

Getting Behind Scotland's Culture Club

At 56 Degree Insight we bring a passion and expertise developed over many years working with clients across a range of sectors. As we approach our launch in mid-June we will be sharing some details on our offer, our points of view and our recent experiences working in each of these areas. This week, let's take a look at the Scottish cultural scene - and the challenges it is facing.....

A Culture Strategy for Scotland

The Scottish Government launched a consultation on their draft Culture Strategy for Scotland in June 2018 with the results from this extensive exercise published in January. Their strategy recognises the potential value of culture and creativity to Scotland's – from the economic benefits to the many health, wellbeing, social, educational and environmental benefits.

The plan is structured around three key ambitions:

- To transform through culture - recognising that culture and creativity are central to Scotland's cultural, social and economic prosperity.
- To empower through culture – opening up and extending culture to every community and for everyone.
- To sustain and nurture culture - by taking the action needed for culture to thrive as a diverse, positive force across all of Scotland.

Responses to the consultation (received from a wide range of respondents from cultural organisations and academics to public bodies and interested individuals) were predominantly positive with overwhelming support for the overall vision, ambitions and actions proposed.

Challenges

But, a reality check. We must all recognise that a number of challenges must be overcome if the strategy is to be delivered. A lack of diversity in the sector may be fuelling inequality of access to the arts and the benefits that can bring. Specifically there is a view that a dominance of people from higher socio-economic groups leading and working in the sector may influence programming and outputs, putting off potential audiences in lower socio-economic groups or from minority backgrounds.

Also, if the ambitions laid out in the strategy are to be achieved, increased funding will be needed to support the policy. Earlier this month, Creative Scotland's acting chief executive warned that the sector is at a "tipping point", especially given the contraction of funding from other sources such as local authorities. The current direct funding package received by the agency is only around 0.2% of the Government's total budget - a lower rate than in many other European countries including Ireland, Norway and Sweden.

Population research highlights inequity

As context to the strategy, we know that arts and culture already play a very important role in our lives in Scotland. The latest findings from the Scottish

Household Survey showed that over the course of a year, 93% of us will engage in cultural activities of one type or another – from visits to the cinema, reading for pleasure, attending live music to attendance at theatre performances.

Population research we undertook for Creative Scotland using Kantar's Scottish Opinion Survey also illustrated high levels of engagement with the arts and culture; over two thirds of the population (68%) see arts and culture as an important part of their life while a similar sized proportion (69%) consider themselves to be creative.

However, if we scratch below these positive headlines, we start to see where there is potential for culture to deliver much more for Scotland. Levels of participation and attendance are actually much lower amongst a number of demographic groups – in particular those aged 75 and over, people in the lowest socio-economic groups, people with fewer academic qualifications and people with poorer physical or mental health.

But there is another real opportunity in all of this. The Scottish Opinion Survey found that 39% of the population would like to take part in creative activities more often than they currently do. Levels of demand are currently outstripping the availability of opportunities – surely good news and a real opportunity for the creative sector?

Insights to inform and monitor the success of the strategy

The final version of the Culture Strategy for Scotland is due to be launched later this year and a group will be established to agree how best to monitor progress on the actions laid out in the strategy and how they are impacting upon society. This will likely involve a wide range of data sources including some of the aforementioned population surveys and some more in-depth qualitative and/or longitudinal approaches which can uncover longer term changes and provide a deeper understanding of the positive outcomes.

With the launch of the strategy later this year, at 56 Degree Insight we will continue to support the arts and culture sector at both a national and local level. We can help in many ways from the provision of population level data on arts and cultural participation and benefits to deeper insights focused on existing and potential audiences at individual arts and cultural venues such as theatres, museums and galleries.

If you are active in the creative sector and are struggling to unearth the best strategy for your organisation, please get in touch to find out how we can help.



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