# WOR CULTURE: REWRITING THE RURAL NARRATIVE

Welcome to this reflection of our fifth *Wor Culture* event which focused on **Rewriting the Rural Narrative**. 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 included presentations from **Dr Frances Rowe (Research Associate, Centre for Rural Economy Newcastle University)** and **Kiz Crosbie (Artistic Director CEO, Mortal Fools)**
[If you click on the Presentation menu there is an option to view with subtitles]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRf8d7TGpKU

## Chat

During the event the chat function was used to allow people to share comments and ask questions. One area discussed was Environmental Sustainability with attendees also using the chat function to share their own work and recommendations:

## Environmental Sustainability

**Niki Black :** The big issue we haven't addressed here is environmental sustainability - the allure of the rural being very much entwined with an idealised notion of the rural. How do we as artists in the rural engage with issues related to climate change, sustainability etc and do we approach this differently because of where we are based?
**Louise Marchal :** I think public transport (the lack of) is key to this - sustainability and access.
**Vee Pollock :** Thanks Niki - we have an event on environment and sustainability coming up so hopefully we can pick that up
**Mark Adamson :** Hi All - not a full answer to rural sustainability, but the NE Local Enterprise Partnership have support and funding for rural energy for communities e.g. micro-generation,

solar PV, heat pumps etc - maybe useful for venues - more info :
https://www.northeastlep.co.uk/funding/funding-applications

**Dave Pritchard :** @Niki - That's one of the key areas of "misperception" that we didn't quite get round to in the breakout group, ie understandings of how the rural environment actually functions, its ecological/hydrological etc interdependencies, cycles, scales (spatial & temporal) over which change happens, etc, where food comes from, how water behaves, and the part this all plays in the wider cultural life of the nation (urban and rural).

**Ros Rigby :** Re climate change and how to get invovled- take a look at https://www.neecco.org.uk- the North East England Climate Coalition launched by VONNE (Voluntary Organisations Network North East) bringing together a wide range of organisations to work together.

**Shane Finan :** On a positive side that hasn't really been mentioned, but that connects to this: My experience of rural communities is that, as an artist, when you ask for something (like electrical power) people bend over backwards to find a way to provide it. So limitations are sometimes also opportunities.

# Shared links of attendee projects and recommendations

**Niki Black :** Hi. I'm Niki Black, research associate, artist, beekeeper. Currently working on Living Deltas Global Challenges hub at NU researching contemporary and heritage art and culture in river deltas/impact on sustainable lives and combating climate change. (When not bee keeping or painting). https://www.ncl.ac.uk/globalchallenges/water/living-deltas/

**Rachel Pattinson :** Hello everyone, I'm Rachel Pattinson. I manage digital research and social innovation programmes in Open Lab, in the School of Computing. And I'm a trustee and director of Mortal Fools, so I'm looking forward to the discussions today! https://openlab.ncl.ac.uk/

**Fran Rowe** : Hello everyone - I'm Fran Rowe Research associate at the Centre for Rural Economy.  Interested in arts and culture in rural development including creative practices. https://www.ncl.ac.uk/cre/

**Ros Rigby :** Hi. I am Ros Rigby, freelance consultant and producer and also Board members of various organisations in the region including the Land of Oak & Iron in the Derwent Valley, which sparked my interest in this session. https://loit.org.uk/

**Yemisi Turner-Blake (he/him) :** Hello everyone, I'm Yemisi Turner-Blake (he/him). I'm a Grants Manager in the Arts Access and Participation Team at Paul Hamlyn Foundation. https://www.phf.org.uk/our-work-in-the-uk/arts-access-participation/

**Kypros Kyprianou :** Hello, Kyp here. Artist and researcher. Doing a practice-led PhD at Newcastle University. Have worked in rural settings both in the Northumberland at ACA and currently on a project on the rural/green line/ zone that splits Cyprus. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kypros_Kyprianou2

**Mark Adamson :** Morning everyone - Mark Adamson, Project Director for Creative Fuse North East. http://www.creativefusene.org.uk/

**Kiz Crosbie (she/her)** : Hi everyone, I'm Kiz, Artistic Director and CEO of Mortal Fools. It's great to be with you here today. https://www.mortalfools.org.uk/

**Andrea Perrett - November Club :** I'm Andrea Perrett, (she/her) Business and Operations Director at November Club in Morpeth.  We deliver theatre in rural Northumberland. https://www.novemberclub.org.uk/

**Menelaos Gkartzios :** Hi friends and colleagues, I am Menelaos, Reader also at the Centre for Rural Economy and with a research interest strand on creative arts practice and rural studies. https://www.ncl.ac.uk/nes/staff/profile/menelaosgkartzios.html#background

**Shane Finan :** Shane Finan, artist, Ireland. Working in collaboration with Kielderhead Wildwood Project and Visual Arts in Rural Communities (VARC) in the northeast. Also working with FIELD research project on agriculture & disease. Interested in building futures, forests and rhizomatic associations. Maybe part-fungus. https://www.shanefinanart.org/

**Hannah Wilkin :** Hi I'm Hannah :) I'm a playwright and first year Creative Practice PhD student specialising in playwriting. I'm originally from Oswaldtwistle (a tiny town in East Lancashire near Accrington and Blackburn), I like to set my writing here and am passionate about seeing all places and communities explored on stage.

**Melanie Shee :** Hello I am Melanie Shee from Creative & Cultural Skills, UK wide sector skills organisation and ACE support organisation. Based in Sunderland and work across the region. https://CCSkills.org.uk  For information we are leading on Kickstart for the cultural sector and should know if our bid to DWP has been successful in a few weeks so if any cultural organisation would like to offer a kickstart placement or want to know more please email me melanie.shee@cckills.org.uk

Re freelancers - this may be of interest https://www.ccskills.org.uk/articles/working-with-the-self-employed-a-best-practice-guide-for-businesses - very much focusing on the legalities of contracting

One other article re freelancer

https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/article/supporting-freelancers-through-crisis-and-beyond

**Jo Robinson** : Hello everyone - I'm Jo Robinson, Professor of Drama and Performance at the University of Nottingham with an interest in theatrical representations of the rural and in the practices of rural touring theatre. I'm joining Newcastle University in February as Head of the School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/English/People/joanna.robinson

**Dave Pritchard :** Hi folks - Dave Pritchard here, Chair of Ramsar Culture Network, and Chair of Arts & Environment Network. https://www.ramsar.org/news/ramsar-culture-network-update https://www.ciwem.org/networks/arts-and-the-environment

**Olivia Cameron -** Performance Coordinator for ICMuS, within School of Arts & Cultures at Newcastle University, and self-employed musician. https://www.ncl.ac.uk/sacs/music/

**David De La Haye :** David de la Haye - Sound Artist and Technician (SACS, Newcastle Uni). Have worked/toured with rural touring schemes and commissions nationally. Currently working on NICAP funded creative practice. Interested in islands particularly. WORK LINK: An audio diary from local environments, a recording for each day of the month From a field-recording perspective, quieter rural spaces are highly sought after, and diminishing:  https://daviddelahaye.co.uk/30-days-wild/

**Mel Whewell :** #WeTheRural still open for contributions on Twitter. Please join us. https://twitter.com/search?q=%23wetherural&src=typeahead_click&f=live

**Kate Craddock :** Hi everyone - Kate Craddock here. I'm a Research Associate at Newcastle University in the School of English, and Festival Director of GIFT: Gateshead International Festival of Theatre.  One of the ongoing projects we are working on for GIFT is an international collaboration with Canadian artists Mia and Eric and 2 festivals in Norway and Germany - exploring 3 distinct woodland areas called '3 Woods'. It might be of interest to participants here. Do have a look at the website and get involved via a visit to Chopwell Woods if you can.  https://www.3-woods.com Great to be here.

**Inge Hill :** Hello everyone, Inge Hill here, passionate creative cultural industry researcher, one focus recently was artisan entrepreneurs; I work at the Royal Agricultural University School of Business and Entrepreneurship, and amongst many things a Fellow of the RSA (Royal Agricultural University). https://www.rau.ac.uk/school-business-and-entrepreneurship

**Shahda Khan :** Hi everyone, Im Shahda Khan, Director of Borderlands which is one of ACE's Creative People and Places projects. I'm based in Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland. https://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/project/borderlands

**Rachel Horton :** Hi everyone! Thank you for having me. I'm The Culture Vulture (@theculturevulturene on social) and also marketing/audience development for Mortal Fools. https://www.facebook.com/TheCultureVultureNE/

**Kyra Wallace :** Hello everyone, I am a lecturer and photographer with a special interest in the natural world. some of my work is on https://kyrawallace.com

**Helen Pailing :** Hi! Helen Pailing from Visual Arts in Rural Communities (VARC) based in rural Northumberland, offering opportunities for artists. Currently running a multi-partner programme 'ENTWINED: Rural. Land. Lives. Art'. https://varc.org.uk/

**Vee Pollock :** As @MelWhewell has said #WeTheRural is still open for contributions so check out the hashtag and get in touch if you'd like to get involved - it has been a fantastic showcase of rural work and rural research regionally, nationally and internationally

**Mel Whewell :** https://www.ncl.ac.uk/creativearts/news/item/ruralresearchcluster.html More here

**Vee Pollock :** Also check this out - Berwick Visual Arts & our Institute for Creative Arts Practice Artist in Residence, Joanne Coates: http://www.berwickvisualarts.co.uk/artists/23/joanne-coates-january-october-2020

**Vee Pollock :** The refresh of the Arts Council rural data and evidence review can be accessed here: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/community-and-place/rural-evidence-and-data-review#section-1

**Louise Marchal :** Hi everyone, I'm Louise Marchal and I'm a visual artist /researcher living and working in a hamlet of less than 30 people, 5 miles from the nearest town but I'm also doing a part-time practice-based PhD at the University of Leeds. (I grew up round here). https://ahc.leeds.ac.uk/fine-art/pgr/2184/louise-marchal

**Alan Smith :** https://www.acart.org.uk/blog & https://www.facebook.com/groups/ACACallCentre

**Shaun Allan :** Hi Shaun Allan here from Vector76, we're a 12 year old VR company that have worked with arts and culture partners over the past 10 years including Culture Lab, Tyneside Cinema, Evolution Festival, Flow~ and NGI. We helped win the Great Exhibition of the North with VR and brought British Airways "FLY" immersive experience from Saatchi Gallery London to Proto in Gateshead. We also joined the StageWorlds initiative in Shanghai to help advise on the use of VR and AR for actor training and 360 streaming shows into rural China. Happy to help with any immersive tech innovation you maybe looking at using in future. https://vector76.co/

**Steve Kendall :** Hi Everyone, I am Steve Kendall a poet and researcher working to understand the impact of the Morden Tower reading series on poetry in the North East and keen to learn how to locate my enquiry in the rural as well as the urban.

**Jane Gibson :** Jane Gibson here, heritage coordinator at Durham WHS, but also a Trustee of The Hearth, Horsley, an arts centre of artists studios and performance space (and an ace café!), bringing arts and culture to our communities https://www.durhamworldheritagesite.com/ & https://www.thehearth.co.uk/

**Yvonne Conchie :** Hi folks, I'm Yvonne Conchie, a freelancer based in Allendale in the North Pennines. I work with communities to help them become more resilient by making the best of their wildlife, history and landscapes.

https://www.conchie.co
Big projects at the moment involve strategic repurposing of historic church buildings,
http://inspirednortheast.org.uk/rural-churches-for-everyone
and awaiting a decision next week on a Green Recovery Challenge Fund submission.
https://sustainableallenvalleys.wordpress.com/2020/10/07/wild-allen-dales-green-recovery-challenge-fund-october-2020/
**Linda France :** A recent collective project going beyond rural urban binary I initiated:
https://durhambookfestival.com/programme/event/murmuration-a-collective-poem-for-our-times/
**Rachel Pattinson :** Here are some resources we discussed in our breakout room:
https://www.culturenorthumberland.co.uk/
https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/

# BREAKOUT ROOMS

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

- How do we better support rural creative communities
- How do we change perceptions of the rural
- What are the challenges and opportunities of working in rural contexts

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

# How do we better support rural creative communities?

- Financial support: Northumberland County Council has fast tracked payments to arts organisations in response to COVID-19 and made small grants available
- PR / Comms / Collaboration support is also needed: pressures on rural arts officers, roles which have been impacted by local government cuts, mean it's challenging to provide one to one support.
- Culture Northumberland: https://www.culturenorthumberland.co.uk/ was launched during COVID-19 to bring opportunities and events together in one place
- Training support: we identified some training gaps, around the anti-racism agenda, and around making applications for funding and work
- Freelance artists need support to make good applications – or maybe we need to change the opaque application processes
- Digital access: the North East has regional challenges around digital access, and we discussed schemes that are trying to provide hardware. Organisations like the Good Things Foundation https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/ are doing good work around digital inclusion.
- We finished our discussion by reflecting that some of these areas for support go beyond rural arts and culture, but all play a role and in the rural context, there are additional challenges around geographical and digital connectivity.
- Building groups and communication - issue of distance and access

the challenge of brining rural communities together from across wide(r) distances

potential lack of transport and logistics, a factor sometimes not considered sufficiently by funders;
digital platforms are helping now (as a COVID response), but this is at the expense of in-person engagement and working practices;
getting young people to rural venues is a particular issue (e.g. the Creative Careers Programme via Creative & Cultural Skills where schools were unable to support owing to lack of access/transport) .

- Post-COVID - collaboration and new partnerships are a greater challenge owing to the loss of face-to-face contact where building trust is typically more natural.
- Need to develop strategy in smaller rural firms - many rural firms are innovative, by in rapidly changing and disruptive/uncertain times, developing foresight and future scanning capabilities will be important - developing capacity to be agile and responsive to 'what might be coming round the corner'.
- Need to consider the health and wellbeing benefits of face-to-face engagement and working - current pandemic may impact on this.
- Issue of digital exclusion (access to technologies, lack of skills and confidence, poor or inadequate connectivity) - this will impact on levels of inclusion and engagement, loss of opportunities, etc
- Need to profile the rural economy at a national level and through relevant platforms - relative to the predominance of the 'urban narrative', rural visibility and case studies is marginalised and 'not seen'.

Visibility can be increased via e.g. increasing current appetite for staycation holidays, buying local programmes, urban flight/out-of-urban housing interest etc

- Support for local produce/producers/creators - via retail and venues
- Development of a freelancers forum for rural creatives/cultural practitioners - will share commonalities with urban-focused networks, but there will be specific issues and challenges that should be shared

Potential to link to relevant rural aligned venues and/or platforms
Support rural collaboration

- Engage young people and power of social media comms
- Consider what rural specifics are needed to fine tune business / practitioner support - take account of and consider particular rural issues.

## How do we change perceptions of the rural?

Who's perception is it we're trying to change? Who is this person or organisation, the Arts Council is important in this but we don't want to be always seeking external endorsements for what we do, we need to be championing what we're doing.

- It's also important to think globally, even in an isolated position digital technology means we are globally connected.
- It's important to celebrate the diversity of the rural that it isn't just this homogenous greenness outside of the city.

- Covid has meant some people have been given a chance to rediscover who they are as practitioners
- How do we use situations like this as a way of lobbying and communicating these ideas to the perceived centres of power, or who hold the purse strings or is this is actually setting up a false sense of tension, where there isn't actually any?
- #WeTheRural slow conference on Twitter is really interesting way of beginning to think about some of these perceptions of the rural

# What are the challenges and opportunities of working in rural contexts?

- Most of our fairly brief discussion focused on ways of "Taking it local" – there was a view that better understanding and recognition was needed for 'hyper-local' approaches and the essential role this plays in rural distinctiveness – both in terms of cultural production and engagement but also, and increasingly importantly, the sustainability of local economies and communities (as places to work and live, as well as visit). This was seen as both an Opportunity and a Challenge!

- Challenges:

  - Access – public transport not extensive enough to reach rural areas, or on a schedule which is useful
  - Small audiences make cost effective events an issue
  - Suitable venues are scarce
  - As things are done on a smaller budget there's a perception that its less professional
  - The rural can be seen by some as a 'hostile place' – e.g. it may not be so welcoming to refugees or asylum seekers
  - Artists are a cultural monitory in rural places and so there is sense you need to constantly justify yourself
  - Lonely
  - Connectivity is an issue – broadband is patchy
  - Embedding yourself in the local community is hard – example of artist showing their film in local co-op just to find ways of connecting with locals
  - Access to power – for equipment for events is often a problem
  - Disproportionate investment in cities vs rural – Arts Council looking at 'inclusivity' in next 10 year strategy
  - Evaluation always relies on audience numbers - potential for trust based evaluation too? (has happened with funding models)
  - Also some views raised around increasing competition for funding - seen as especially difficult for smaller voluntary groups who have less resource to develop strong proposals than larger orgs that may be going for the same funding calls.
  - Physical distance and access to cultural offer (for rural communities) was a continuing issue (Taking it local = a positive solution). Digital can only be part of the solution, opportunity for physical / social access is also essential.
  - Partnerships – how to develop, open up routes for better engagement with (rural) local authorities was raised as an issue – noted presence of Northumberland in this event, but not Co. Durham for example.

- Opportunities:

Small audiences enable deeper/personable interaction/feedback
Digital downloads make it cheaper to run events – less costs – and increase accessibility as more can access these
Sometimes the challenges can inspire creative ways to engage with local audiences (eg showing a film in a co-op shop)
Less travel nationally means less impact on environment

# 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.

- The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation have launched an award for civic arts organisations geared to recognise activities with communities during the pandemic https://gulbenkian.pt/uk-branch/our-work/the-civic-role-of-arts-organisations/the-award-for-civic-arts-organisations/
- The Centre for Cultural Value has been hosting a Festival of Ideas over the last couple of weeks with lots of interesting sessions. Further details can be found here: https://www.culturalvalue.org.uk/ and recorded aspects of the sessions will be available on their YouTube channel shortly
- Our own Professor Richard Clay presented a BBC4 Documentary on C21 Mythologies which can be accessed via iPlayer: https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000p9t7/21stcentury-mythologies-with-richard-clay
- The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre have published their views on how the government should support the creative industries through the Comprehensive Spending Review (beyond bailouts): https://www.pec.ac.uk/policy-briefings/three-ways-in-which-evidence-should-guide-spending-review-promises-on-the-creative-industries
- Kiz Crosbie from Mortal Fools gave the keynote address to Culture Bridge North East's *Imagine If...* conference - further details and Kiz's speech https://culturebridgenortheast.org.uk/imagine-if-2020
- The British Council has launched a call for Creative Commissions in response to COP26 - further details: https://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/opportunities/open-call-creative-commissions

If you have any other resources you would like to add to this list please email bob.allan@ncl.ac.uk


Want to be kept in the loop? For information about Wor Culture and future sessions you can sign up here and view our blog at https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/culturencl/