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WARWICK
OF UK CITIES
PROJECT
REASONS TO
CO-CREATE



ABOUT THE **FUTURE TRENDS SERIES**

THE FUTURE TRENDS SERIES—published as part of the **Warwick UK Cities of Culture Project**—discusses ways of thinking about the value of culture. It explores the importance of research for understanding the place of culture in everyday lives, its impact on local people, society, the economy, wellbeing, and prosperity at large. It does so through a research-informed approach that connects with the needs of policy making.

The intended audiences for the series include cultural workers, organisers of cultural events, funders, policymakers at the national level and in local government, as well as academics. The series aims to provide accessible, research-led accounts of issues related and relevant to the development of the DCMS UK City of Culture Programme and connected initiatives supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Arts Council England and others.

The papers are expected to inform, provoke and engage with place-based ambitions and planning for cultural growth and vitality at all levels. They also offer a practical guide to understanding the range of concepts, methods, data, and evidence that can inform the planning and preparation of proposals and programming.

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About the Warwick UK Cities of Culture Project

The AHRC-commissioned Warwick UK Cities of Culture Project is led by the University of Warwick and highlights the importance of universities and of research in the DCMS UK City of Culture Programme: from the bidding process for the title, through to delivery, evaluation, and legacy of the programme.

The project has a particular focus on increasing the use of arts, humanities, and social science research to match the scale of opportunity for evidence-based learning afforded by the DCMS UK City of Culture Programme.

The project is committed to sharing insights and data that can benefit and inform the UK City of Culture Programme and other place-based cultural investments, mega-events, and initiatives.

REASONS TO CO-CREATE

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THE VALUE OF
CO-CREATION
IS BEST
UNDERSTOOD
IN TERMS OF
WHAT MAKES
CO-CREATION
MEANINGFUL
TO THOSE WHO
PARTICIPATE.

REASONS TO CO-CREATE

PATRYCJA KASZYNSKA, ANDREW ANZEL AND
CHRISTOPHER ROLLS

Co-creating is difficult, so why do it? Co-creation is a popular term but the outcomes of co-creative practices and the reasons for doing it—the justifying *whys*—are poorly understood.

This is a problem because, arguably, the value of co-creation cannot be understood independently of the reasons for which people co-create.

We suggest that the value of co-creation is best understood in terms of what makes co-creation meaningful to those who participate and that it is best evaluated in accordance with the objectives reflecting these reasons: *the whys* of co-creation described in this paper.

This evaluation approach can be developed further through arts and humanities research and tested in future Cities of Culture.

INTRODUCTION

'Co-creation' is used to refer to a rapidly expanding body of ideas and practice. But co-creating is not simple. It is resource consuming and logistically taxing, so, why co-create?

The starting point of this paper is that **while co-creation has become a popular term, the outcomes of co-creative practices and, more importantly, the reasons for doing it—the justifying whys—are poorly understood.**

Drawing on the experience of Coventry as UK City of Culture 2021 we ask: why engage in co-creation during place-based interventions?

What can we expect to come out of it?

These questions should be of interest to cultural practitioners, audiences, academics, and policy-makers, who all have stakes in co-creation.

We answer these questions by focusing on the following:

- 1) **What is co-creating?**
- 2) **What good is co-creating?**
- 3) **Why co-create?**
- 4) **Why co-create in the context of Coventry UK CoC 2021?**
- 5) **What are the future trends and recommendations for policy, practice, and research?**

CO-CREATING IS NOT SIMPLE. IT IS RESOURCE CONSUMING AND LOGISTICALLY TAXING.





1. What is co-creating?

‘Co-creation’ is a term used widely in the cultural sector, as evidenced by the number of ‘how to’ guides.¹ Public sectors and policy makers have seen multi-stakeholder participatory methodologies being prototyped and tested under the name of co-creation.² In academia, co-creation and its related notions (e.g., co-production and co-design, participatory action research, community of practice and inquiry) have been in currency for over 50 years.³

However the question of what co-creation is remains complex, partly because its meaning differs across sectors.

In the academic context alone, the term is used in many different disciplines, which has muddled the conceptual contours of co-creation as the meaning shifts across the different discourses. Furthermore, similar terms—

such as co-production and co-design—have been used synonymously with co-creation while referring to different stages and degrees of engagement.ⁱⁱ

In the cultural sector, co-creation is said to be ‘a process and a methodology where responsibility, authority and agency are shared.’⁴ This is a good description of *how* co-creation (ideally) happens but it places less attention on *what* happens and *why*.

We therefore offer a working definition for co-creation:

intentional collaboration in the creation of something meaningful to the collaborators.

In other words, it is a collaborative process where relationships are created to enable outcomes that would not occur if the stakeholders worked in silos, and that these outcomes can be interpreted as meaningful by and to those involved.

GENERAL FEATURES OF CO-CREATION

- ***Co-creation is a process*** (i.e., collaboration) that involves multiple stakeholders, who each come to the table with their own intentions and interests for the collaboration.
- Co-creation eventually ***creates something*** that would not have come about had the stakeholders been working in silos. This ‘something’ can manifest in many ways.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Co-creation endeavours to create something that is ***meaningful to all collaborators***.^{iv} This aspect of meaning-making renders co-creation an apt object of investigation for the arts and humanities.

¹ For instance, the ART/Tech Co-Creation Manual produced by a Horizon 2020-funded Re-FREAM project <https://re-fream.eu/resources/art-tech-methodology/>

² See a recent Science for Policy report by the EIT Climate-KIC and the Joint Research Centre (JRC) <https://eit.europa.eu/library/co-creation-policy-participatory-methodologies-structure-multi-stakeholder-policy-making>; also Christian Bason, *Leading public sector innovation: Co-creating for a better society* (Bristol University Policy Press, 2018).

³ See for instance Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action*. (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Elinor Ostrom, ‘Citizen participation and policing: What do we know?’, *Journal of Voluntary Action Research* 7, No. 1-2 (1978), 102-108; Roger B. Parks, Paula C. Baker, Larry Kiser, Ronald Oakerson, Elinor Ostrom, Vincent Ostrom, Stephen L. Percy, Martha B. Vandivort, Gordon P. Whitaker, and Rick Wilson, ‘Consumers as coproducers of public services: Some economic and institutional considerations’, *Policy Studies Journal* 9, No. 7 (1981), 1001-1011; Angie Hart, Ceri Davies, Kim Aumann, Etienne Wenger, Kay Aranda, Becky Heaver, and David Wolff, ‘Mobilising knowledge in community–university partnerships: what does a community of practice approach contribute?’, *Contemporary Social Science* 8, No. 3 (2013), 278-291; David Coghlan, and Mary Brydon-Miller, eds., *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2014).

⁴ See the report by Heart of Glass and Battersea Art Centre, *Considering Co-Creation* (London: Arts Council England, 2021), p.18. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ConsideringCo-Creation.pdf>

2. What good is co-creating?

The rise of co-creation may be seen against the backdrop of a new paradigm of the New Public Governance⁵, with co-creation being rooted in the development of a direct, participatory democracy that emerged from the activism of the 1960s and 1970s.⁶ A more cynical account links it, perhaps paradoxically, to the later neoliberal ideology, where competition and fiscal measures are seen as the main regulators of social action and where a semi-permanent situation of austerity is presented as government's only alternative. Here, co-creation becomes a money-saving measure and a way of enhancing the performance of the public sector without additional investment from the state.⁷ Some accounts of co-creation suggest that these two accounts might be simultaneously true.⁸ In the cultural sector the status of co-creation is similarly viewed

with ambivalence. Organisations that see co-creation as a practical tool to achieve collaborative benefit may also regard its buzz-word status as a rhetorical 'hook' to secure funding.⁹ But what is clear is that **co-creation is never just one thing: it is not so much a single and uniform form of agency as a bundle of networked processes spanning different agents.**

What complicates the situation further is that the outcomes of co-creation, co-production, and co-design have been notoriously difficult to evidence. Brix and colleagues, who write about co-production in the context of public sector management, capture this well by noting that 'paradoxically, co-production is currently being implemented in public organisations even though few empirical studies have determined the immediate and long-term outcomes of co-production initiatives'.¹⁰ Nor is co-creation easily measured in terms of efficiency gains.¹¹



CO-CREATION IS NEVER JUST ONE THING: IT IS NOT SO MUCH A SINGLE AND UNIFORM FORM OF AGENCY AS A BUNDLE OF NETWORKED PROCESSES SPANNING DIFFERENT AGENTS.

- ⁵ Stephen Osborne, *Public Service Logic: Creating Value for Public Service Users, Citizens, and Society through Public Service Delivery* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020); Jacob Torfing and Peter Triantafyllou, 'What's in a name? Grasping new public governance as a political-administrative system' *International Review of Public Administration* 18, No. 2 (2013), 9-25.
- ⁶ Elinor Ostrom, 'Citizen participation and policing: What do we know?', *Journal of Voluntary Action Research* 7, No. 1-2 (1978): 102-108; Roger B. Parks et al., 'Consumers as coproducers of public services: Some economic and institutional considerations.' *Policy Studies Journal* 9, No. 7 (1981): 1001-1011.
- ⁷ Victor Pestoff, 'Co-production and third sector social services in Europe: Some concepts and evidence.' *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 23, No. 4 (2012): 1102-1118.
- ⁸ David M. Bell and Kate Pahl, 'Co-production: towards a utopian approach.' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 21, No. 1 (2018): 105-117.
- ⁹ Ben Walmsley, 'Co-creating theatre: authentic engagement or inter-legitimation?', *Cultural Trends* 22, No. 2 (2013): 108-118.
- ¹⁰ Jacob Brix, Hanne Kathrine Krogstrup, and Nanna Moeller Mortensen, 'Evaluating the outcomes of co-production in local government', *Local Government Studies* 46, No. 2 (2020), p. 170.
- ¹¹ Patrycja Kaszynska, Adam Thorpe and Samuel Mitchell, *MAKE (e)valuation Report* (London: UAL, 2021) https://www.arts.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/332033/Final_Clean_MAKE_EvaluationReport_070222.pdf



**CO-CREATION
IS AS A WAY OF
DELIVERING
PUBLIC SERVICE
THAT CREATES
PUBLIC VALUE.**

In this sense, it can be seen as a process that ‘supports first and foremost the development of a shared capacity to deliver, not the provision of specific services.’^v The value of co-creation, when cast in these terms, is hard to capture using traditional, output-oriented and indicator-driven evaluation approaches. The decentralised, networked, and evolving character of value co-creation cannot be pinned down in terms of metrics attached to fixed outcomes. But this does not mean that the value of co-creation cannot be demonstrated, and demonstrating its value matters, not least because co-creating comes with costs.

As Flinders and colleagues point out, ‘co-production is a risky method. It is time-consuming, ethically complex, emotionally demanding, inherently unstable, vulnerable to external shocks, subject to competing demands and it challenges many disciplinary norms.’¹² Roberto Verganti (a management and innovation researcher) questions whether the

brainstorming and collective idea generation that is associated with co-creation is a good means of delivering projects that require moving towards a shared purpose.¹³ So, given the doubts, risks, and costs, we ask again: why co-create?

3. Why co-create?

As already noted, co-creation has been discussed in a number of different disciplinary areas and contexts. While this has blurred its conceptual definition, the fact that co-creation has such different discursive iterations reveals that that it can be valued for different reasons, which become visible through different interpretative frames. We review below those we have identified, citing their discipline-related origins and their implications for cultural contexts.^{vi}

- **Democratic Imperative:**

justifies the practice of co-creation in terms of the need for negotiation of ownership and democratic control of public and organisational relations.

This way of understanding co-creation can be found in the

discourses of public administration and governance. These see co-creation as a re-organisation of relations between citizens and government¹⁴, a notion that can be traced back to the forms of radical participatory democracy found in the activism of the 1960s and 1970s¹⁵ and later, the models of public value.¹⁶

¹² Matthew Flinders, Matthew Wood, and Malaika Cunningham. ‘The politics of co-production: risks, limits and pollution.’ *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice* 12, No. 2 (2016), 261; See also Scott Bremer and Simon Meisch, ‘Co-production in climate change research: reviewing different perspectives’, *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 8, No. 6 (2017), e482.

¹³ Roberto Verganti, *Overcrowded: Designing Meaningful Products in a World Awash with Ideas* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2018), p. 48.

¹⁴ Tony Bovaird, ‘Beyond engagement and participation: User and community coproduction of public services’, *Public Administration Review* 67, No. 5 (2007), 846-860; John Alford, *Engaging public sector clients: From service-delivery to co-production* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹⁵ Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action*. (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Roger B. Parks, Paula C. Baker, Larry Kiser, Ronald Oakerson, Elinor Ostrom, Vincent Ostrom, Stephen L. Percy, Martha B. Vandivort, Gordon P. Whitaker, and Rick Wilson, ‘Consumers as coproducers of public services: Some economic and institutional considerations’, *Policy Studies Journal* 9, No. 7 (1981) 1001-1011

¹⁶ Mark H. Moore, *Creating public value: Strategic management in government* (Cambridge MA Harvard University Press, 1995).

From this perspective, co-creation is a way of delivering public service that creates public value. It is justified because of its democratic mandate.¹⁷

This imperative plays out in the cultural sector in at least two ways. First, co-creation can occur because there is a democratic mandate to have all citizens participate in or benefit from publicly funded culture.^{vii} Second, co-creation is implemented to allow power asymmetries to be corrected (i.e., democratising decision making at a project level). It could also be a way in which radical forms of democratic ownership take shape within the sector.^{viii}

- **Ethical Imperative:** justifies co-creation as ‘the right thing to do’ and a method ‘which both attends to and works against dominant inequalities’.¹⁸

This sense of cocreation can be traced to writings in political and moral theory (e.g., by John

Rawls and Onora O’Neill) but also to more recent work with marginalised cultures and minorities.¹⁹ This can be seen reflected in the development of participatory research methodologies in the arts, humanities, and human sciences.²⁰

This form of co-creation recognises systemic oppression and marginalisation and attempts to address them through processes that deliberately foreground diversity, equality, and inclusion.^{ix} The diversity of participants’ experiences sits at the heart of co-creation practice, arguably amplifying the voices of those who have traditionally been silenced.^x

Examples of initiatives where the ethical imperative for co-creation has been formally recognised include those aiming to decolonise the cultural sector, such as the [EU-funded Co-creation project](#) and [UAL Decolonising Arts Institute](#).

From this perspective, co-creating is a way in which hierarchical and exploitative structures can be explored and illuminated, if not reorganised and dismantled.

- **Artistic Imperative:** justifies co-creation on the ground of enhancing artistic and cultural value.

The artistic imperative is an important reason that is specific to the arts sector. Here, co-creation not only serves democracy or ethical justice, it can also create better artistic and cultural forms. These kinds of arguments have been made in the context of cultural policy and audience research.²¹

In Leila Jancovich’s neat summation, ‘finding better ways to engage with the public is necessary, not only to increase the legitimacy of decision-making but also to ensure that artistic practice is less self-referential’.²²



- ¹⁷ Stephen Osborne, *Public Service Logic: Creating Value for Public Service Users, Citizens, and Society through Public Service Delivery* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).
- ¹⁸ David M. Bell and Kate Pahl, ‘Co-production: towards a utopian approach.’ *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 21, No. 1 (2018), 105-117.
- ¹⁹ Christina Horvath and Juliet Carpenter, eds., *Co-creation in Theory and Practice: Exploring Creativity in the Global North and South*. (Bristol University: Policy Press, 2020).
- ²⁰ Keri Facer and Kate Pahl, eds., *Valuing Interdisciplinary Collaborative Research: Beyond Impact* (Bristol University: Policy Press, 2017).
- ²¹ Ben Walmsley, *Audience engagement in the performing arts: A critical analysis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
- ²² Leila Jancovich, ‘Great art for everyone? Engagement and participation policy in the arts’, *Cultural Trends* 20, No. 3-4 (2011), p. 279.



**CO-CREATION
VALUES THE
INPUT OF NON-
PROFESSIONAL
CREATIVES IN
EXPANDING WHAT
'ART' CAN BE.**

Without co-creation, culture making can grow sterile, resulting in art forms that are less engaging and less meaningful. Arguably, this is the motivation underlying the publication of the Cultural Rights Manual, which includes not only the right to participate in cultural life but also the right to self-expression through authorship. In this context, co-creation is seen as allowing the cultural sector to branch out beyond artist-to-artist collaborations and value the input of non-professional creatives in expanding what 'art' can be. This gives art and culture a better grounding in lived experiences, fostering innovation in the forms of artistic expression.

- **Business Imperative:** justifies co-creation on the ground that it increases future economic return for some or all collaborators and that it yields innovation by capitalising on multiple sources of expertise.

This imperative is derived from marketing literature, where the term 'co-creation' is said to have originated with the influential study by Vargo and Lusch.²³ Marketing literature stresses the need for personalisation and customisation. Its notion of co-creation has come to signify brand 'stickiness' and the binding of customer loyalties. This gives rise to management literature's 'consumer-centric' firm²⁴ and the idea that business models enable value to be co-created through open sourcing and collaborative input from customers.²⁵

Cultural organisations may engage in co-creation in order to 'build new markets' of ticket buyers.²⁶ For example, a theatre that co-creates a musical with non-theatre-going collaborators may hope to entice the collaborators' social network to attend that performance and possibly other performances in the future. Stickiness and future commitment are generated through the locking-in of

stakeholders' personal inputs in cultural productions.

- **Impact Imperative:** justifies co-creation as a way of making sure that ideas are carried forward and implemented.

This impact imperative can be seen as rooted in the context of design research where participation and direct involvement are viewed as key to successful project delivery.²⁷

²³ Stephen L. Vargo and Robert F. Lusch, 'The four service marketing myths: remnants of a goods-based, manufacturing model', *Journal of Service Research* 6, No. 4 (2004), 324-335.

²⁴ Lisa Peñaloza and Alladi Venkatesh, 'Further evolving the new dominant logic of marketing: from services to the social construction of markets', *Marketing Theory* 6, No. 3 (2006), 299-316.

²⁵ Rafael Ramirez, 'Value co-production: intellectual origins and implications for practice and research', *Strategic Management Journal* 20, No. 1 (1999), 49-65.

²⁶ See the contribution by Carsten Baumgarth, 'Brand management and the world of the arts: Collaboration, co-operation, co-creation, and inspiration', *Journal of Product & Brand Management* Vol. 27 No. 3 (2018), 237-248.

²⁷ Ezio Manzini, *Design, when everybody designs: An introduction to design for social innovation*. (MIT Press, 2015); Erling Björgvinsson, Pelle Ehn, and Per-Anders Hillgren, 'Agonistic participatory design: working with marginalised social movements', *CoDesign* 8, No. 2-3 (2012), 127-144.

Against this backdrop, the idea of knowledge co-creation can be considered as related to the idea of transformative research: ‘research approaches that aim at producing impact-oriented knowledge through the co-creation of solutions with societal stakeholders, driven by researchers’, and underpinned by the commitment to partake in ‘interventions seeking to enact and support change.’²⁸ Harking back to early notions of engaged scholarship and participatory research, this research orientation is driven less by the simple desire to interpret and understand the world, and more by the need to change it.²⁹

For the cultural sector, the impact imperative could manifest in the trailblazing of a new artistic format with consequences for how people live. For example, a cultural organisation might collaborate with healthcare professionals and patients who struggle with mental health to co-create an arts-for-health

initiative, finding novel ways of using the arts to improve mental health.

4. Why co-create in the context of Coventry CoC 2021?

In this paper we examine co-creation through the case study of Coventry UK CoC 2021, which is an example of a large-scale, city-wide cultural project that aimed to co-create the majority of its programme through a ‘bottom up’ rather than ‘top down’ engagement with Coventry’s diverse communities. The Evaluation Strategy states that ‘The Trust is supporting a devolved model of delivery which will encourage the transfer of power to local communities in order for local people to be part of ideas development, co-creation and decision making’.³⁰ The imperatives of co-creation were embedded in Coventry CoC’s Story of Change, with co-creation being the expected delivery process for the programme.

The Trust engaged in around 16,300 hours of consultation and planning work since winning the UK CoC title in December 2017. This took place in all 18 of the city’s wards, and with residents from every neighbourhood in the city. As of 31 May 2022, over 3,000 community dancers, musicians, poets, and makers participated in the Coventry UK CoC 2021 programme. In addition, there were over 5,500 participations in workshops throughout the UK CoC 2021 year. Excluding commercial events, 77% of the programme was *co-created* with local residents and communities. When we include the commercial programme, 64% of the programme was *co-created*.

Such statistics raise the question of what exactly co-creation means across all these different contexts. In general terms, Coventry’s co-creation signified an asset-based—as opposed to deficit-based—approach that positioned culture as

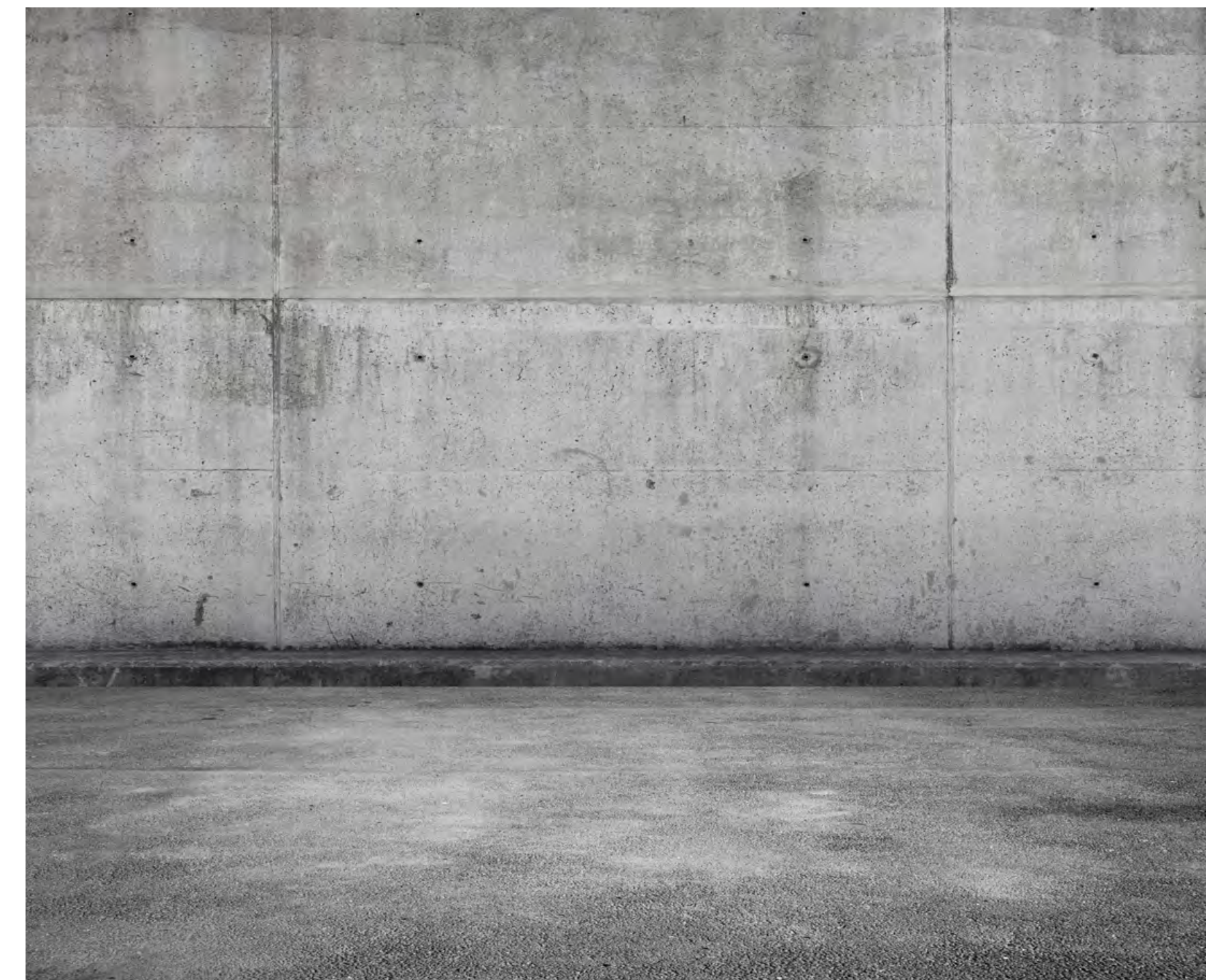
something already existing within local neighbourhoods.

This perspective enabled Coventry residents to engage in culture production processes that were collaborative, meaningful to them, and which produced new cultural forms, skills, and wellbeing benefits.

²⁸ Ioan Fazey and others, ‘Ten essentials for action-oriented and second order energy transitions, transformations and climate change research’, *Energy Research & Social Science* 40 (2018), 54-70.

²⁹ Natalie Cowley, ‘What is praxis? Discussed in relation to Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Sartre’, *TKKA: Graduate and Postgraduate E-Journal* 4 (2008), 1-8.

³⁰ Jonothan Neelands and others, *Coventry City of Culture 2021 Performance Management and Evaluation Strategy* (The University of Warwick, Coventry University and Coventry City Council: Coventry, 2020), p.17.





**THE AMBITIONS
TO CO-CREATE
WERE ROBUST AND
UNDERPINNED
BY A NUMBER OF
IMPERITIVES TO
CO-CREATE.**

A Model of Co-creation: ambition and reality

One of Coventry CoC's Output Indicators was the establishment of a recognised model of co-creation, to which a meaningful evaluation question could be attached: 'To what extent has the Coventry City of Culture Trust developed and demonstrated co-creation and evidence-based art and cultural programming that creates social economic value?' The Theory of Change therefore assumed a coherent definition and model of co-creation, and also that the success of the co-creating activities could be demonstrated.

In practice, embedding co-creation in the delivery of all the Story of Change activities was difficult to achieve, and not just because the COVID-19 global pandemic disrupted many of the stakeholders' collaborative and relationship-building opportunities. We have already described the inherent challenges to delivering and evaluating co-creation.

We suggest we can more accurately capture the reality of delivery in some cases by speaking of co-production rather than co-creation. Nevertheless, while collaboration in some of *the activities delivered was limited to participation in the production process and skills development rather than including the ideation of what activities were needed*, the ambitions to co-create were robust and underpinned by a number of imperatives to co-create.

To that end, the social enterprise 64 Million Artists, who work on national place-based projects with a focus on cultural democracy, were commissioned to support the Coventry CoC Collaborative City producers in embedding co-creation processes across projects. It also chaired the Collaborative City Steering Group, which was made up of local leaders representing Coventry's wards and diverse communities.

This advisory and decision making group held Trust producers to account and, through their networks, fed multiple-stakeholder perspectives into the design and delivery of Coventry CoC projects, so that information could flow between networks and stakeholders could feed into the development and delivery of projects at key stages.

The following brief case studies of two Coventry CoC Collaborative City programme projects illustrate how the values of co-creation were embedded in the design and delivery, the imperatives that informed the process, and the meanings that emerged.

CASE STUDY: THEATRE NEXT DOOR

Coventry's community centres joined forces to bring high quality performances to communities across Coventry during its CoC year.

A mix of professional and amateur citizen-programmed shows were 'pay-what-you-wish' for local residents. The collaborative stakeholders included citizens, community centre staff and volunteers, a performing arts cultural organisation (Black Country Touring), artists and performers, and the local authority.

How co-creation happened?

The idea that local community centres in Coventry could operate as venues for events during the CoC year emerged

from discussions between community centre staff and volunteers, local citizens, and Coventry CoC producers. Community centres were recognised as important local assets, rich in citizens' pride, skills, talents, and local knowledge.

Community centre staff and volunteers expressed a wish to receive training in event management. The Theatre Next Door project therefore evolved organically as a programming and skills-development opportunity.

It was co-decided to commission a professional touring theatre company to train community centre volunteers in all aspects of event management, from programming to staging, box office, and marketing.

What was co-created?

Local citizens programmed the shows—both professional and amateur—they wished to see in their local community centre.

Many citizens attended a performance (e.g., a staged play) for the first time, while others gained new skills in event management, programming, and marketing, increasing their capacity to programme cultural activity in the future.

Why was co-creation implemented?

- **Democratic imperative:** Participatory decision making encouraged civic participation in cultural programming, with the culture being defined by citizens.
- **Ethical imperative:** Citizen-led programming and training devolved decision making and assets away from Coventry CoC producers to local residents, redressing cultural inequity.

- **Artistic imperative:**

high-quality professional performances sat alongside local amateur performances, creating new forms of cultural expression.

- **Business imperative:**

The pay-what-you-wish model made events accessible to different income levels and still produced revenue for community centres, creating more buy-in.

- **Impact imperative:**

Event management skills were developed with local citizens, retaining knowledge as a local asset.





**PARTICIPANTS
GAINED NEW
SKILLS IN
PHOTOGRAPHY
AND MADE NEW
CONNECTIONS
WITH THEIR
NEIGHBOURS.**

CASE STUDY: RADFORD BUBBLES EXHIBITION

Community leaders in the Radford ward of Coventry came up with the idea of setting up a Coventry UK CoC portrait photography project that would take a snapshot of life during the pandemic, creating memories for future generations.

The collaborative stakeholders included citizens, local community leaders, Jubilee Crescent Community Centre staff, and local artists.

How co-creation happened?

Workshops facilitated by a Coventry CoC producer and staff at the Jubilee Crescent Community Centre sought advice from local community leaders on how best to engage Radford's diverse communities during the CoC year.

The workshops' ten participants reflected local networks and Radford's cultural diversity.

During the workshops, themes around community resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, with the possibility of somehow creating a 'snapshot' of it. This led to a collective decision to create a photography project.

All Radford locals were invited to take part as either photographers or portrait subjects. Local artists were engaged to help share photography skills and, through further workshops, co-design a colourful studio background and touring exhibition gallery.

What was co-created?

Participants gained new skills in photography and made new connections with neighbours. Stories of local care and support shifted local perceptions.

The photographs and their attached stories toured the city and became a symbol of neighbourly caring. The images will go on permanent display in the Jubilee Crescent Community Centre as a lasting record of achievement.

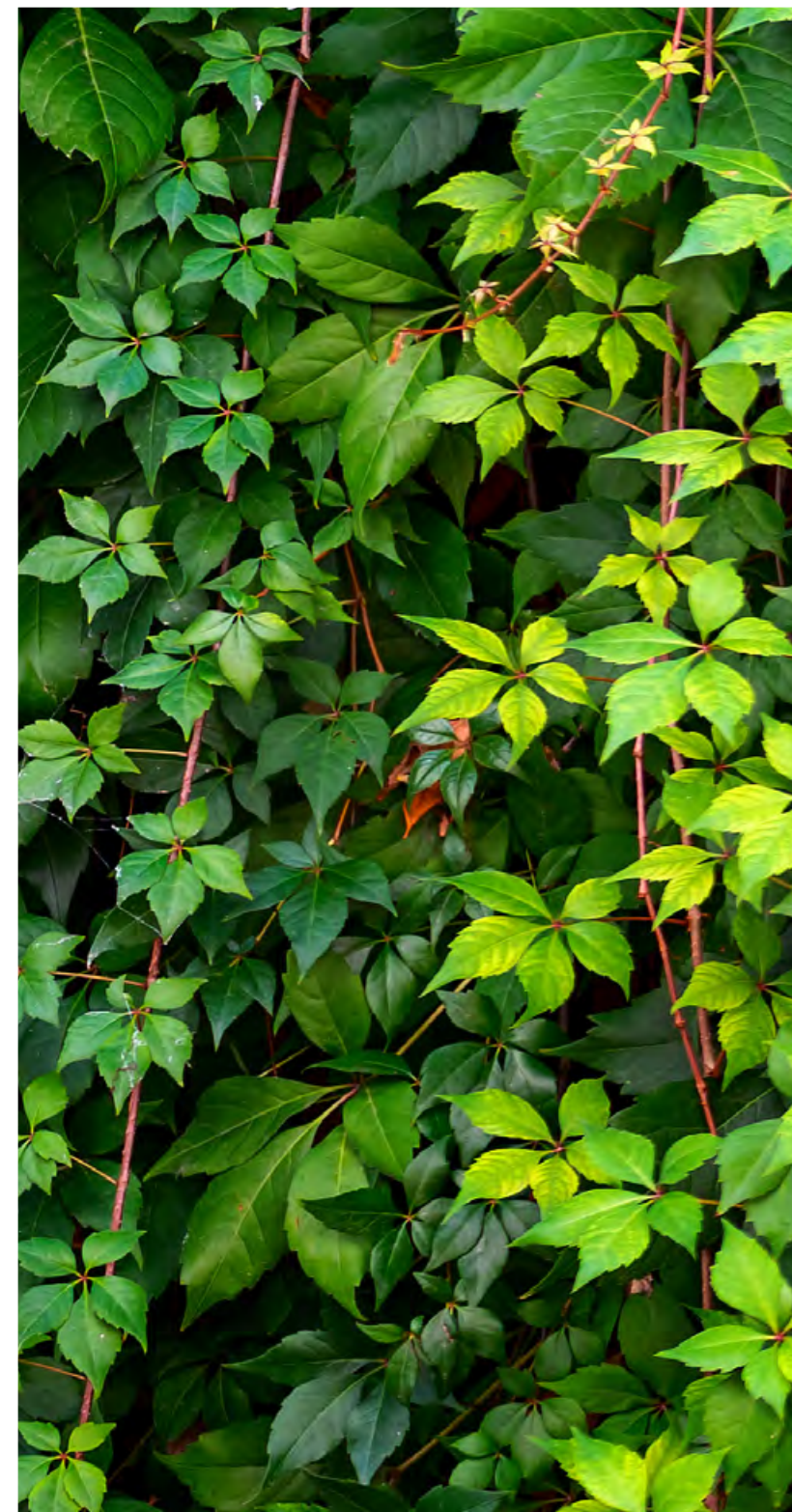
The project created a sense of civic pride in a ward that historically lacked access to cultural assets and was deprived in terms of benefits from publicly funded culture.

Why was co-creation implemented?

- Democratic imperative:**
 Citizens co-designed and co-delivered the project from the initial concept stage through open, accessible, and transparent decision-making processes. Participants engaged on their own terms and in their own words.
- Ethical imperative:**
 Diversity and inclusion as co-agreed core values ensured that non-dominant identities were represented across the project.
- Artistic imperative:**
 The high-quality, skilfully-taken photographs and colourful exhibition gallery design came out of collaborative workshop processes involving citizens and professional artists.
- Business imperative:**
 The project was relatively low budget but had a high social impact yield with new

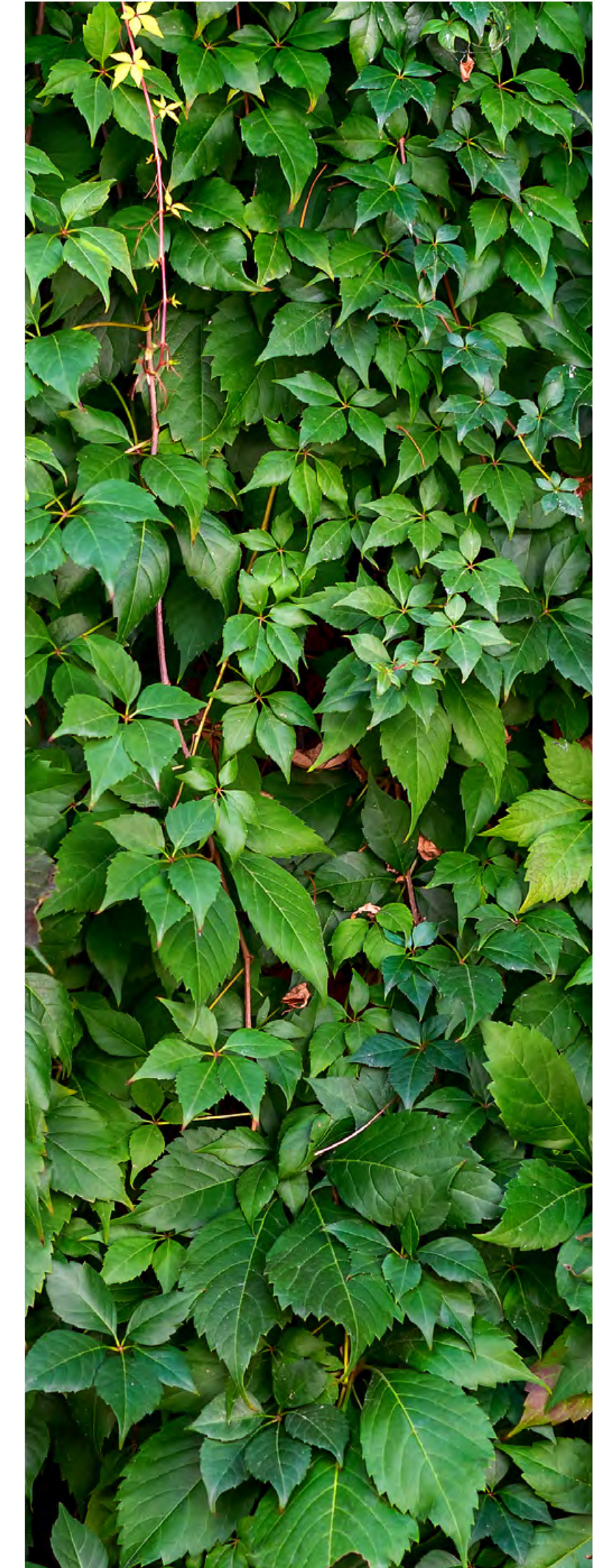
relationships with local businesses established across the ward.

- Impact imperative:**
 Skills were embedded at the local level while participation enhanced local creativity and care in a deprived area.



CHALLENGES OF DELIVERING CO-CREATION DURING COVENTRY CoC

- Power imbalances among citizens**
 A challenge experienced by many citizen-led projects within CoC is the crowding out of new voices by the 'usual suspects' when it comes to local engagement. Inequalities in citizens' capacity levels, motivations, needs, and personal resources must be addressed and factored into decision making.^{xi}
- Partnership equity**
 In the context of a CoC, a balance must be struck between at least three groups: the lead organisation (e.g., the Trust), local partnership organisations, and individual citizens. In practice, ensuring the 'checks-and-balances' was hard.
- Realistic expectations**
 Producers and cultural sector workers have idealistic expectations about what can be achieved by co-creation or citizen-led ways of working. Limited funding and short-term horizons often undermine the best intentions. Transparency about a project's sustainability and real-world legacy can be lacking.
- Making decisions and taking action**
 A common feature of co-created projects is a focus on process over delivery. While this promotes communication, relationships, and exploratory ways of working, it can also inflict analysis paralysis, indecisiveness, and incoherence on a project.



5. What are future trends and recommendations for policy, practice and research?

Practice in the cultural sector has concentrated on the processes of co-creation.

We focus on the motivations or whys of co-creation, exploring how these relate to what is co-created and to how the value of co-creation can be expressed.

We claim that **the reasons behind co-creation reveal what is valuable about it**. Our preliminary typology of the underlying motivations for co-creation can be seen as a sketch for **an evaluation framework for co-creation**.

It suggests key objectives—democratic, ethical, artistic, business, and impact—against which the success of collaborative activities can be evaluated. However further research is required. From an empirical point of view, even though co-creating is now widely practised, it is premature to speak of generalisable

findings for ‘what works’. This is why following the recommendations below in relation to future CoC programmes is crucial.

- **Identifying imperatives and reasons for group co-creation in different contexts** is key to understanding co-creation. This is the ground-work needed for establishing the evaluation framework sketched in this paper. Delivering this research will require careful and patient working with people in contexts where co-creating occurs, in line with the long-established principles of participatory action research.³¹
- If co-creation value is related to the reasons for engagement, which in turn can be expressed in terms of what the involved stakeholders find meaningful, **studying meaning-making in the context of co-creation is key**. The role played by arts and humanities research in understanding

what stakeholders find meaningful and how meaning is produced in co-creation requires more attention.^{xii}

- Evaluating co-creation—in terms of process and outcomes—is notoriously difficult. We argue that decision makers may want to approach evaluation through the prisms of reasons to co-create. Specific evaluation methods will have to be proposed that **allow co-creation activities to be benchmarked, while respecting the principle that co-creation has to be assessed on grounds that are meaningful to those involved in specific projects**. Ways of connecting this with the kind of evidence that policy makers use to make decisions will have to be established.
- In addition, more attention needs to be paid to understanding whether a specific imperative (the why) relates to a specific way of doing co-creation (the how)

and creates a specific result (the what)? Future inquiry should **examine the patterns between the why, how, and what of co-creation**, not least because it is becoming increasingly apparent that participation and inclusion are not synonymous and that formal inclusion may result in experiences of marginalisation.³²

To conclude, we regard the fact that co-creation is many things to many people as its source of strength rather than a weakness because it reveals the different sources of value in co-creation. We suggest that the value of co-creation should be understood in terms of what makes co-creation meaningful to those who participate, and that it must be evaluated in accordance with the objectives reflecting the reasons—the whys of co-creation—described in this paper. This evaluation approach can be tested in future CoC.



³¹ The report by Nadine Holdsworth and Jennifer Verson “What does home mean to you” is a good example of the type of contextually embedded approach that is needed <https://coventry21evaluation.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/AHICoC-report-2022-final.pdf>

³² See Kathryn S. Quick and Martha S. Feldman, ‘Distinguishing participation and inclusion’, *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 31, No. 3 (2011), 272-290; Jacob Torfing, Eva Sørensen, and Asbjørn Røiseland, ‘Transforming the public sector into an arena for co-creation: Barriers, drivers, benefits, and ways forward’, *Administration & Society* 51, No. 5 (2019), 795-825; David M. Bell and Kate Pahl, ‘Co-production: towards a utopian approach’, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 21, No. 1 (2018), 105-117.

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i. Place-based projects (e.g., Cities and Boroughs of Culture, Creative People and Places Partnerships, local authority cultural strategies) have embraced collaborative processes. This poses many challenges of implementation: see the discussion by Anne Torreggiani (2018) for considerations specific to the cultural sector and the piece by Robin Hambleton and Joanna Howard for broader considerations arising in relation to local governance.

ii. Many (cross-disciplinary) contexts use a range of related terms without clear distinctions. As Sanders and Stappers (2008, p. 6) observe, 'The terms co-design and co-creation are today often confused and/or treated synonymously with one another. Opinions about who should be involved in these collective acts of creativity, when, and in what role vary widely'. Grönroos (2011) postulates a distinction between co-creation and co-production, with participation in the latter being tied to the production process, and in the former to value creation. Osborne and colleagues (2016) seek analytic clarity by distinguishing between co-production, co-design, co-construction, and co-innovation as the stages leading to the co-creation or co-destruction of value. In short, the nomenclature is not well established, nor are the terms used

consistently (Voorberg, et al., 2014). In the context of this paper, we use co-creation to signify the most robust form of engagement on the spectrum.

iii. It could be a product (e.g., a new musical), a service (e.g., an artist residency), a capacity (e.g., ability to play piano), a connection (e.g., making a new friend), or an innovation (e.g., invention of a new musical genre), or all of the above.

iv. How collaborators ascribe meaning to the process and the created something is phenomenal (experienced by the stakeholders), intersubjective (arising through subjective experience but warranted in a group), and multifaceted (there are many manifestations).

v. In this sense, rather than tapping into specific indicators or ameliorating specific problems, co-creation can be said to work 'to promote the development of different capabilities in different people, depending on what kind of contribution they were prepared to make'. Kaszynska et al. (2021, p. 8)

vi. This characterisation is our own invention and is meant to outline the most prominent trends rather than provide an exhaustive list.

vii. Translated into policy, this is reflected in the rhetoric of 'everyday creativity'. See, for instance, Arts Council England's Let's Create strategy.

viii. Cultural organisations have historically been managed by a certain demographic of people, for whom making and consuming art is at their prerogative. See 'Addressing Cultural and Other Inequalities at Scale' authored by Orian Brook.

ix. For instance, when writing about territorial stigmatisation, Horvath and Carpenter (2020, p. 2) argue that 'knowledge practices focusing on marginality must necessarily involve communities whose knowledge is emerging from struggles against oppression'.

x. And yet, in this context, it is becoming increasingly apparent that participation and inclusion are not synonymous and that formal inclusion may lead to experiences of marginalisation, thus forcing a closer scrutiny of participation in co-creative processes in a way that remains sensitive to the diversity of citizenship. See Quick and Feldman (2011) and Torfing et al. (2019).

xi. Interventionist approaches begin with the aim of engaging 'hard-to-reach' or disenfranchised community members, whereas less interventionist approaches assume that energy, interest, and commitment are prerequisites of participation and should not be manufactured or artificially stimulated.

xii. Current research tends to explore co-creation imperatives from an institutional perspective. That is to say, scholars have paid particular attention to why organisations co-create with individuals rather than to why individuals co-create with organisations. This is a research deficit that requires attention. This is likely to involve the traditional methods of the arts and humanities, such as storytelling, visualising, and manifesting, as well as the design techniques used to promote participatory and collaborative forms of agency.

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