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Stirling Culture Symposium

Stirling's creative identity: past, present and possible



Report produced by Ruth Currie on behalf of the Stirling Cultural Partnership

Overview

In 2018, the Stirling Cultural Partnership established a Place Partnership programme, in collaboration with Creative Scotland. The Stirling Cultural Partnership is led by Stirling Council in collaboration with 8 partners and the Place Partnership programme is led by Creative Stirling.

On the 23rd May, 2019 the Stirling Cultural Partnership hosted Stirling's first culture symposium. The theme of the symposium was 'Stirling creative identity: past, present and possible'. The aim of the symposium was to share, celebrate and challenge the actions and perceptions of what's taken place in regard to creative activity in Stirling, and collaborate together to develop what we might need to do next, to sustain a creative lifeblood throughout Stirling.

A snapshot of the day

- 80 people at event
- 9 speakers, 3 workshops
- The only requirement for participation was that when contributing, participants were respectful and constructive in their responses and considered 3 key things (1) what do I know? (2) what do I want? (3) what will I do? – some embraced this more than others
- 5 methods of data collection: meant (online evaluation), discussion notes, workshop feedback, map, Eventbrite data
- 5 ward areas represented on the day and all 7 represented in the online booking. Representatives were a mixture of artists, arts managers, council and community council representatives, directors, freelance practitioners, educators, participants in projects, students, local cultural champions
- 3 main themes emerging from analysis so far: communications and connections; CPD and network development; activity delivery

What we did

There were three themes framing the day, each intended to spark discussion and ideas amongst the participants of the symposium. These were:

Spaces [that we create] **Places** [and how they're represented] **Traces** [where we've been and where we'll go].

Nine people gave 'lightening talks', where they shared their work in relation to one of the three themes, for 5 minutes each. Each have either been active in Place Partnership activity or a member of the Stirling Cultural Partnership.

We had three workshop sessions that followed on from this, where participants could get into different groups and discuss some of the priorities in more detail. These were:

Position , mobilise and enable our creative communities to achieve positive change - Connecting creativity across rural and urban Stirling

Pathways for growth and creative business development - Stirling as a creative destination

Commitment to Stirling's culture and creative future - Making space, for whom, why and where?

Through these framing ideas, the detail of what happened at the symposium was down to the participants. The only requirement for participation was that when contributing, participants were respectful and constructive in their responses and considered 3 key things:

**What do I know?
What do I want?
What will I do?**

How people shared their thoughts and ideas...

With an enthusiastic atmosphere and a coming together of approx. 80 people, the symposium was an opportunity to reconnect with the ideals and ideas that shape people's engagement in Stirling's creativity.

We used an anonymous evaluation platform throughout the day where participants could share their ideas and comments; 75% of those participating took part in the online evaluation throughout the day.

During lightning talks each table made notes of their discussion, which summarised their ideas and during the workshops each group wrote a statement of intent or idea using Onits (magnetic note cards). Information was triangulated across all sources and three themes emerged: **communications and connections; networks and CPD; delivery activity**. With half of the people in the room agreeing that Stirling did not have a strong creative identity, whilst 76% considered Stirling to be a creative place, the event was an opportunity to share perceptions and excavate some of the assumptions which lay under the surface of these statistics.

What will you find in this report?

- A summary of each theme that emerged from the data and a series of recommendations
- Take-aways which resonated across these three themes
- Emerging questions
- Actions you can take

Theme one: connections and communication

An encouraging observation of the data collected is that many of the priorities that were discussed at the symposium illustrate a want and need for activity that is already happening in many spaces throughout Stirling. However, it was also a clear indicator that there is something more that is required to amplify the available networks, mentoring, volunteering and participatory opportunities that exist. The symposium participants are a self-selecting sample group (participants opted into the symposium with a vested interest and engagement in creativity in Stirling). If this group of people feel that there is a need for activity that already exists, there is a responsibility to ask ourselves what needs to be done to amplify and connect this, so it is more visible and more accessible to those wishing to further participate. Suggestions were offered for specific interventions that could support connectivity, including: a database of activity, a Stirling arts correspondent, dedicated marketing, monthly newsletters, and making increased use of the resources and support known to already exist.

This is also connected to the recurring theme of physical connection. This was articulated in two key ways (1) In the practical sense of transport and access. Specifically, how could arts, culture and heritage work together with transport services to make city events more accessible. Trails and ways to make the connections between different areas was also highlighted.

(2) Spaces available for creative activity to take place. Specifically, what local spaces could do to be more open to being shaped by local people of that area. Examples of what barriers to participation may be and further exploration of how these can be removed is required. This could be achieved through Continued Professional Development (CPD) and networking priorities emerging from the group (see theme 2). Increased collaboration between venues, organisations and services was also suggested, alongside the visibility of this and support for new partnerships to emerge through small grants.

Theme

one: recommendations

- Stirling Cultural Partnership (SCP) could explore available comms and what 'quick win' connections can be actioned in short term with existing resources
- Establish Facebook group and populate to keep conversation and sharing opportunities going, post symposium
- Place Partnership could commission a communication strategist to develop a comms plan that can be used across SCP and cultural connectors. Including: liaising with SCP internal comms team, content development, CPD at network event for wider creative community, guide resources
- Those with responsibility to programme or deliver creative activities use CPD networks as a mechanism to connect with local-led ideas, ensuring these are a key part of their decision-making process with communities



Theme two: CPD and networks

Every discussion group identified opportunities to come together in some way, be that, for example: through skills sharing, local co-production, mentoring, listening to artists and specific under-represented demographics, project management or through engaging more clearly with the networks and groups what already exist. It was very clear from the feedback that participants felt that coming together through the symposium connected them to others. It was an opportunity to share their ideas, aspirations, concerns and solutions for ways to contribute to Stirling's creative identity. More opportunities to do so would be highly valued. Where these opportunities already exist, there is a responsibility to find ways to connect them and amplify when and where they take place and what the learnings and outcomes from these are. This responsibility sits both within and outwith the SCP.

Workshop feedback and discussion group notes suggests that CPD opportunities around specific themes would be welcomed. These included:

- funding support and advice, including for specific groups
- marketing and how to connect work more explicitly with others
- share experience, peer-learning and support. Some participants suggested they would be willing to offer content for these
- panel and discussion groups on specific themes

Participants also identified opportunities to come together to co-design projects that connected services, venues and organisations working across Stirling as something that would be valued. This was also expressed as a way some participants can share their expertise. Building on digital networks as a way to come together, connected to theme one, was also expressed as a possibility.

Theme

two: recommendations

- Place Partnership programme a CPD programme in collaboration with cultural connectors, complimentary services and prospective new partnerships
- Those attending the symposium and their networks can populate a Facebook group with activities and ideas to support a self-directing network
- Stirling Cultural Partnership to identify overlaps with other strategic working groups, community connections and services to identify commonality/possibilities for development across arts, culture and heritage



Theme three: project delivery

Many, if not all of the people participating in the symposium are involved in creative projects with a participatory element in some way (e.g. project participants, project managers, facilitators or funders). Across the discussions and feedback of the day, there were three recurring things people felt were important to highlight regarding the participation in, and development of, creative projects:

- access and how to remove physical barriers to taking part (e.g. being consulted on the design of projects and the transportation to attend, particularly in the evenings; activity outside of buildings and that are 'on tour' or made relevant to distinct locations)
- access and how to remove attitudinal barriers to taking part (e.g. being consulted on the design of projects; how spaces can be more appealing to more local people, who may find the idea of taking part inaccessible; opportunities for intergenerational as well as targeted projects)
- agency and autonomy in the design and development of creative projects. Specifically, how projects are developed, who is involved in this process, and who is responsible for their delivery.

Theme

three: recommendations

- Utilise a programme of CPD/networks to work towards the removal of barriers through collaboration and planning projects with prospective participants/partners
- Place partnership could offer small grants to complement/pilot creative projects, run by local 'cultural connectors' (local people that are making creative projects happen in their local area)



Take-aways across all themes

- We need to connect what already exists, both through physical and digital spaces. Strong sense across many of the groups that we should make more use of familiar spaces as well as unused or unfamiliar spaces
- Those working in the creative sectors within Stirling are seeking further access to CPD (skills, project management specifically) and networking opportunities with other creative people, including opportunities to plan together (such as symposium). People also recognised that there was a need for these opportunities to be available to volunteers, students and those curious about becoming more involved in creative activities in Stirling
- Make more visible/increase opportunities for intergenerational and family engagement and lifewide learning opportunities
- Students are an important part of Stirling's identity and can be influencers and temperature gauges for the vibrancy of the creative offer from the creative workforce
- When considering space, there was a sense it needs to be more than one thing to particular groups. Are we asking ourselves how responsive our spaces are? There was also a sense that there can be a dissonance between spaces and the local people who might access these, again, highlighting responsiveness
- Information sharing remains a high priority across those attending the symposium. Specifically, there is a sense that there needs to be more local ideas represented; more transparency about where information is; joined up communications; and, a way of sharing what's happening more effectively
- There was a sense of familiarity across some of the resources that have been available within Stirling, but although resources may be shared, there is not currently shared value or agency through their use. Example sharing through symposium discussions illustrated that commonly available resources may require a bespoke, local-led application

Take-aways across all themes (continued)

- Connected to this, how people share the process and experience of their work was also discussed. Specifically, making this more open. There was a sense that we can't understand what's changed until we're in it. Trust is required between people, projects and the mechanisms we use to support these (comms and funding etc) to contribute positively to the evolution of Stirling's creative opportunities. This further reinforced the appetite for sharing opportunities
- The language we use in relation to our activity may require review as shared understanding of meaning is not always clear. Specifically, understanding what we mean by 'change'
- Creativity on the move was recurrent across many of the groups: arts trails, street art, connecting spaces (those which are established creative spaces and those within are not) were explicitly suggested examples of this
- Local spirit, ownership and agency regarding creative projects was also a common theme throughout the groups. Particularly in relation to use of spaces and cross-sector/intergenerational projects. Where participants felt this was currently being positively supported, differed between groups
- All discussion groups highlighted the need to make use of the networks and connections we currently have in some way. Specifically, transport and connecting opportunities with late-night travel that is targeted for residents was mentioned repeatedly. As too were questions around how we can continue to embed volunteering and mentoring into our programmes.

Emerging questions to consider

- What would happen if we all tried something different?
- How can risk and innovation be supported?
- How can we better connect the opportunities to meet that already exist?
- What CPD and networking opportunities are already on offer and what are the gaps?
- How can cultural connectors galvanise the creativity of their local area, and what support do they need?
- Are spaces as responsive as they need to be? How do we know and what needs to happen?
- What do students want in creative opportunities in Stirling?



Our Next Steps:

The following action steps are needed to mobilise possibilities:

1 Join the facebook group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/694124271005643/>

2 Write a blog for Place Partnership

3 Tell us about creative things happening in your area

4 Follow Creative Stirling on Facebook for updates of Place Partnership events

5 Follow up those connections you made at the symposium...

5 Keep doing great creative things and shout about it...

From the learning experienced through the symposium and the ideas generously shared by those who engaged, the Stirling Cultural Partnership are working to be responsive to this through their planning of Place Partnership next steps.

We commit to be transparent, trusting and open to the unknown. We hope you will do the same.

