting project going called 'Let Artists be Artists'.

Mark Robinson : I'd agree with that Cinzia: chimes with various strands of work brought together here if useful <http://www.thinkingpractice.co.uk/multiplying-leadership-in-a-time-of-release/>

POLICY, LOBBYING & WHAT NEXT?

Mel Whewell : Mark, you talked about policy interventions. To many in the cultural sector this too is a very mysterious world. "Lobbyist" as a job for example. How do you influence policy and at what level? local authority? National Government?

Mark Robinson : Thanks Mel. By and large the arts have not gone down the lobbyist route - some parts are structurally forbidden these days. (Arts councils now for instance.) Lobbying gets done in the networks at the level of national museums etc... I think it's helpful to think about 'policy' as operating at all levels - every organisation has its policies, some written, some unwritten - individuals too I guess. Each is a potential lever, as well as an expression of values. So I'd say go for both 'ends' - the person/org in the mirror and national government and LAs.

Leila D'Aronville : Mel - I think there is something there around the 'What Next?' Movement which is led by Patricia Stead and Alan Butland in Newcastle and also Nick Malyan in Durham and Laura Brewis in Sunderland. This is part of a national network. Through Tyne Wear Creative Freelancers I am linking in with this network and some others. It isn't necessarily lobbying in it's purest form, but it means that regional representatives and collectives have had voices in conversations with DCMS, the House of Lords, Keir Starmer etc...

Alan Butland, Leila D'Aronville & Kate Craddock : NE Culture Partnership provide a uniting organisation/movement <http://www.case4culture.org.uk/necp/>

Patricia Stead : Thanks Leila for mentioning 'What Next?' (WN?) The central coordinators for WN? Have had a lot of input to DCMS and other Govt departments during the pandemic. It is now a huge network and a movement other than an "organisation". It connects a lot of people around the country and has clout to get some very high profile speakers. It is a very useful network to be part of when there are big issues to contribute to. The Comprehensive Spending Review will be the next one. WN? NewcastleGateshead, Sunderland and Durham provide the opportunity for people across the cultural spectrum to have a say and we have submitted contributions to national consultation in the past. WN?NG has been quiet for a while but will be seeking contributions for national consultations again in the future.

Mark Robinson : There are some themes from/for before after and during covid in this blog <http://www.thinkingpractice.co.uk/dream-a-little-before-you-think-19-mundane-dreams-about-cultural-policy/>

BREAKOUT ROOMS

After the presentations we split into Breakout Rooms (smaller discussion groups) themed on:

- Cultural Ecologies
- Diversity
- Geographic challenges and issues of scale
- Supporting talent, skills and the workforce

Here's a summary of the key points from those groups

Cultural Ecologies

- What is the definition of a **cultural economy**?
- **Do artists think about themselves too much**, are we just part of a wider employment sector?
- The City Council's defining aim, regardless of which sector they may work in is to **find good work for people**
- There was a call for support and an **acknowledgement for freelancers** with portfolio careers.
- Discussion around people getting together using tech, but also there was a reminder that some artists, makers and communities still don't **access to the tech** that they need.
- Interesting discussion about **portfolio careers**, is it actually a good thing or something that's forced upon us? Where is the choice in this notion of portfolio careers? Is it something that is actually quite damaging for some younger people involved in the arts?
- **Visibility of artists** is difficult, how do you hang on to your identity?
- A lot of what the sector does is invisible but it's a really **important part of society and the wider economy**
- **The importance of passion** within what we do and within the boards of various organisations
- How a **freelancer** is going to be supported in post-covid situation?

Diversity

- Cuts are going to come but **where is it that cuts are going to be made and how does that relate to inequality?** Organisations will tend to retreat to their core functions. e.g. the museum and gallery sector will cluster around exhibitions & programming and potentially cut education programming. The problem is education and outreach programming is where progress has been made in terms of the question of diversity and inequality
- The issue is the problems of inequality and diversity are so structural that **we need structural change**, we need change coming from leadership, and we potentially need a change in leadership
- An issue is the **tendency for leaders to not necessarily see themselves as part of the problem**, even when they are, everyone sees themselves as the exception.
- Within the cultural sector **working together** is the best way forward
- Highlighted the narratives around **the term BAME used to group such a large population of people and how that can be problematic**
- Discussed fairness around **intersectionality** and how that also comes in to play when talking about diversity, and how the intersectionality around women's issues, and ethnicities, and social issues also come in to play.

- **Tackling issues around disadvantaged groups within a community tends to help the whole society.** So as culture organisation's work in that way it tends to support everyone.
- Highlighting **what funding bodies think of arts and culture** and how certain communities that are producing art and cultures may not fit within these parameters an arts council bid
- New movement towards hiring black, minority and diverse artists within organisations that hadn't done that before and how that can be seen as a **tokenism** and how we now have the platform to challenge those organisations by supporting the artists that they are hiring and supporting the wording that they're using.
- Discussion around **tackling unconscious bias** and how to communicate that when tackling these biases that it is not disadvantaging people that might have had the support from those organizations before.
- There is hope that the Black Lives Matter movement and the changes of the young people of today are **challenging our communities and organizations**, and how that's really helpful as artists.

Geographic challenges and issues of scale

- **How does the North East retain a unique identity** in relation to the greater North? Danger of losing out to larger metropolitan areas, and for the North East to get displaced (by the North West)
- **Main geographical challenge of the North East is the spread of the area** - from Northumberland/Berwick to Teesside, and it being difficult to build and maintain relationships across this broad area
- **The North East also projects multiple different images/versions of itself** -we are telling very different stories across cultural and heritage sectors, and not all projecting the same image to the rest of UK (great difference between the rural narratives of Northumberland and the more gritty North East image of urban areas)
- **The lack of a development agency** or marketing body to support a unified voice is prevalent - e.g. the historic One North East with the now defunct slogan 'Passionate about the North East'
- How can we **build an individual identity** and promote ourselves as the North East?
- The geographical barriers around our relationship/proximity to London are not going to change (although arguably the current switch to online working has made this more of an even playing field than ever before) but we can **look at other examples with same geographical issues who are doing this better. - e.g. Hull.**
- Problems and issues of scale across large organisations (who predominantly take up large proportion of available resource) and smaller orgs/independent artists being a real issue **in the North East where we still live with legacy of investment in buildings not artists**
- Thinking about geography on a hyperlocal level also - **who is best positioned to be working in community settings?** The smaller independent artists and orgs who are embedded? Or the 'outreach/education' departments of larger organisations (who now 'suck up' all the engagement work)?
- The pressure and **desire to retain graduates in the region to develop the sector** remains, but opportunities are decreasing that will keep them here
- **How can other sectors who have more national and international networks link better with the regional cultural sector?** e.g. larger environmental organisations with creative organisations?

Supporting talent, skills and the workforce

What are the challenges and opportunities?

- STEM v SHAPE – are constantly pitted against each other. It is time that they actually supported each other. **All people need the humanities side to support the technical side** and the arguments should be made in policy terms
- **Voice of freelancers has now been heard in both monetary and intrinsic value of that workforce.** Has created a chance for bottom up communication as opposed to top down.
- There is a **greater willingness to listen** to these arguments
- It is now a **'policy refresh' moment** – a chance to move around and re-design
- **How do we create a proper supply chain?** (suggested solution is to give the money to the artists rather than the buildings)
- **For Freelance musicians the challenges and opportunities are different around the North.** Some aspects of the work have become more accessible as work is done online however other things have not. The levels of investment and infrastructure varies in the north, some organisations and freelancers were able to put on virtual performances during covid-19 whilst others were not. Freelancers who work on putting on events have lost a large proportion of their income.
- **Access to digital upskilling** has become widely available due to the large shift to working from home. However lots of people don't know where to access these opportunities
- **Skills gap analysis has been largely carried out before Covid-19** and does not take into consideration the effects it has places on different industries.

What are the skills gaps?

- Perhaps there needs to be a **dedicated/accredited drama skills programme** offer that gives weight to the topic
- In NU Music School, **developing people skills** are also offered as part of the programme
- Developing **resilience/co-creation** (how we come out of this)
- **Organisational management skills, performance management/HR related courses** (feedback from Mark's research)
- **Governance training for Boards** – may need sector specific approach – some Community funders already provide this
- **Awareness of what other groups are doing**

What is the role of education providers?

- **Creative topics are being undervalued.** Need to champion these particularly in schools. Make sure they are not marginalised. FE and HE have a role in this
- **Identifying the gaps**
- **Advice to schools is missing**
- **Apprenticeships** – how we can connect areas in need

Workforce Development

- Working online has gave practitioners a **global reach**

- Instead of focusing on grants where does money reside, for example china – however our workforce do not have **language skills** to be able to make connections for investment. Schools are not preparing children for a global economy.
- Suggested that ‘artist’ should allow to be artists and **those who are in facilitating roles should be accessing courses to upskill in order to support the creative process** and successfully deliver projects. However artists might also want to partake in upskilling.
- Concerns have been raised about the **future talent development** amongst school pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

RESOURCES/READS/SECTOR NEWS

This is not a comprehensive list (and many sources will have been updated or have become outdated by the time you read this). It is what we've come across, what people have been reading recently, and resources suggested by yourselves.

Skills, talent and diversity in the creative industries

https://www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk/media/549033/pec-evidence-synthesis-scoping_work-foundation-final-1-.pdf

Arts Council - Livelihoods Visual Artists Report

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/livelihoods-visual-artists-report>

To higher-earners in the arts <https://www.gilliekleiman.com/blog/>

Dream a Little Before You Think - 19 Mundane Dreams About Cultural Policy

<http://www.thinkingpractice.co.uk/dream-a-little-before-you-think-19-mundane-dreams-about-cultural-policy/>

Multiplying Leadership in a Time of Release <http://www.thinkingpractice.co.uk/multiplying-leadership-in-a-time-of-release/>

Juggling work, home and family in the gig economy <https://geoworklives.com/>

Panic! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries

<https://createlondon.org/event/panic-paper/>

Assembly: A Forum for Artists in Precarious Labour

<https://thenewbridgeproject.com/events/assembly-forum-artists-precarious-labour/>

Culture Is Bad For You: Inequality in the Cultural and Creative Industries

<https://blackwells.co.uk/bookshop/product/Culture-Is-Bad-for-You-by-Orian-Brook-author-Dave-O'Brien-author-Mark-Taylor-author/9781526144164>

North East Culture Partnership <http://www.case4culture.org.uk/necp/>

If you have any other resources you would like to add to this list please email

bob.allan@ncl.ac.uk

Finishing Notes - in case you are wondering...What is Wor Culture?

Wor Culture is a forum for discussing issues relating to the culture and creative sectors in the North East, and contribute to shaping its future. The gathering is facilitated by Newcastle University but we strongly encourage you to propose topics for discussion, join in the debate, or offer to lead a session.

At the moment, due to COVID19, this is an online gathering using Zoom. We will be looking at alternative formats in due course.

How is the programme put together?

The sessions focus on topics suggested by you. You can also suggest speakers (or offer to do a presentation or provocation) and/or host a session (we'll support you!). All suggestions to: bob.allan@ncl.ac.uk

What is the format of the event?

Normally the event follows a format where we have a series of short presentations (c. 10 minutes) to help establish the context for the discussion. This is followed by a Q&A. We then have a series of breakout groups each focused on a different theme or topic. You choose which one you want to join beforehand. Breakout groups are smaller, focused discussion groups. After this each group feeds back into a general discussion.

There is a function in Zoom called the 'Chat' function which is like texting or messaging. We use this to gather questions and comments. Participants can also use it to contribute or send a private message to the host if they do not want to speak using their video.

What is expected of me?

We warmly welcome everyone who would like to come along to the event. How you participate is entirely up to you.

At the beginning of the event we ask everyone to mute their microphones and turn off their video to try to avoid any problems with background noise and videos crashing. You can listen, keeping your video and microphone off; you can contribute to the discussion via the chat function; you can contribute by turning on your video and asking a question; you can have your video on in the breakout rooms or not; and you can decide whether you want to come along to the coffee social. **We would love to hear your voice and have your thoughts** but there is absolutely no pressure to contribute.

What if I can't join in or come along to the Zoom gatherings?

We are very aware that digital gatherings are not accessible for everyone for many reasons. We are working to make our sessions as accessible as possible (if you have any ideas or suggestions let us know) but we are still conscious that they still will not be accessible to everyone. If you would like to contribute to any of the sessions but cannot attend the zoom gathering, we'd be happy to talk to you beforehand by whatever means is best for you, you could contribute in writing or by submitting a short video, and we can feedback to you after the event. Or, if you have any other ideas, do let us know.

What happens after the event?

After each event we will produce a reflection of the event including information from the presentations, insights and questions drawn from the conversation on 'chat', information from the breakout room discussions, and any useful resources participants might have shared or we've discovered that are relevant to discussions. This might take a little time as we're a small team but bear with us! We will then circulate this to participants, regional networks, colleagues in local authorities etc. so they can see what your thinking is.

We will also look at the information and issues raised and, where possible, feed these into future sessions.

Want to be kept in the loop?

For information on future sessions you can sign up [here](#)