

Creative recovery?

The role of cultural policy in shaping post-COVID urban futures

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FOREWORD

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FOREWORD



Three years since the outbreak of COVID-19, cities across the world continue to grapple with the pandemic's devastating impact on culture and the creative industries. The pandemic exposed the precarious livelihoods of creative workers and the fragility of cultural institutions. But the crisis also revealed the unique power of art and culture too. Impromptu choirs on balconies, collective painting projects, and musicians entertaining their neighbours during lockdowns, showed how culture sustains individuals and communities. Creativity flourished in the online world too – including a step change in scale and ambition for live performance that saw theatre, opera and music connect with existing and new audiences around the globe. Themes of loss and hope have permeated the cultural life of our cities.

Against this backdrop and faced with an unprecedented crisis, our first instinct at the World Cities Culture Forum was to create a space for city leaders to come together online. In real time, we tried to make sense of the unfolding crisis, sharing what was happening in our cities, how we were responding, and what we were learning. The World Cities Culture Forum COVID-19 webinars became a vital leadership forum, a space for innovation, honesty, and rapid response policy development.

Over 40 world cities met regularly to cover a vast range of topics. The pandemic did not affect everyone equally and so equity, inclusion, and helping the most vulnerable became a focus. We shared ideas to support a creative workforce comprised largely of freelancers and small businesses. We looked at the rush to digital and unpacked behavioural change and public confidence trends. We explored collaborative funding models, how philanthropy and government could join forces and act quickly. We fast tracked public realm improvements that would otherwise have taken decades – from alfresco dining to asphalt art.

The pandemic came in waves, it wasn't a linear journey, so we managed a constant cycle of closing, reopening, closing, and reopening venues safely.

Cultural tourism went from global to local and we supported lots of 'hyper local' culture in communities, often on the outskirts of cities. In the midst of fundamental challenges from food security to hospital capacity, we went back to basics, building our arguments to protect culture while being cognisant of the wider crisis.

One of our principles at the World Cities Culture Forum is to make sure our advocacy and policies are underpinned by data. We gathered an unprecedented amount as the crisis unfolded – so we could understand the impact and then design the best policy response. As a result, we have perhaps the most comprehensive portrait of rapid culture policy development in global cities ever captured.

We recorded 270 policies, insights, and data from our 40 global cities, which the researchers at King's College London have now analysed. I want to thank King's College London for this vitally important work. They have captured the enduring sentiments, approaches and consequences of the pandemic on culture and the creative industries, a story that is truly global in scope.

But crucially this report does not only look back, it also looks forward, revealing how culture is driving recovery in cities – from reanimating public spaces and encouraging people back into full engagement with city life, to improving working conditions for creative workers. It also highlights the areas that we still need to address in order to build resilience and hardwire culture into our cities long term.

Finally, I want to thank our inspiring civic leaders from our network of global cities. The work we did together during the pandemic was only possible because of our shared values and the relationships of trust and honesty we have built over many years.

At the World Cities Culture Forum, we believe that by being generous with our ideas and learning from one another we can build fairer and more prosperous cities. Our conversations over the pandemic reinforced the ties between our cities, and made us even more resolute in our shared mission to build a world where culture is at the heart of thriving cities.

Justine Simons OBE

*London's Deputy Mayor for Culture &
the Creative Industries, and World Cities
Culture Forum Founder & Chair*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the time of writing, a little over three years since the pandemic began, the World Health Organization (WHO) has just declared that COVID-19 is no longer a public health emergency of international concern. But the outbreak of the virus was not ‘just’ a public health event. It was a ‘meta-crisis’ (Frosh & Georgiou 2022), interacting with – and making newly visible – a range of pre-existing economic, social, political, and environmental crises. As such, whilst WHO’s important milestone is an extremely welcome development, the effects of the pandemic continue to unfold. It has many ongoing implications, including for the cultural life of cities: raising challenges and opportunities for urban communities, for policymakers, and for many within cultural and creative ecosystems (de Bernard et al., 2021). Indeed, some have applied the notion of ‘long COVID’ to the cultural sector, to highlight the enduring effects of the shocks that began in early 2020. Within the context of these ongoing consequences of the pandemic, in this report we examine how cultural policymakers in cities responded to the crisis. We do so, specifically, to understand what implications these responses have for the future.

The research was conducted in collaboration with the World Cities Culture Forum – a network of 42 cities across the globe, which provides a platform for policymakers to ‘share research and intelligence, and explore the vital role of culture in their future prosperity’ (World Cities Culture Forum, n.d.). The research involved the collection of data via focus groups, interviews and a survey, alongside the analysis of pre-existing World Cities Culture Forum data. The pre-existing data included transcripts of a series of 11 webinars hosted by the Forum during 2020 and 2021, in which cities shared their COVID experiences; and responses to a survey conducted by BOP Consulting for the World Cities Culture Forum during this same period, inviting partner cities to share the policy measures being taken. Working with this combination of new and pre-existing data, our research addressed three questions:

1. How did city cultural policymakers respond to COVID-19 in support of culture?
2. What was the role of the World Cities Culture Forum?
3. What are the implications of these cultural policy responses for post-COVID urban futures?



Key findings

1. There were two phases of response: mitigation & recovery

COVID-19 had major impacts on the cultural and creative ecosystems of all cities, but the data indicates two broad phases of response: first mitigation, then recovery. The perceived length of these phases varied from city to city, related not just to rates of COVID infection and mortality, but also the length and strictness of local lockdowns. During the mitigation phase, urban cultural policy often involved evidence-gathering on the impacts of COVID-19 on the creative economy, public venues, and the vitality of the city in general. The scale of policy interventions varied greatly at this stage, from major programmes of emergency funding, to negotiating tax breaks or rental reductions for struggling venues, as well as finding new ways for artists and creative workers to reach audiences at a time of social distancing. After the mitigation phase, cities looked towards recovery and rebuilding. This included thinking through the legacies of the new initiatives that worked well during lockdown, often with a view to ‘building back better’. However, this did not in itself mean turning away from what was done in the mitigation phase: seven in ten of our survey respondents told us they intended to continue policies and projects adopted during the pandemic.

2. There were opportunities for policy experimentation, iteration & innovation

In the first stage of the pandemic, cultural policy was typically ‘fast policy’, involving experimentation based on creative ideas of what might work, and gathering evidence of their impact. Within the emergency conditions that COVID-19 brought about, there were opportunities to experiment, iterate, and innovate. Alongside the enormous difficulties and losses experienced, policymakers often appreciated being forced to look at their ways of doing things, and to do things differently – and the greater freedom to develop ideas and take action at speed. A key challenge, raised strongly by some research participants, is how to maintain the momentum of these exceptional periods of ‘policy entrepreneurship’ and innovation.

3. The scope of urban cultural policy expanded

One of the effects of COVID-19 was to force urban cultural policymakers to (re)consider exactly who and what they are responsible for. During the pandemic they were meeting a wide range of needs, and these needs changed over time. In some cases, they were thereby contributing to the expanded vision of care that became visible during the pandemic, paying attention to and taking responsibility for meeting the needs of a wide range of people, often including minoritised communities. The pandemic hence raised the question of what needs urban cultural policy fulfils? In some cases, this was a matter of *whose* needs should be met. For example, is it only professional artists and their audiences? Grassroots and community groups, too? The pandemic thereby also demanded new consideration of the geographical scales at which urban cultural policy operates. There were shifts to the ‘local’ in practice and in policy – including around three quarters of respondents to our survey working with local communities in new ways. Closely connected to this, the pandemic led to innovation in the (re)use of public space, raising important questions regarding ‘public culture’.

4. Partnerships & networks really mattered

In responding to the pandemic, urban cultural policymakers developed new and sometimes sustained interactions with an expanded range of partners within their cities, recognising complex cultural and creative ecosystems. Beyond the institutions they directly funded, this increasingly included a wide range of private companies, communities, and freelancers. In some cities, this has led to (or accelerated) the development of new cultural policy processes and structures. This included new processes for public consultation, decision-making, and policy co-design; and the integration of previously separate government functions. Valued partnerships also included the World Cities Culture Forum itself. Just over two-thirds of our survey respondents said the connection to the World Cities Culture Forum was useful in helping them to respond to the challenges arising from the pandemic – the majority describing the relationship as very useful. What partner cities gained from their involvement

Alongside the enormous difficulties and losses experienced, policymakers often appreciated being forced to look at their ways of doing things, and to do things differently.

was not only the opportunity to share immediate solutions to pressing problems, but also to look further to the future: the Forum’s pandemic webinars involved future-focused thinking in a variety of ways, extending the ‘time horizon’ in which cities were working, and thinking beyond the immediate and near future.

5. Amidst loss, there was hope

In analysing the data, we paid attention to the attitudes and sentiments regarding the future of representatives of partner cities, revealing a variety of expressions of worry, anxiety, and fear, alongside hopes for developing positive futures. In our survey, seven in ten respondents reported decreases in vitality and vibrancy of city centres, and three in five felt the city economy weakened. But around two-thirds of respondents felt that the cultural sector would be better off over the longer term, compared to before COVID-19, with most suggesting the pandemic provided an impetus to ‘do things differently’ and ‘build back better’, with art seen as having a regenerative and central place in city-making. All but one respondent agreed that ‘the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to imagine a better way of doing things in the cultural and creative sector’, including better connecting culture to local communities and ensuring access to creative opportunities across a range of hitherto marginalised populations. There were also signs of confidence in the role of cultural policy within overall city recovery. Three-quarters of our survey respondents agreed that ‘culture and creativity are core elements of my city’s wider plans for recovery and renewal from the COVID-19 pandemic’, and seven in ten agreed that the pandemic ‘raised awareness of the importance of culture and creativity in my city’.

What partner cities gained from their involvement was not only the opportunity to share immediate solutions to pressing problems, but also to look further to the future.



Creative recovery? Implications for imagining & developing post-COVID urban futures

There is a double meaning in our report's title. It asks, *has the creative sector recovered?* But also, and more to the point, *has the recovery been creative?* The aim of this report is not simply to better understand how city policymakers responded to the pandemic. It also addresses the implications of these responses for post-COVID urban futures, and, in particular, the role of cultural policy in helping to shape those futures. Many of the representatives we spoke to emphasised the new opportunities for experimentation, iteration, and innovation – for policy creativity – that they experienced within the specific conditions of the pandemic. But there is concern that policymaking will (or is already) returning to pre-pandemic modes of operation, failing to maintain the benefits of these new ways of working.

This raises the question, *how can such opportunities for experimentation, iteration, and innovation be sustained and developed further? What conditions can enable urban cultural policymakers to (creatively) imagine and develop post-COVID urban futures?* Our research suggests five answers:

(I) EXTEND TIME HORIZONS. It is understandable that during acute phases of a crisis, the focus of policymakers is on the present and the immediate future. But what makes it possible to also look further ahead, and to think expansively and creatively about the future? This is an important consideration for policymaking, both during times of upheaval and otherwise – and the demands of the political cycle, in many contexts, can make this a real challenge. The experience of World Cities Culture Forum partner cities during the pandemic indicates that one important factor is to be able to extend 'time horizons' (beyond the short term) in making plans for the future. There may be a range of ways in which to do this in practice, including via involvement in supportive professional networks and partnerships.

(II) CULTIVATE SUPPORTIVE PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS & PARTNERSHIPS. During a period of rapid change and ongoing uncertainty, it was part of the role of the World Cities Culture Forum to create conditions that would support a range of multilateral and bilateral conversations between cities, sharing experiences and ideas, through which to imagine and develop new possibilities. Bilateral conversations took place between partner cities and cities beyond the network, too. The value of all these conversations to city representatives indicates that one of the conditions that can help policymakers to imagine and develop possible futures is supportive external relationships, partnerships. and networks.

(III) ENSURE EFFECTIVE PROCESSES FOR IDENTIFYING CITIZENS' NEEDS. During the pandemic, new conversations were often developed between city culture teams and their citizens – either informally, or via new consultation procedures or advisory bodies. Such consultations may address very immediate needs, but they also have the potential to involve citizens in sustained and systematic processes of imagining and developing possible futures for their communities, and for the city as a whole. There are opportunities here to shift to forms of cultural policymaking that are more directly oriented towards the identification of a population's cultural needs. The experience of World Cities Culture Forum partner cities during the pandemic points towards some of these possibilities, including existing and emerging innovations in processes of consultation and decision-making.

(IV) DEVELOP EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO UNCERTAINTY – INCLUDING CONDITIONS FOR 'HOPE'. A key feature of policymakers' experience of the pandemic was uncertainty. The data documents the difficulties of facing the future during an acute crisis. But it also points towards some of the approaches – such as scenario and contingency planning, and working closely with key partners – that can be implemented to meet some of these challenges. Alongside



IMAGE COURTESY OF CITY OF LOS ANGELES.

experiences of loss and destabilising uncertainty, times of crisis can also be moments of hope – and, indeed, hope is always partly an experience of uncertainty. The Creative Recovery research saw evidence of deliberate steps being taken by city policymakers to create conditions in which new, positive futures could be imagined and worked towards. Examples included bidding to host an international biennial, thereby initiating a collective project around which to mobilise people; and commissioning public artworks during lockdown, to show that the city continues to be a place of life and creativity, even during the most difficult of times. Developing effective approaches to uncertainty, and deliberately cultivating conditions for hope, will continue to be important for imagining and developing post-COVID urban futures.

(V) REMEMBER WHAT WAS POSSIBLE. How the past is handled plays a key role in what futures are conceivable. The ways of working during the pandemic need to be remembered, as do the new policy agendas and priorities. If the experience of the pandemic raised particular topics into new visibility – such as the future of the public realm or the precarious conditions of cultural workers, for example – policy agendas are inherently contestable and changeable. Documenting the policy priorities articulated during the pandemic – as this report does – can serve as a reminder, and as a resource, for discussions about what should be on the list of priorities for urban cultural policymakers during future phases of ‘post-COVID’ agenda-setting. Similarly, as pre-existing policy processes and systems reassert themselves following the period of pandemic ‘policy-entrepreneurship’, it will be important to ensure that there is shared recollection that things were done differently in the past, and could be done differently in the future.

The ways of working during the pandemic need to be remembered, as do the new policy agendas and priorities.

INTRODUCTION

Existing research on urban cultural policy responses to COVID-19

To date, there has been only limited research into how COVID-19 impacted upon, and shaped, the cultural policies pursued by cities. There is somewhat more academic literature on national level cultural policy responses, but still a small body of work. Where there is considerably more academic literature, and grey literature, is on the impact of the pandemic on culture.

One rare exception to the absence of city level studies of cultural policy response is a publication focused on five capital cities – Berlin, London, New York, Paris and Toronto – in the first ‘wave’ of the pandemic (Anheier et al., 2021). That report noted variations in cultural policy measures, analysing the capacities of cultural policymaking in each of these five ‘world cities’¹, comparing and contrasting their effectiveness at the height of the pandemic. The ‘governance capacity’² of cities was seen to be important, as this bequeathed cities the ability to act both independently and somewhat more rapidly than national or regional government in terms of reacting to the pandemic, and, in turn, mapping out a new cultural policy strategy (see McGuirk et al., 2021 on urban governance innovation).

Anheier et al. indicated that existing cultural policy was often fatally undermined by the pandemic, with the loss of visitor numbers, and the closure of venues and workspaces leading to the unemployment and precarity of creative workers (see also Comunian & England, 2020). Yet in all five cities, existing urban cultural and creative ecosystems exhibited particular characteristics that made the impacts of COVID-19 particularly problematic for creative workers: all were expensive world cities where a lack of affordable workspace – as well as residential space – made work more precarious for all but the most well-paid creatives (see also Novy & Colomb, 2013; Moreton, 2013; Pollio et al., 2021; Tanghetti et al., 2022; Scott et al., 2023).

Adding to these problems for creative workers (ie lack of work and workspaces) was the fact that national policies often side-lined cultural policy in the rush to instigate support packages for ‘priority’ sectors. Here, the lack of attention devoted to culture in programmes of national pandemic support helped intensify belief among creative workers that they were both devalued and marginalised within urban economies seen to be driven by finance and related economic services (Flore et al., 2023). Mental health issues and a sense of hopelessness were common among creative workers, as COVID-19-induced lockdowns demanded forms of home-working and venue closure, with earnings dwindling (Flore et al., 2023; England, 2021).

Yet the select nature of the cases considered by Anheier et al. (2021) begs the important question as to whether the tendencies evident in five major ‘cultural capitals’ in the global North are apparent elsewhere, and whether the lack of urban resilience evident in relation to these cities’ creative sectors was a facet of their wider socio-spatial inequalities (eg pronounced segregation of rich and poor accompanying spiralling real estate costs). This makes study of the cities in the World Cities Culture Forum timely and important, given it spans global North and South, and includes cities where creative work takes a variety of different forms. While in the past it is cities in the global South that have often been depicted as having the least capacity to respond to economic crises, the complexity of contemporary urban systems means that cities in the global North also found existing models of urban resilience unhelpful for dealing with the scale, intensity, and pace of crises such as the COVID-pandemic (Orford et al., 2023).

There has been only limited research into how COVID-19 impacted upon, and shaped, the cultural policies pursued by cities.

1 ‘World cities’ are not just large cities in population terms, but ones acknowledged as central places in the organisation of the global economy. Measures of world cityness hence tend to focus on financial and business indicators rather than social, cultural or population characteristics.

2 Van Popering-Verkerk et al. (2022: 1767) define governance capacity as ‘the capacity to deal with societal issues’, and identify its five elements as, ‘(1) collective action, (2) coordination, (3) resilience, (4) learning, and (5) resources.’

The World Cities Culture Forum

Established in 2012, the World Cities Culture Forum is a global network of civic leaders from over 40 cities across six continents. The network supports cities to exchange solutions and share best practice in cultural policymaking to ‘build a world where culture is at the heart of thriving cities.’ It does so through a variety of means including the annual World Cities Culture Summit, which convenes the network in a different partner city each year. Due to the pandemic, the in-person summit was cancelled in 2020 and 2021. The 2022 event was held in Helsinki. The Leadership Exchange Programme (backed by Bloomberg Philanthropies since 2017) supports city leaders to address urgent challenges by working with their peers around the world. The network also conducts research with city partners, and publishes the World Cities Culture Forum Report, a comprehensive dataset on the impact of culture in cities, every three years. It was founded and is chaired by Justine Simons OBE, London’s Deputy Mayor for Culture and the Creative Industries. Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, is the Patron.

The World Cities Culture Forum supports urban cultural policymakers to share knowledge and to promote culture in their cities.

Research questions

The research questions for this project were:

1. How did city cultural policymakers respond to COVID-19 in support of culture?
2. What was the role of the World Cities Culture Forum?
3. What are the implications of these cultural policy responses for post-COVID urban futures?

Data & methods

The research involved the collection of new data via focus groups, interviews and a survey, and the analysis of pre-existing World Cities Culture Forum data.

Analysis of pre-existing data

1. **CITY POLICY MEASURES.** Responses to a World Cities Culture Forum city partner survey, undertaken by BOP Consulting, 2020-21, in the wake of the initial pandemic spread. This survey asked representatives of world cities to provide details of the various measures they were undertaking to support culture in their city, and to outline the intended beneficiaries for each measure. This data set comprised a total of 274 responses naming specific cultural policy measures undertaken across 39 world cities. (All but three World Cities Culture Forum partner cities responded, plus Berlin, Boston, Chicago, Copenhagen, Rome, and Vilnius.)
2. **WEBINAR TRANSCRIPTS.** Anonymised transcripts from 11 webinars, recorded over 16 hours and hosted by the World Cities Culture Forum in collaboration with BOP Consulting between 2020 and 2022. These featured round-table discussions by partner city representatives, discussing pandemic impacts and responses. Each webinar focused on a key thematic area, including: The Future of Major Cultural Events; The Future of Cultural Funding; The Future of the 15-Minute City; Making Space for Culture; COVID & the Public Realm; Opportunities for the Night Time Economy; and Cultural Tourism in a post-COVID world.

The research involved the collection of new data via focus groups, interviews and a survey, and analysis of pre-existing World Cities Culture Forum data.

Collection & analysis of new data

3. FOCUS GROUPS/INTERVIEWS. Transcripts from five in-depth focus groups held over six hours with 35 representatives from World Cities Culture Forum partner cities, conducted by King's researchers in October and November 2022. Two of these focus groups took place in person at the World Cities Culture Forum Summit in Helsinki, and the remaining were conducted online. This dataset also comprised two follow-up interviews with Buenos Aires and Oslo. Each focus group or interview invited discussion around three key questions:

- a. What has been the most important policy intervention to support culture in your city, in response to COVID-19?
- b. What have been the challenges and opportunities you have faced in contributing to your city's overall recovery and renewal?
- c. How has COVID-19 changed policy for culture in your city? (eg, in terms of its aims, or how it is made.)

4. SURVEY. The King's research team designed a survey for completion by representatives of World Cities Culture Forum partner cities. It was completed by 23 respondents from 18 cities, between December 2022 and February 2023. The survey had three main sections:

- a. Cultural and creative sector during COVID-19 (focused on the impacts of the pandemic)
- b. The role of the world cities culture forum during the pandemic
- c. The future of cultural & creative policy in your city

For the process of data analysis, a detailed coding structure was designed to address the three research questions. This sought to identify what types of cultural policy were used and by what kinds of stakeholder, in response to the impacts of COVID-19; what the role of the World Cities Culture Forum was in supporting these policies; and what such interventions might show about how city cultural policymakers were engaging with the future. Additional analysis identified whether these policy measures were seen by city cultural policymakers as challenges or opportunities, and how the pandemic's impacts were being understood.

The coding of datasets 1, 2 and 3 (city policy measures, webinar transcripts, and focus groups/interviews) resulted in the application of 178 codes, applied 8,971 times in total. It is this coded data, along with descriptive analysis of dataset 4 (the survey results), that is presented and discussed within the following chapters.

For the process of data analysis, a detailed coding structure was designed to address the three research questions.

CHAPTER 1
RESPONDING
TO COVID-19
IN SUPPORT
OF CULTURE

This chapter explores the measures taken by World Cities Culture Forum partner cities in response to the pandemic. It begins with a brief discussion of the impacts of COVID-19 on the cultural and creative ecosystems of these cities. It then overviews the policy responses to these impacts, before discussing the ‘mitigation’ and ‘recovery’ phases of response in more detail. The chapter concludes by highlighting a key feature of these policy responses across both the mitigation and recovery phases: they led to the formation and/or development of new relationships, partnerships, and networks. As we discuss further in Chapters Two and Three, these relationships have implications for the role of cultural policy in shaping post-COVID urban futures.

1.1. Impacts of COVID-19 on urban cultural & creative ecosystems

COVID-19 was not the first twenty-first century crisis to befall the world’s cities, with the 2008 financial crash also impacting urban systems. However, the effects of that previous crisis were more devastating for those employed in sectors such as manufacturing than they were for creative workers (Donald et al., 2013). The outbreak of COVID-19 was, in contrast, particularly damaging for city cultural life.

A majority of the World Cities Culture Forum partner cities who completed our survey (December 2022 – February 2023) reported that the vitality and vibrancy of city centres (16/23 respondents), and the strength of their local economy (14/23 respondents), had declined during the pandemic. This was accompanied by a deepening of inequalities in income and wealth (16/23 respondents said this had increased). One positive outcome was an increase in the city population’s engagement with their local neighbourhood, which just over half of respondents said had increased during the pandemic. For just over two-fifths of the cities, there were changes to demography, with the number of migrants moving to the city to work, and the size of the city’s population, perceived to have contracted (see Figure 1).

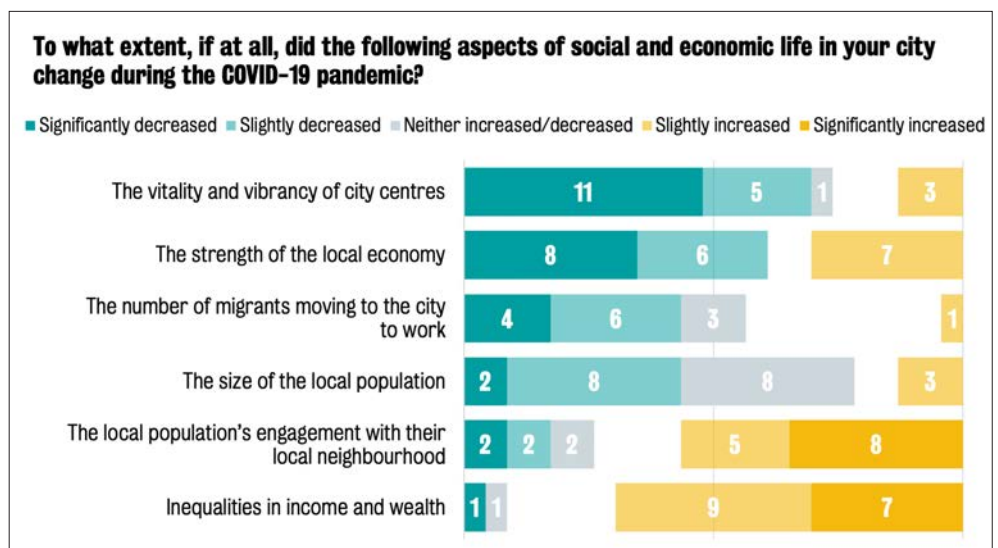


Figure 1. COVID-19 impact on the social and economic life of World Cities Culture Forum cities (source: survey (n=23 respondents), ‘Don’t knows’ not shown)

In analysing the World Cities Culture Forum webinar transcripts and our focus group/ interview data, we see that much of the language around the social and cultural impacts of COVID-19 mirrored that concerning its deadly health impacts. For example, city representatives spoke of the ‘assassination’ of their city’s night time and creative economies. They described COVID-19 as a ‘destroyer’ of city centres, and ‘decimator’ of creative employment; a once-in-a-generation moment with profound social and spatial impacts. A representative from Sydney, for example, spoke of the city as ‘dead’ during the 120 days of enforced lockdown (Helsinki focus group A), whilst one city representative said ‘we are going now from the corporate towers to ghost towers’ (The Future of the 15-Minute City webinar). In Dublin, ‘the central city core was basically abandoned. Like with most cities, we all have those photographs of empty streets, which we’ve never seen before’ (Dublin, European focus group).

A wide range of cities indicated the unprecedented scale of threat to their culture and hospitality industries, describing venue closures, job losses and declining visiting numbers, while it was noted that creative workers found it hard to access workspaces and equipment (see also Skaggs et al., 2023). The idea of sudden and dramatic decline was one that was reiterated widely, with the early days of the pandemic generating concerns that the cultural sector might not recover. The extent of the challenges faced is illustrated by Buenos Aires, for example, where:

in the beginning of the lockdown, it was impossible for the cultural sector to resume activities. [...] One out of every three jobs were lost in the sector. So that’s a very important challenge that we are still dealing with. The cultural sector turnover fell 26 per cent – almost four times the average of the city (Buenos Aires, interview).

Lockdowns were often described as having pernicious impacts on the cultural sector. In some cases, such measures were described as overly zealous and even unjust, with several of those we spoke to suggesting the risks of viral transmission in cultural venues and institutions were much lower than other workplaces that were allowed to reopen earlier. The idea that lockdowns were unfair on, or disproportionately impacting, the cultural sector was emphasised by one city representative, for example, who stated that ‘restrictions have not always been fair, and artists and cultural sector workers have, in many ways, lost faith in [...] public decision-making’ (The Future of Cultural Funding webinar).

The impacts of lockdown on the cultural sector were, however, not felt the same everywhere. In the UK, for example, the pandemic followed an expensive departure from the European Union, meaning creative workers were already struggling to come to terms with post-Brexit economic conditions:

Across the pandemic we were facing some real difficulties financially. And it was a case of 152,000 jobs were potentially lost, and an awful lot of the problems that actually preceded the pandemic ended up worsening. So, losses from the pandemic were huge, especially for cultural venues, because they were the first to close and the last to reopen. [...] Awful, a vast amount of money (London, Europe focus group).

In contrast, a representative from Austin indicated that the effects of the pandemic were not solely negative, as the city appeared to benefit from relocation of some cultural and creative workers from the East and West US coasts. This meant that Austin’s cultural and creative ecosystem appeared, in some ways, healthier as a result:

Interestingly, in Austin, we’ve still experienced a lot of growth during the pandemic, we’ve had from 120 people to 150 people moving here every day – it increased during the pandemic. So people from California and New York and wherever, were like, ‘oh, let’s move to Austin’. (Austin, Helsinki Summit focus group A).

As this example indicates, whilst some impacts of the pandemic were widespread across the cities of the World Cities Culture Forum, there were substantial variations in experience, too. Moreover, the consequences of the pandemic were not exclusively damaging. Changes

Whilst some impacts of the pandemic were widespread across the cities of the World Cities Culture Forum, there were substantial variations in experience, too.

took place in some cultural and creative ecosystems – and, indeed, within processes of urban cultural policymaking – which were generative and welcome. Nonetheless, even in cities like Austin, where the pandemic partly boosted the local economy through increased in-migration, actions were still taken to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, in support of the cultural life of the city.

1.2 Overview of policy responses

Measures taken to support cultural and creative ecosystems were wide ranging, including forms of strategising, internal planning, ad hoc experimentation, and collaborations with other policy areas. Not all of these measures were understood as cultural policy per se, with overlaps into social, economic, and broader urban policy. We analysed our data to establish an overview of the measures taken. To do this, datasets 1-3 (the policy measures, webinar transcripts, and focus group/interview transcripts) were systematically coded into eight policy types, according to the ways they were referred to by World Cities Culture Forum partner cities (see Figure 2).

The most common types were those measures intended to maintain ‘cultural provision’ for various publics, such as building digital and online platforms, holding outdoor events and performances, or nurturing community and neighbourhood cultural activity. This was followed by an emphasis on ‘strategic planning’ on behalf of the sector, including aspects of budgeting support, establishing cultural taskforces and recovery plans, building extra-governmental networks, and information sharing. ‘Regulatory and safety measures’ also occurred frequently in the data, alongside ‘advocacy’ on behalf of the sector, and ‘financial measures’, with some deployment of ‘training and skills development’ too.

While ‘cultural provision’ was emphasised as a primary focus of cultural policy measures across all global regions, there were some notable regional differences, revealing variations in priorities and experiences. For example, cities in North America placed more emphasis on ‘strategies and planning’, while those in South America most emphasised ‘regulatory and safety measures’. Cities in Asia placed much more emphasis on ‘Training and skills development’ than any other region, while cities in North America placed much more emphasis on ‘cultural rights’ than other regions, with no references made to this type of cultural policy by cities in Asia or Africa in the data analysed.³

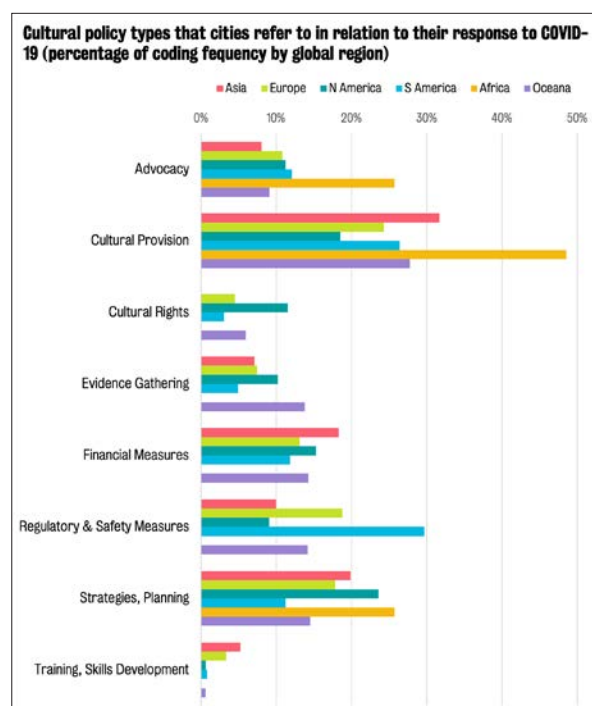


Figure 2. Cultural policy types that cities refer to in relation to their response to COVID-19, percentage of coding frequency by global region.

³ Please note that the regional findings with regards to Asian and African cities need to be seen in the context of a small sample size from those regions.

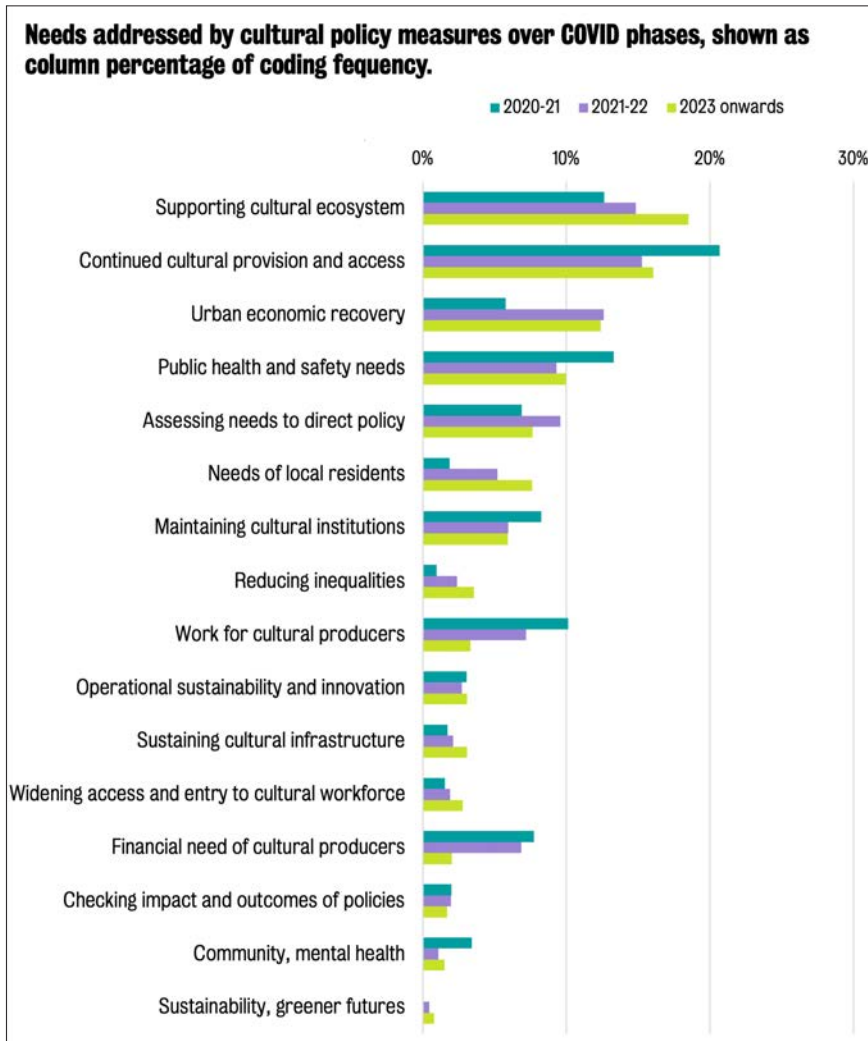


Figure 3. Needs addressed by cultural policy measures over time

Within these eight broad types of cultural policy, we identified 17 specific ‘needs’ that these policies were intended to address. These ranged from ‘public health and safety needs’, to ‘financial need of cultural producers’, to ‘continued cultural provision and access’. We then mapped these needs across three key phases of the COVID-19 pandemic – the initial impact (2020/21), the mid phase (2021/2022), and future needs (2023 and beyond).

In the initial 2020-21 phase, ‘continued cultural provision and access’ (21 per cent) was the most emphasised need, and also remained very highly emphasised in subsequent phases, followed by ‘public health and safety needs’ (13 per cent), and then ‘supporting the cultural ecosystem’ (13 per cent). The latter became the most emphasised need from 2023 and beyond (accounting for 19 per cent of references to needs at that stage).⁴ ‘Urban economic recovery’ (from 6 per cent to 12 per cent) and the ‘needs of local residents’ (from 2 per cent to 8 per cent) also became increasingly emphasised as the pandemic and its impacts progressed over time. Conversely, emphasis was notably reduced, over the same period, on needs such as the ‘financial needs of cultural producers’ (from 8 per cent to 2 per cent), ensuring ‘work for cultural producers’ (from 10 per cent to 3 per cent) and to a lesser extent ‘maintaining cultural

4 This reflects the growing recognition of city cultural life as constituting an ‘ecosystem’ (see de Bernard et al., 2021).

institutions’ (from 8 per cent to 6 per cent), alongside a small fall in addressing ‘public health and safety needs’ (from 13 per cent to 10 per cent).

Our analysis of the data indicates two phases of cultural policy response: one of crisis *mitigation*, the other of *crisis recovery*. The perceived length of these phases varied from city to city, and this was not just related to rates of COVID-19 infection and mortality, but also to the length and strictness of local lockdowns. As indicated above, ‘cultural provision’ was the primary type of cultural policy deployed by World Cities Culture Forum partner cities across all global regions, referred to in 11 distinct forms and identified in 359 references across the data. Via analysis (using cross-tabulated coding references), we can see how these measures relate to the ‘mitigation’ and ‘recovery’ phases for each of these types of cultural provision. For cultural provision overall, 40 per cent of the 359 references suggested mitigation was the focus of provision. 55 per cent were about directing provision towards recovery. Specific types of cultural provision that showed a clear emphasis on mitigation measures were ‘culture at home’ (100 per cent), ‘digital and online culture’ (74 per cent) and ‘supporting artists and creative activities’ (81 per cent). Those skewed towards an emphasis on recovery included ‘publicly available culture’ (64 per cent) and ‘people make culture’ (52 per cent).

1.3 Mitigation

1.3.1 Parachutes – meeting immediate financial needs

As some respondents noted in the webinars and focus groups/interviews, cultural venues including theatres, galleries, and cinemas were often the first organisations forced to close and the last allowed to open. In this context, mitigation often involved supporting cultural and creative organisations and workers – whose work, in many cases, ended the moment lockdown began – by providing financial support. The pandemic clearly disrupted the financial models for many organisations and individuals within the cultural and creative sectors. All but three of the respondents to our survey noted that the revenue generated by ticket sales decreased during the pandemic, with 7 in 10 saying it decreased significantly; and for half of the partner cities surveyed, declining income from ticket sales came alongside losses from other sources of revenue as well. Yet levels of funding from the national government and city authorities sought to counter-balance this, with around two-thirds of respondents seeing increased support from these sources (see Figure 4).

Levels of funding from the national government and city authorities sought to counter-balance lost income, with around two-thirds of respondents seeing increased support from these sources.

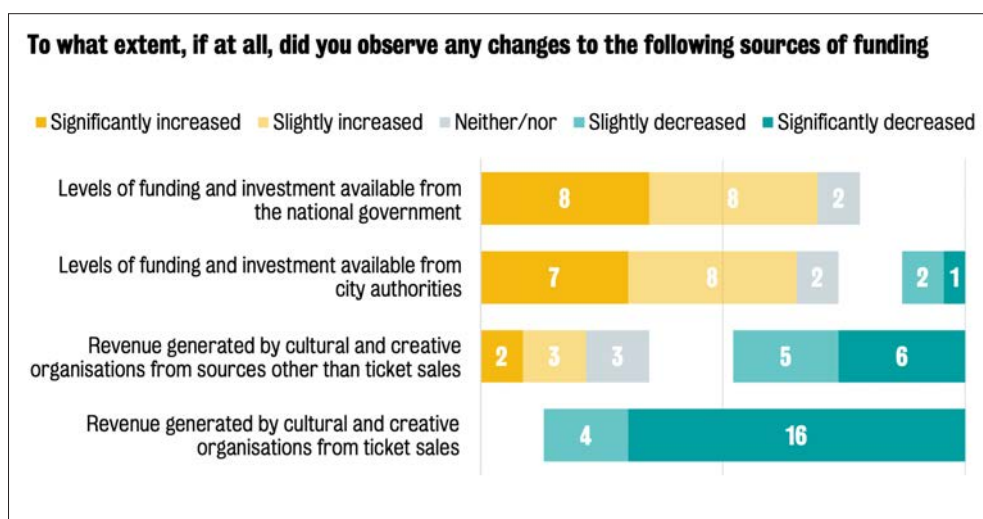


Figure 4. Changes to sources of funding for culture and creativity during the COVID-19 pandemic (source: survey (n=23 respondents), ‘Don’t knows’ not shown)



IMAGE COURTESY OF CITY OF TORONTO.

Cities reported a wide range of packages of systemic cultural support. In Toronto, for example:

*During the mitigation period, our most important policy intervention was the rapid delivery of emergency sustaining funding to artists and arts organisations. We somehow – this was in the first days of lockdown – put together a grant program in five days, and funded 980 artists and arts organisations in two weeks. I don't know how we did that, a lot of overtime and stress. (Toronto, North America focus group. See also **Toronto city case study**, below.)*

In many cases the focus of cultural policy was specifically on helping workers, rather than institutions – especially those freelancers and self-employed workers who lacked any support from employers. As a representative from Hong Kong explained, at first ‘it was really mainly remedial. People they lost their jobs, they don't have the income, so we give subsidies, we helped them. We helped them reschedule the shows, we helped them go on with what they're doing’ (Hong Kong, East Asia focus group). Representatives from all partner cities indicated that the pandemic threatened their cultural and creative ecosystems in a variety of ways, but it particularly exposed the vulnerability of freelancers and independent artists and cultural workers (see Tanghetti et al., 2022). For this reason, in many cities the immediate support to creative workers' livelihoods became a priority. In Sydney, for example, the culture team worked on ‘immediately getting money to artists to sustain daily lives’ (Sydney, Helsinki focus group B).

During the mitigation phase, the emphasis was on survival. As a representative from Zurich explained, ‘we established new grants, and extra grants for free cultural workers. So this was quite helpful for them to survive’ (Zurich, Helsinki focus group A). The urgent need for such support was accentuated by the self-employed status of many in the cultural sector. In Melbourne, for example, ‘artists didn't qualify for a lot of the state government's support in terms of working because [...] it was just impossible for the gig economy’ (Melbourne, Helsinki focus group A). One solution in Melbourne was to employ freelance artists in programmes that took art into open public spaces, with the city's historic laneways hosting music, visual art, and light installations by over 80 creatives in 2021. A comparable

The scale and scope of financial initiatives in different cities was highly variable.

programme of artist commissions was implemented in Brussels, where support for cultural and creative workers (and organisations) was framed as a ‘New Deal’. As a representative from that city explained:

We [took] some inspiration from the US president [FDR, in the 1930s] during the crisis. And we thought it was very important to support the artists, and how to support as artists, giving them opportunities to work. So we gave – in short – money to our cultural venues saying “you have to work for residencies with artists”. (Brussels, Helsinki focus group A).

In other cases, however, support was in the form not of loans or employment, but no-strings-attached funding. In Lisbon:

The most important [priority] was the support for artists and companies. We had two lines [...] for the artistic sector, one for individuals, and one for companies [...]. And the most important [thing about this] was that this funding, these grants, they didn't have the obligation to deliver anything. (Lisbon, Europe focus group).

The scale of these financial initiatives was often considerable, boosted by central government grants to help the sector. In Buenos Aires, for example, the financial relief programme brought ‘an additional extraordinary fund of 40 per cent in all our funding lines. [...] We had tax exemptions and we had special loans’ (Buenos Aires, interview). Yet even in this case, the city conceded it was not able ‘to replace fully that income that was not being generated’, meaning it continued to lobby vigorously for the reopening of cultural venues (see **Buenos Aires city case study**, below).

Overall, the scale and scope of financial initiatives in different cities was highly variable. In some cases the financial support packages seemed relatively modest given the potential scale of need.

1.3.2 The show must go on – meeting access & participation needs

Mitigation responses were, of course, not only aimed at supporting cultural and creative workers and organisations. They were also aimed at ensuring that city populations continued to have ‘cultural access’, or what can be understood, more broadly, as ‘cultural opportunity’ (Gross & Wilson, 2018), or ‘cultural rights’. The pandemic highlighted the value of cultural and creative activity (see, for example, Jeannotte, 2021), including as an important contributor to well-being, and a means of connecting people during periods of isolation. Initiatives globally highlighted this important dimension, including through public art. In Austin, for example, ‘we had a mural program that we were able to have artists create ‘be well’ murals, so it was specifically about health care, and mental health’ (Austin, North America focus group).

In some cities there was a particular emphasis on guaranteeing cultural access and cultural rights to a wider range of populations. This meant that the challenges posed by COVID-19 led to new ways to provide opportunities for people to take part in cultural and creative activities. As a representative from Milan put it, ‘we found new ways to get culture to other people or to many more people. And that was very positive’ (Milan, Europe focus group). For Milan, as for many cities, the investment in digitalisation, and the development of new kinds of digital ‘offer’ in relation to public culture, were seen as key parts of their response, with the potential to have lasting effects beyond the period of mitigation: ‘What good we took from the pandemic is an increased digitalisation’, alongside ‘an improved attention to the cultural welfare, because as a result of the pandemic, the importance of cultural services in supporting people’s wellbeing has become increasingly clear’ (Milan, Europe focus group. See **Milan city case study**, below.)

Notably, some institutions and venues were encouraged to become virtual institutions through the application of digital technologies, at the same time as many creative workers became de facto digital workers (Skaggs et al., 2023). Indeed, the prevalence of this is indicated by the fact that all but two survey respondents noted an acceleration of digital skills development in the sector when the pandemic first hit, and over two-thirds observed

investment in digital infrastructure and skills (18/23 respondents). As a representative from Dublin noted, the primary impetus for this was often survival, though this has led to lasting innovations in ways of working. During periods of social distancing, digital technologies enabled programmes to continue, and human connection to be sustained:

We need more of such cultural programs, we have to strengthen them, and help the mental health of people. So that's important. That's why our technology has helped us to strengthen connection during those difficult times. And we have decided to invest a lot in it. (Dublin, Europe focus group).

Other cities, too, reported significant investment in digital skills and capacity building – such as Hong Kong, where \$HK25million was given by the central lottery fund to 68 groups, to learn and develop the delivery of creative content via digital technology. Indeed, supporting cultural and creative organisations in pivoting to digital practices was an important part of the role of some city culture teams during the mitigation phase.

Some cities had very ambitious programmes of online activity to try to compensate for the lack of face-to-face events. Edinburgh, for example, sought to replicate its festival diary via 150 online events in 2020, which also had the effect of widening its international audience; Warsaw's Autumn music festival became a hybrid online and live event (the latter was in the form of smaller, neighbourhood concerts); whilst Sydney 2020 Writer's Festival started face-to-face but then pivoted to online. In the early days of the pandemic, there was much scepticism about online working, exhibition, and production. But in our focus groups/ interviews, and in the World Cities Culture Forum webinars, many cities reported the benefits. These included enabling cultural and creative activities to be more decentralised and democratised, though people continued to miss face-to-face experiences.

But it was not only through digital means that cultural opportunities were supported during the mitigation phase. Many other events moved from enclosed, indoor spaces to open, public spaces, in circumstances where outdoor in-person activities were possible within national health and safety regulations. Barcelona made increasing use of squares and streets for cultural events, working with local schools and cultural institutions, while Lisbon used local library spaces for small-scale cultural events to maintain a sense of cultural community. Toronto's Café Patio initiative took up curb-side space outside restaurants, allowing for the resumption of the night time economy even during lockdown. This was a model also pursued in Milan and in parts of London, where road closures and licensing reform in the summer of 2020 allowed business to recoup some of the income they had lost during initial lockdown.

1.3.3 Cultural 'care' workers – meeting wider community needs

In addition to meeting financial needs, and access and participation needs, during the mitigation phase city cultural policymakers also used their capacities and resources to respond to wider dimensions of the public health emergency. A representative from Sydney explained, for example, 'we immediately had to pull together to get food to a lot of people who were struggling. And that proved to show a whole lot of issues in our city that weren't working' (Sydney, Helsinki focus group B). In addition to providing support to accessing food, some city culture teams played an active role in supporting vaccination efforts, such as in Toronto.

In supporting responses to the wider health emergency, it was relatively easy for city governors to identify major cultural institutions that were underused during lockdown. These 'social assets' could then take on new roles, such as food banks or vaccination centres. As a representative from Edinburgh reported, 'having public buildings and having the assets of the cultural state', meant that cultural policymakers were in a position to help meet a range of urgent community needs, as these buildings 'became places where people could gather food, get support and relief, etcetera. Places like libraries, local arts centres, became foodbanks and COVID vaccination centres, etcetera' (Edinburgh, Helsinki focus group A). These efforts concur with the research findings of Fransen et al. (2021), who found that often it was organisations that previously had little experience of organising at a community scale that became significant in organising health care and support in COVID-19 times. Whilst,

In some cities there was a particular emphasis on guaranteeing cultural access and cultural rights to a wider range of populations.

Through their mitigation work, many city cultural policymakers undertook sustained processes of care.

then, cultural and creative organisations may have closed in their main function, they often remained valued as shared assets for communities (see also Champion et al., 2023).

In these ways, city culture teams – and many of those within the cultural and creative ecosystems they were supporting through this time – contributed to the expanded visions of ‘care’ that arose during the pandemic (see Wood & Skeggs, 2020; Chatzidakis & Segal, 2020; The Care Collective, 2020). Care involves paying attention to people’s needs, and taking responsibility for helping to meet those needs (Tronto, 2013), and some culture teams paid attention to, and took responsibility for meeting, a wide range of needs within their communities and networks. This was not only in respect of supporting health and social care efforts such as food banks and vaccination centres. There is a growing interest in understanding creativity (Wilson, 2018), cultural and creative work (Morse, 2021; Belfiore, 2022), and cultural policy (Wilson et al., 2020; Wilson & Gross, 2022) as practices of ‘care’. The evidence of the mitigation phase, presented in the preceding parts of this chapter, exemplifies this – with cultural policymakers paying attention to, and taking responsibility for meeting, the needs of a broad population of citizens and workers.

In this context, it is important to recognise the *labour of care* undertaken by policymakers during this period. Extraordinary physical and emotional pressures were experienced in meeting communities’ needs. As a representative from Dublin reported, ‘We had the longest lockdown I think in Europe. [...] And so actually, people were exhausted. And the challenge was the momentum and the energy to keep going. There were certain points, particularly in the early spring of 2021, and early 2022, where people were just like, “I’m done, I’m too tired”’ (Dublin, Europe focus group). Similarly, in Toronto, ‘We worked seven days a week. So we had no downtime. [...] you’re on the computer all the time. And so the people that we’re serving, we never saw them, because we were constantly putting out fires. So one of the challenges was firefighting, and just needing to manage the reality of human energy’ (Toronto, Helsinki focus group A). Through their mitigation work, then, many city cultural policymakers undertook sustained processes of care. As we will describe later in this chapter, and further in Chapters Two and Three, an important consequence of this was not only to put out ‘fires’, but also to establish new relationships, partnerships, and networks – through which new ways of doing urban cultural policy may be developing.

1.4 Recovery

Cities gradually moved into a phase of responding to COVID-19 where the focus became less on dealing with assessing and addressing immediate financial impacts, pivoting to digital activity, and dealing with unprecedented challenges of health and safety. Increasingly measures were about *recovery* rather than mitigation. At the time of our survey, in December 2022 – February 2023, a large majority of respondents felt they were no longer in the emergency response phase, but had moved into a process of recovery and renewal (see Figure 5). Importantly, this does not mean turning away from what was done in the mitigation phase. Approximately seven in ten respondents told us that they intended to continue to support policies and projects adopted during the pandemic. However, there was less consensus between World Cities Culture Forum partner cities when it came to whether pre-pandemic ways of working had resumed, with roughly equal numbers of survey respondents agreeing as disagreeing this was the case. There was also a spread of views as to whether there is clarity on which direction cultural and creative policy will take post-COVID.

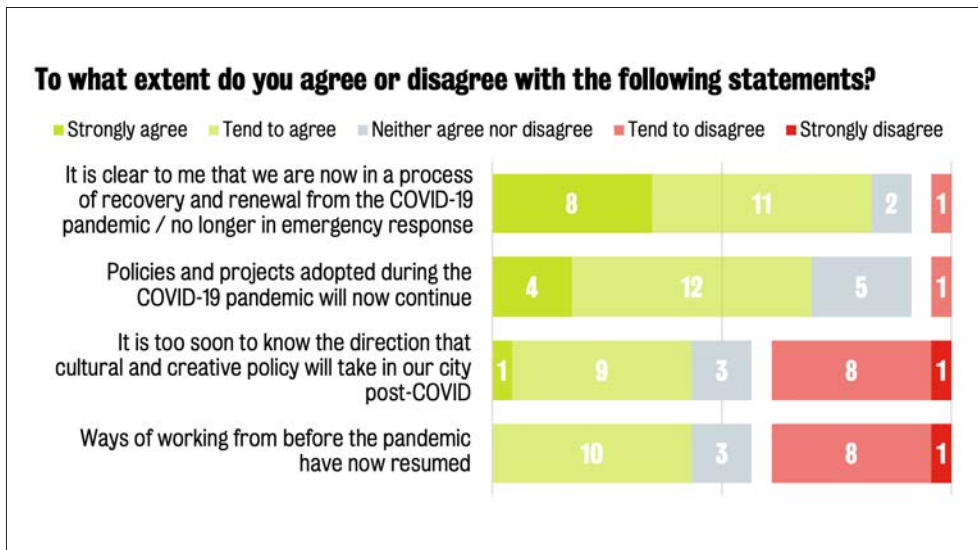


Figure 5. Recovery and renewal post-COVID (source: survey, n=23 – ‘Don’t knows’ not shown)

1.4.1 Build Back Better

In the recovery phase, it became increasingly possible for policymakers to turn their attention to strengthening the cultural and creative ecosystem of their cities. This involved attempts to reassess strategy and consider the longer-term trajectory of a city’s development in relation to future challenges. Here, the pandemic ‘pause’ allowed for critical reflection, taking stock of future priorities, and even re-energising city cultural policy. This often involved seeking to better integrate cultural policy within wider urban policies, and to suggest that the city needed to leverage culture and creativity to help ‘build back better’. This is reflected in the survey data, where three-quarters of respondents agreed that ‘culture and creativity are core elements of my city’s wider plans for recovery and renewal from the COVID-19 pandemic’, and that the pandemic ‘raised awareness of the importance of culture and creativity in my city’ (7 in 10 agree). Indeed, World Cities Culture Forum partner cities were often keen to emphasise the value that art and culture was recognised to have had during lockdown, not least in terms of promoting social well-being and connectivity.

When asked whether – when thinking about recovery – they focused more on returning to how things were before the pandemic, or whether they saw it as an opportunity to do things differently, survey respondents unanimously favoured the latter. All but one respondent agreed that ‘the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to imagine a better way of doing things in the cultural and creative sector’. There was no support for the alternative statement, ‘the sooner the cultural and creative sector can return to how things were before the COVID-19 pandemic, the better’. Around two-thirds of the representatives of partner cities who completed the survey felt that the sector would be better off over the longer term, compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic – five times the amount who felt the sector would be worse off or much the same as before (see Figure 6). This indicates a sense of hopefulness about the future of the cultural and creative sector, post-pandemic (and the theme of hope is discussed further in Chapter Three).

It is important, however, to recognise that different cities – and even individuals within them – indicated a variety of understandings of what ‘building back better’ means. When survey respondents were asked to express in their own words what this means for the cultural and creative sector, we found a range of meanings, including:

Three-quarters of respondents agreed that ‘culture and creativity are core elements of my city’s wider plans for recovery and renewal from the COVID-19 pandemic’.

Over the longer term, do you think that the cultural and creative sector in your city will be better off, worse off or about the same, than before the COVID-19 pandemic?

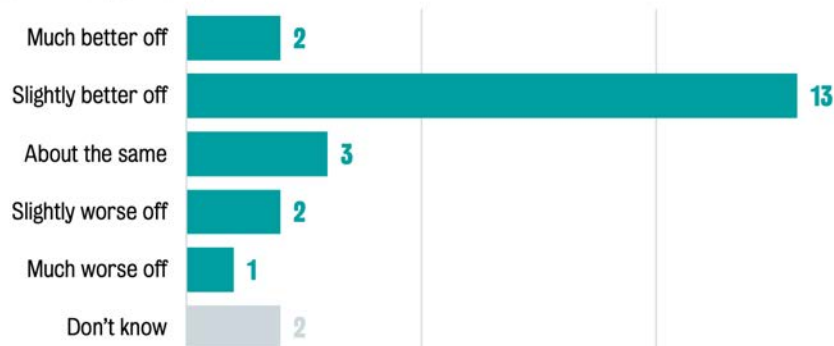


Figure 6. Hopefulness about the future of the cultural and creative sector post-COVID (source: survey (n=23))

Around two-thirds of the World Cities Culture Forum partner cities who completed the survey felt that the sector would be better off over the longer term, compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Connecting more with local communities** through investment in local content, building stronger connections to communities, organisations, audiences and local cultures, supporting the wellbeing of people locally.
- **Investing more in people** through offering greater security and equity of employment and income, focusing on employee retention, support for freelancers and addressing burnout.
- **A more equitable and inclusive sector** including increasing access to culture, addressing racism and racial justice, and striving for more diversity in the composition of the sector.
- **Being agile and resilient** including maintaining the flexibility of the pandemic times, harnessing the power of arts and culture to provide resilience as well as looking to alternative economic models to support that resilience.
- **Reimagining cultural spaces** to redefine the use of the public realm and the provision of creative spaces, as well as offering affordable living space for artists.
- **Pushing boundaries** including sustaining the technological and economic innovations during the pandemic, to be more experimental, challenging, and permissive of failure.
- **Reflecting on the past** to improve how future challenges are handled.

Additionally, when asked what the biggest challenges are facing their cities over the next 2-3 years – and implicitly, thereby, what some of the work of ‘building back better’ would need to focus on – we saw quite a wide range of responses:

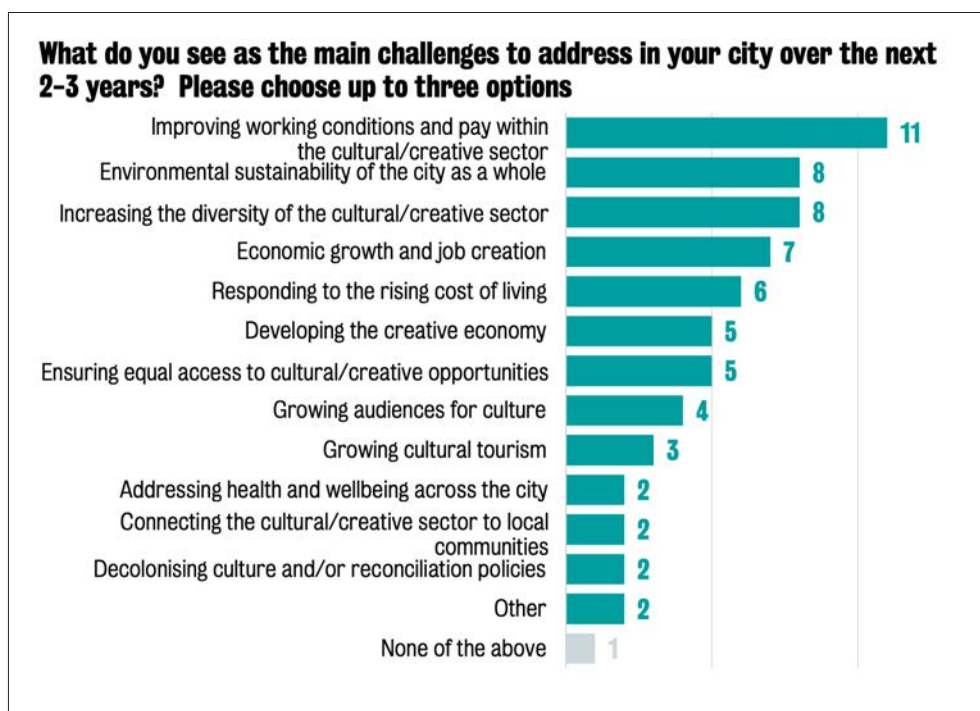


Figure 7. Challenges for the future (source: survey, n=23 – ‘Don’t knows’ not shown)

City representatives often indicated that cultural policymakers, and the cultural and creative organisations and workers they support, had the potential and the responsibility to step up as a key agent in post-pandemic recovery. In turn, it appeared they believed that cultural and creative workers needed to be recognised for their role in making cities good places to live in, and that cities needed to be liveable and affordable for them (see Wahba & Chun, 2022). City representatives often spoke of improving the welfare and well-being of cultural creative workers. This was especially so for those cities where pre-COVID conditions for these workers were often precarious, and where affordability was an issue. As one city representative explained, ‘COVID-19 did not create [...] the affordability crisis we’re facing, but it definitely has heightened and intensified some elements’ (Making Space for Culture webinar).

Previous research has indicated that cultural activity itself can encourage gentrification (Mathews, 2010). This is borne out in parts of the data. For example, in several cases the reliance of a city on a particular form of cultural tourism became evident during the pandemic (ie short-term renting and AirBnB), encouraging a strategic reorientation of tourism strategy post-COVID. Notably, one city reported that:

The tourism sector was already in crisis before COVID. It was already putting pressure on the infrastructure of the city, and we’ve seen this here, but also cities like Barcelona, Venice, you know, these smaller cities, and already the tourism was broken. The cities were not able to cope. So what then COVID has done is sort of taken away the problem, and we’ve seen that that’s not the solution, cities need visitors. But then [COVID] offers the chance to reboot [...] tourism. (The Future of Cultural Tourism webinar).

Emerging from the pandemic, this city has therefore attempted to discourage ‘stag party’ and ‘hen party’ tourism, moving into more diverse tourist markets, including domestic tourism. Such approaches are connected to other measures designed to address problems of affordability in these cities, via regulation and taxation (see Hübscher & Kallert, 2023). For example, in our survey, around a third of respondents indicated that they are considering future policies designed to create affordable, communally owned workspaces via ‘creative

City representatives often indicated that cultural policymakers, and the cultural and creative organisations and workers they support, had the potential and the responsibility to step up as a key agent in post-pandemic recovery.

Part of the process of looking towards recovery and rebuilding was to consider the legacies of mitigation initiatives: learning from what worked well during lockdown, with a view to building back better.

land trust’ ideas, which originated in San Francisco but which have informed policy in London, Amsterdam, Berlin, and latterly Sydney (see Scott et al., 2023). Whilst, then, there is a variety of understandings of what it means to ‘build back better’, there are clusters of shared challenges, opportunities, and ambitions observable across many of the cities.

1.4.2 Policy priorities, models & strategies

Part of the process of looking towards recovery and rebuilding was to consider the legacies of mitigation initiatives: learning from what worked well during lockdown, with a view to building back better. Moreover, COVID-19 often forced a re-evaluation of potential solutions to problems that were understood to have existed before the pandemic – such as unsustainable tourism, poor quality of the public realm, or unaffordable workspace. In some cases, this re-evaluation led city cultural policymakers to indicate that ‘transformational change’ would be needed. Some of the recovery policies highlighted by partner cities were therefore not direct responses to COVID-19, but were existing policies scaled up, or put into motion when the pandemic hit, that seemed to offer solutions to pre-existing problems. For example, the 15-minute city, in which there is interest amongst a substantial proportion of our survey respondents, as we discuss further in Chapter Three, was an idea promoted by Carlo Moreno (2019) prior to the pandemic.

In our survey, we directly asked respondents to comment on the policy ‘models’ they have considered applying within their city. A wide range of options were indicated as being considered. In particular, over half of respondents said they were considering new forms of funding and investment, such as public-private funding models, sustainability and climate change strategies, large scale and international cultural events such as biennials, and the 24-hour city model. (See Figure 8.)

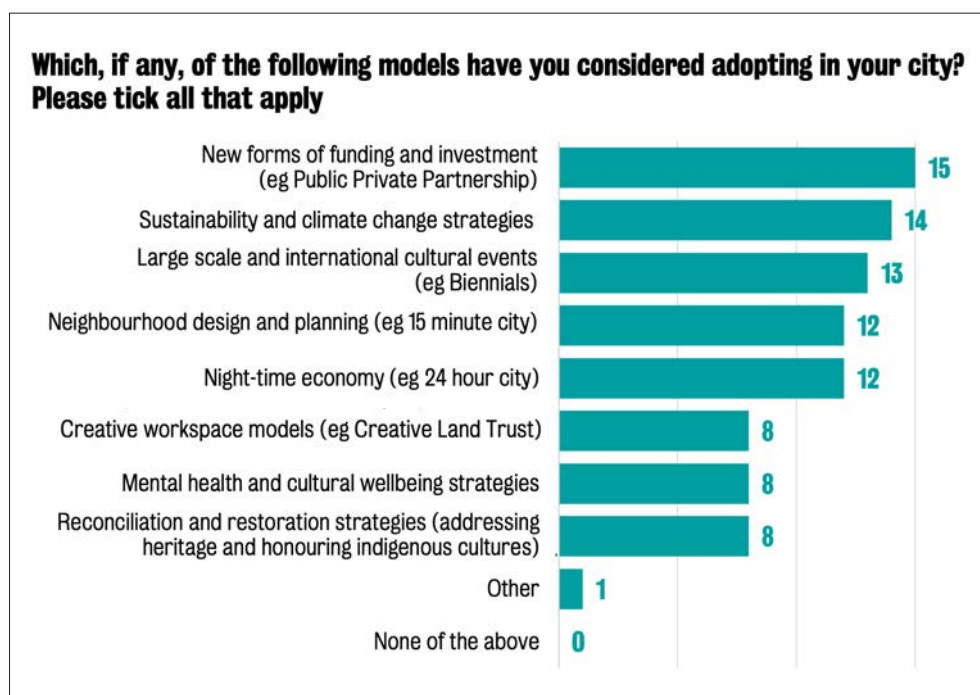


Figure 8. Policy models being considered in partner cities (source: survey (n=23))

Our four data sets, not only the survey, indicate considerable overlap in terms of the perceived role of cultural policy and other policy fields (eg planning policy). This includes, for example, new partnerships between public and private sectors, including improving ‘street culture’ through strategies based on ‘percent for art’ principles. In Toronto (see **Toronto city case study**, below), for instance, a programme called ‘Artscape Atelier’ acts as a connector between urban developers and artists, enabling new ways to commission public art and embed pieces within urban spaces. Across many cities, it appeared that there was considerable emphasis on taking culture to the streets, recognising that during the pandemic people were keen to experience outdoor culture. Many cities spoke of a ‘new normal’ where public space would take on an enhanced role as a setting for art and cultural life. Part of the value of this would be in environmental terms, with a move to more local and less carbon intensive activities. Promoting the 15-minute city idea, for example, one webinar contributor said, ‘the reality is that we have been living for several years in an abnormal situation with the climate change. [...] We needed to develop a new way for changing radically our urban lifestyles’ (The Future of the 15-Minute City webinar).

This sense of COVID-19 as a catalyst for new policy priorities, models, and strategies emerged in multiple focus groups and interviews. The data indicates that in many cities the pandemic encouraged ‘progressive’ cultural policy to come to the fore, not only in terms of taking culture to the street, but also embedding principles of cultural access, cultural opportunity, and cultural rights. This included a particular emphasis on decentring cultural provision – such as by using city resources to support cultural and creative activities in neighbourhoods and communities that had previously benefitted less directly from public spending on culture. This is reflected in the responses to a survey question on priorities for the cultural and creative sector over the next ten years, where ‘Widening access to cultural and creative opportunities’, and ‘Supporting culture and creativity across the city as a whole, not just the centre’, were seen as two of the most important among a set of potential priorities for the next decade (see Figure 9).

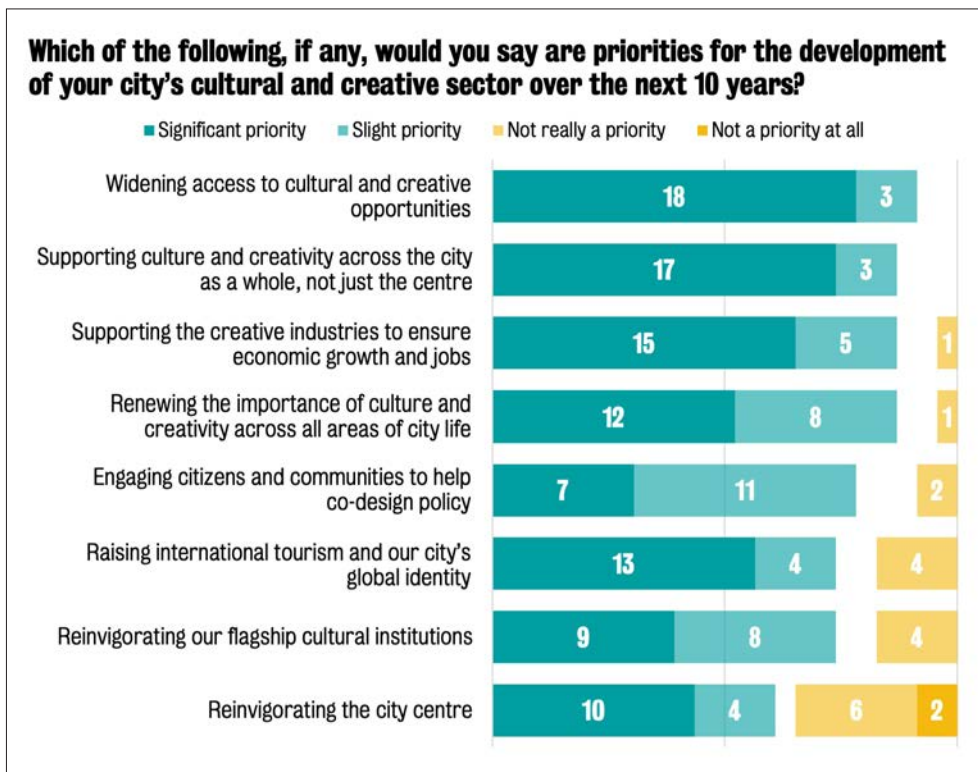


Figure 9. Priorities for development over the next decade (source: survey, n=23, ‘Don’t knows’ not shown)



IMAGE COURTESY OF CITY OF AUSTIN.

An experience shared widely amongst the cities was that their policy responses involved working closely with a broad range of organisations, communities, and individuals – often thereby forming new relationships, partnerships and networks.

In North American cities, there was also focus on issues of cultural reconciliation and racism, which were accentuated by the realisation that COVID-19 had particular impacts on people of colour (see Orford et al., 2023). In Toronto, for example, there has been an emphasis on ‘equity-deserving communities, largely: people of colour, black, indigenous people of colour communities, racialised people’ (Toronto, North America focus group). Related considerations are also in evidence in cities outside of North America, too. From Melbourne, for example, it was reported that ‘indigenous communities and artists have really been able to take a lot of attention over the last 18 months, [...with] culturally and linguistically diverse communities really getting a lot of attention financially and otherwise, which is awesome’ (Melbourne, The Role of Culture in City Recovery webinar).

1.4.3 In it together

Across both the mitigation and recovery phases, an experience shared widely amongst the cities was that their policy responses involved working closely with a broad range of organisations, communities, and individuals – often thereby forming new relationships, partnerships, and networks.

In the first instance, this was a consequence of the need to better understand what the cultural and creative ecosystem of the city actually consisted of. As a representative from one city explained, at the start of the pandemic:

We had the chance to map the cultural system. That's an opportunity for us. Why did we map better than in a healthy moment? Because when institutions, associations are suffering, the risk is that they're going to die, and they will not survive the long time of COVID, you have to map, you have to know, you have to listen to the needs. So mapping is something really important to recognise the network of cultural centres. (Helsinki focus group B).

The pandemic highlighted the importance of mapping and recognising the diversity of institutions, people, organisations, and networks that constitute a city’s cultural and creative ecosystem. World Cities Culture Forum partner cities report a variety of ways in which their knowledge of their city ecosystem increased following the outbreak of COVID-19, often via informal processes of consultation and network-building, but also through more formalised processes. Understanding the ecosystem, and helping those within the ecosystem, were inseparable. Moreover, it was often via close, ongoing conversations with cultural and creative organisations, workers, and communities that policymakers were able to iteratively develop suitable responses. In Buenos Aires (see **Buenos case study**, below), for example:

We had to work really hard and hand-in-hand with the cultural sector and with other agencies within the government to draw the protocols, to reactivate and to resume activities. So, that was really challenging, but also an opportunity for all the governments to understand cultural activity and its importance to the city. (Buenos Aires, Helsinki focus group A).

Responding to the pandemic also involved the formation of new multilateral networks of collaboration within cities. In one city, for example, during the pandemic a group of over 300 cultural institutions joined a Zoom call almost daily. This was ‘to deal with safety, to deal with advocacy, to deal with programming, to deal with the cooperation they need to get state and local government to pay attention to them’ (Cultural Tourism in a post-COVID World webinar).

The new relationships formed through processes of response to the pandemic have in some cities led to – or accelerated – changes in policy process and institutional arrangements. In Tokyo, for example:

One of the most impactful things [experienced during the pandemic] is shifting the policymaking [process itself]. Before, Tokyo’s culture policy was divided in three sectors, one cultural promotion, and second is the creative industries and the third is sightseeing. So, each sector used to have their own activities and policies to support culture and the arts. But after the impact of COVID-19, the government has started to think overlapping in those three sectors. So, we can say that we have now – this is a new policy – collaboration with those three sectors together (Tokyo, East Asia focus group).

In Edinburgh, similarly, the experience of responding to the pandemic has affected policy processes: ‘what it’s done is it’s allowed us to collaborate better, both internally within the council and [with] external partners. It’s allowed us to create and find new partnerships that we need’ (Edinburgh, Helsinki Summit focus group B).

In addition to their benefits, these new collaborations also raise challenging questions for the ongoing ‘post-COVID’ era. Given the range of people involved, how can city policymakers prioritise among the range of potential aims they may wish to fulfil within their cultural and creative ecosystem? There may be a risk that, with many priorities and possibilities, city culture teams could get ‘lost’ as a range of interests compete for recognition. Moreover, these challenges of prioritisation and clarity of strategic purpose may be compounded by cultural policy interventions sometimes requiring coordination across different geographic scales – potentially involving information-gathering and/or decision-making at neighbourhood, city, metropolitan, regional, national, and/or international scales. (Both Tokyo and Toronto, for example, highlighted the federal system of government within their respective countries.) Alongside, then, the potential of these new cultural policy relationships to enable cities to ‘build back better’, there are important questions regarding how they can be effectively sustained in practice – in the context of cultural and creative ecosystems characterised by a complex range of interests, priorities, and needs.

The pandemic highlighted the importance of mapping and recognising the diversity of institutions, people, organisations and networks that constitute a city’s cultural and creative ecosystem.

1.5 Six city case studies



AUSTIN THE FUTURE OF... POLICY INNOVATION

Many World Cities Culture Forum partner cities reported opportunities for policy acceleration and innovation during the pandemic. In our focus groups, policymakers from Austin shared their experiences of doing things in new ways. This included the speed they were able to roll out grants. A total of 5,605 COVID relief grants were made to creatives between April 2020 and November 2022, totalling \$29,635,539. This included funds to individuals, non-profits, and other businesses. Many of these grants addressed racial equity. In addition to the financial support provided, the emergency processes of distributing funds created opportunities for Austin's cultural policymakers to develop 'better conversations and better relationships with the public', new perspectives on future programmes of work, and 'a permanent re-evaluation and re-exploration' of their role in the city (Austin, North America focus group).

Looking to the future, Austin highlighted challenges and opportunities for sustaining the policy innovation beyond the pandemic's emergency phase. As the period of quick-paced crisis management came to an end, some opportunities for innovation appeared to be lost (see Chapter Three for further detail). In this context, policymakers from Austin highlighted the need to 'do things differently' at the highest levels of city government to enable and sustain conditions conducive to innovative policymaking. They also highlighted cultural/creative policymakers as uniquely positioned to work in innovative new ways.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Mitigation with a focus on racial equity

In 2020 the City of Austin worked to mitigate the historical and compounding effects of COVID-19 on BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) communities, by shifting the deepest funding cuts away from ethnic minority groups. COVID-19 drastically reduced the amount of income raised by the Hotel Occupancy Tax in Austin, leading to arts budget cuts. The city of Austin introduced a funding matrix for their 2021 budget which meant no percentage reductions to Black contractors and groups, and a mitigated (12 per cent) cut to Asian, Latino, African, and Native American categories.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Recovery with the Civilian Conservation Corps

Launched in 2020 and renewed in 2023, the Austin Civilian Conservation Corps programme employs local artists to create new work to address safety, mental health, and community healing in the wake of COVID-19. With a budget of \$1 million, the programme takes influence from FDR's New Deal, and has seen artists create 'be well' murals as part of a mural programme focused on healthcare and mental health in the city.

BUENOS AIRES THE FUTURE OF... POLICY PARTNERSHIPS

The establishment of new relationships, partnerships and networks between policymakers and the creative communities they served was a crucial experience during the pandemic, across World Cities Culture Forum partner cities. Buenos Aires exemplified this in their sustained engagement with cultural venues, artists, and sector representatives to negotiate safe re-opening protocols and procedures. Conversing with the sector almost daily at the height of the pandemic, policymakers in the city formed re-opening policies in collaboration with cultural venues, cultural workers, and government health departments. As one policymaker explained, this was important in helping the cultural sector to reopen. But also very important, and with wider consequences, was the process itself:

We worked with every sector to understand their special needs, and how and in which circumstances they would be able to resume activities like, for example, which percentage of audience would allow them to reopen their spaces without losing money. So I believe that process and working side by side with them was really important for us, to build trust between public and private sector. (Buenos Aires interview).

As a result of this work, new and sustained relationships with the sector have formed – based on a mutual understanding and respect for the work both sides are putting in to create a sustainable cultural and creative ecosystem in Buenos Aires.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

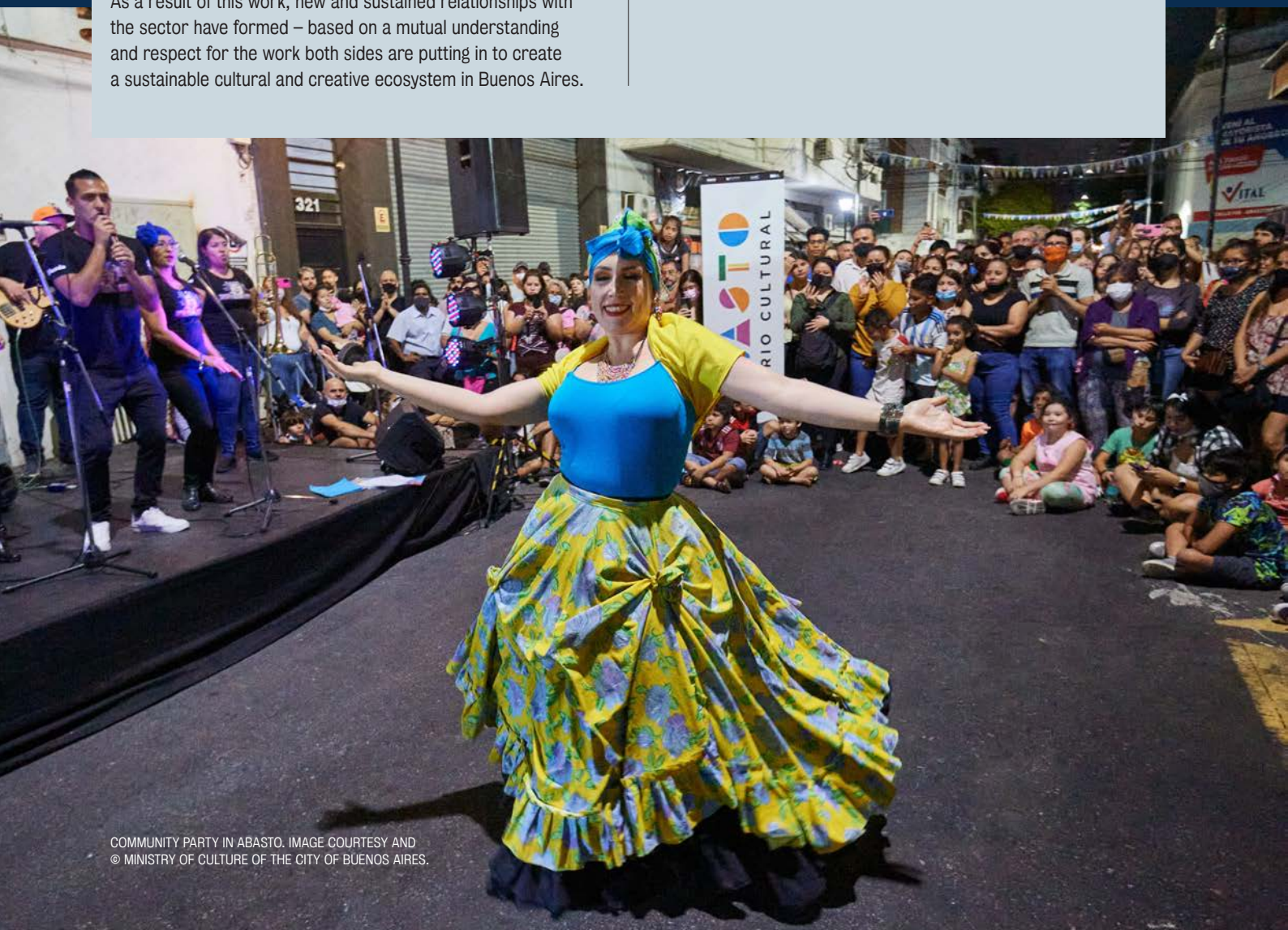
Mitigation with Culture at Home

In 2020 Buenos Aires launched *Cultura en Casa* (Culture at Home), bringing citizens a different programme to their home each day. Through this initiative, citizens were able to continue engaging with the cultural life of the city, and artists and cultural producers were able to share their work.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Recovery with digital nomads

In 2021 Buenos Aires introduced a special visa for ‘digital nomads’ – allowing temporary residence for up to a year, exclusive benefits for using flexible workspaces, and assistance in finding accommodation in the city. Encouraging these new long-stay visitors to the city was designed to contribute to Buenos Aires’ cultural and creative ecosystem and boost the economy.





LONDON THE FUTURE OF... CITY CENTRES

As with many partner cities across the World Cities Culture Forum, London faced empty city centre streets at the height of the pandemic. London took on the double challenge of revitalising the city centre and supporting the multitude of local 'town centres', within the city, that were essential to London's communities during COVID-19.

In the early stages of lockdown and recovery, London's cultural policymakers worked hard with colleagues across city government to ensure that high streets, neighbourhood amenities and meeting points (such as parks and school pick-up areas), and transport links remained safe and open. This included tactical urbanism interventions like low traffic neighbourhoods and the expansion of cycle lanes and pavements. It also included the expansion of the Greater London Authority (GLA)'s High Streets for All mission, supporting experimental uses of London's high streets and public spaces, working to keep highstreets animated and safe in the '24-hour city'. These interventions ensured that whilst the city centre remained quiet, local neighbourhoods were supported in their new and long term uses.

London's city centre, however, was not forgotten. The relaxation of public licensing measures, for example, meant that the streets of the Soho area became lively spaces for outdoor eating, drawing Londoner's back to the city centre. And in an ongoing effort to encourage visitors to return to London's flagship institutions and revitalise domestic and international tourism, the Mayor Sadiq Kahn launched 'Let's do London' (see below) to promote the reanimation of the city centre.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Mitigation by London's Culture at Risk office

Policymakers in London helped those organisations most at risk across the city during the pandemic by expanding London's existing Culture at Risk team, and mobilising staff to provide immediate front-line support and advice to creative organisations. This existing knowledge base and organisational support allowed London's policymakers to act rapidly and effectively to assist those cultural institutions most at risk of closure, often acting more quickly than national government and funding agencies were able to – and highlighting the importance of long-term mapping and monitoring of the city's cultural ecosystem.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Recovery with 'Let's Do London' Campaign

In May 2021 London launched its biggest ever domestic tourism campaign, 'Let's Do London', part of a £7 million investment into the reopening of central London post-COVID. The campaign formed an important part of reviving the city centre, encouraging Londoner's to return, and attracting visitors from across the UK to the capital. Working across the cultural sector and with tourism bodies, the campaign sought to revitalise London's economy, with an initial focus on food and outdoor culture as part of a safe re-opening.



MILAN THE FUTURE OF... ART & CULTURE IN THE PUBLIC REALM

COVID-19 accelerated many urban policies concerning art and culture in the public realm. Milan exemplified this, with the expansion of their *Piazze Aperte* (Open Squares), and other ‘tactical urbanism’ policies throughout the pandemic. These included introducing bike lanes, the closure of streets outside schools, and the re-purposing of car parks for markets and outdoor eating. The extent of interest in this was considerable, with Milan receiving almost 5000 applications from communities wishing to repurpose public space when the programme first opened. Cultural producers played a critical role in animating these new interventions in the public realm, not only in the design of street furniture, but also in performing for communities. In the May 2020 *Piano City* events, for example, mobile piano bikes (pianos fitted into the front frame of a three wheeled cycle) played from squares and parks.

Policymakers from Milan reflected on COVID-19 as a time of substantial policy change, including experiments that were in their infancy at the outset of the pandemic being rolled out across the city with large-scale support. As within other partner cities, however, there was also some opposition to these changes to the public realm. In this context, it was important for cultural policymakers in Milan to be able to draw strength in the global response – indicating successful similar initiatives within the World Cities Culture Forum network that were working in other cities in Europe and across the world.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Mitigation with the Cultural Plan

In May 2020 Milan announced their Cultural Plan as a part of the city’s Emergency Fund for Mutual Aid, supporting cultural spaces, cultural workers, and innovative projects as culture reopened. With a primary focus on grassroots and local culture, the plan exemplified the increasing recognition of local cultural needs by World Cities Culture Forum partner cities during the pandemic.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Recovery with Air of Culture

During Milan’s second phase of reopening in 2020, the city launched *Air of Culture*. This programme of outdoor events organised by the city’s cultural institutions – including open air cinemas, concerts by La Scala Philharmonic Orchestra, and theatre performances by Piccolo Teatro – was typical of the city’s policies, which used art and culture to expand uses of the public realm.



TOKYO THE FUTURE OF... MAJOR CULTURAL EVENTS

The pandemic undermined plans for major cultural events and festivals, with large scale gatherings and international travel restricted. Tokyo faced this challenge as they dealt with the postponement and re-scheduling of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Tokyo Metropolitan Government's Olympic cultural programme, 'Tokyo Tokyo' festival, also had to be rescheduled. Changes had to be made to the programme – including no longer inviting artists from overseas to present their work, moving certain events online, and reducing audience numbers. Thorough mitigation measures and contingency planning were put in place, and the festival did go ahead, including an exhibition of Tokyo-themed works drawn by Japanese manga artists, Butoh performances, and large-scale art projects across the city.

Cultural policymakers from Tokyo reported that the Tokyo Tokyo festival played an important role in connecting people and in enlivening the city, contributing to the recovery and future priorities of the city. Moreover, as mentioned in section 1.4.3, in our focus groups they told us that the pandemic was a turning point for the city's cultural policy. Looking to the future, Tokyo Metropolitan Government are now focused on building connections with local artists and cultural workers, and on combining their formerly separated areas of policy in arts, the creative industries, and tourism, to promote Tokyo internationally.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Mitigation with Video Arts Commissions

In 2020 Tokyo Metropolitan Government launched a support programme for artists and cultural practitioners living in the city, granting them funds to make video works. These videos were then shared on an online platform for citizens to watch at home. The programme was so popular that funding was increased from 500 million yen to 2.8 billion yen.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Recovery with Civic Creative Base Tokyo

Tokyo's recently opened Civic Creative Base aims to support the creative practice of artists in the city by providing them with space. The city has appointed artists there, and is supporting them to create new works. Rather than the works themselves being commissioned, there is an emphasis on the artists' creative practice.

TORONTO THE FUTURE OF... URBAN CULTURAL FUNDING

The City of Toronto's rapid response to the effects of COVID-19 on the cultural life of the city saw policymakers providing emergency financial support to artists, leveraging public private partnerships, and further developing philanthropic collaborations. This work continued into the recovery phase, with policymakers reflecting on the development of recovery policies relating to reopening public space, equity considerations, and community-led cultural district planning.

In the City's close relationship with Artscape, a not-for-profit based in Toronto that 'makes space for creativity and transforms communities' (Artscape, n.d.), they have been developing innovative urban funding programmes such as Artscape Atelier. This is an intermediary between urban developers and artists that provides a way for developers to procure public art, and for street furniture to be embedded into the built environment. These programmes were accelerated and scaled up to provide work for artists through the pandemic.

One critical element for the future, reflected on by our focus group participants from Toronto, was the challenge of measuring impacts and outcomes during the COVID crisis, and therefore the subsequent challenge of evidencing the importance of the programmes initiated. Our participants highlighted the need, beyond the pandemic, to continue articulating 'the importance of government investment and culture, using outcome-based measures' and 'being able to tell the story of why governments continuing to invest in this area matters to people' (Toronto, North America focus group).

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

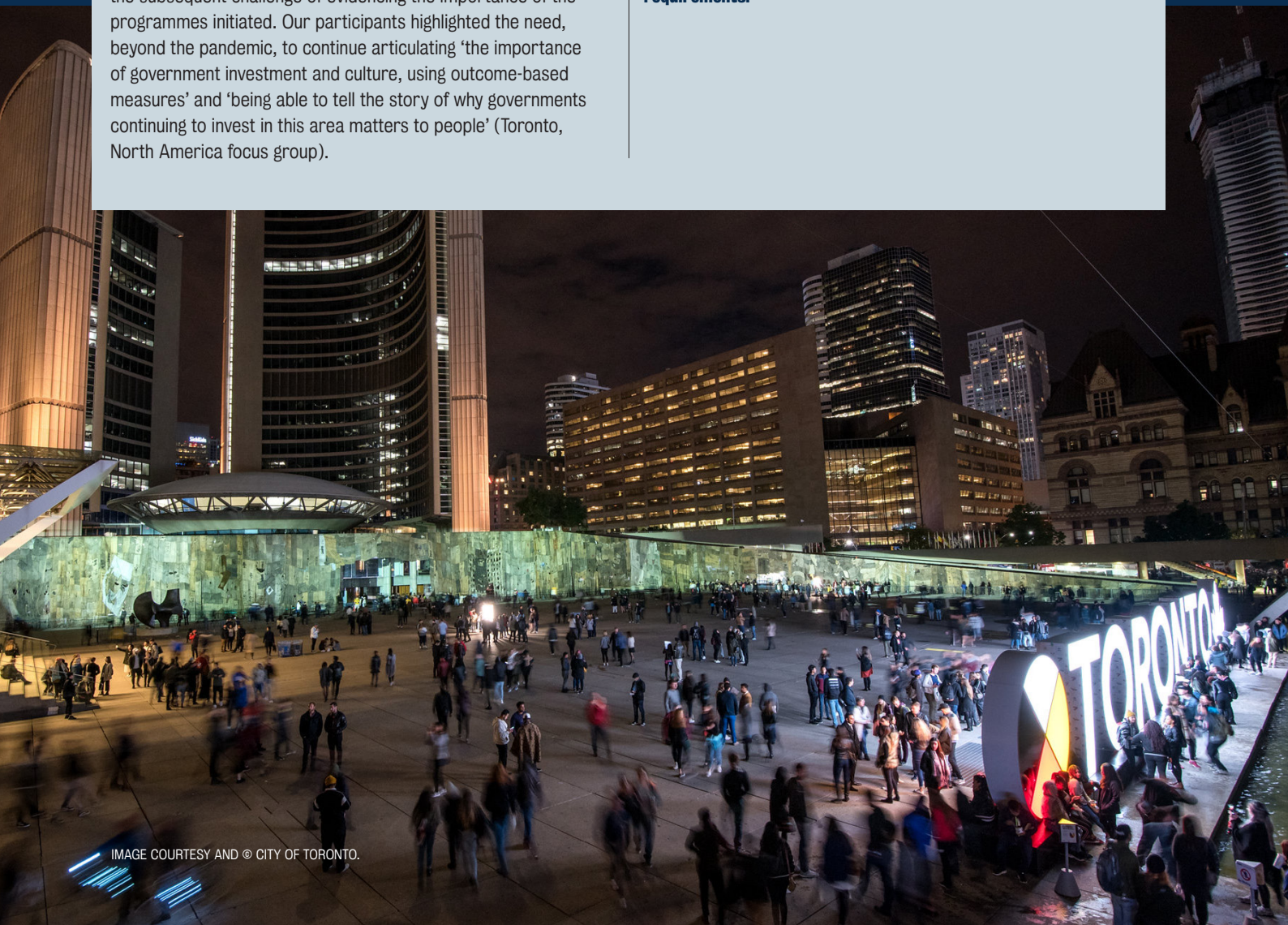
Recovery with ShowLoveTO Partner programme

In an effort to bring cultural life safely back to the city, the ShowLoveTO Partner activation programme funded one-off events across the city in 2021. These included performances, public exhibitions and heritage events, and provided additional support to local organisations working to bring communities safely back together.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Mitigation through waiving grant requirements

Toronto Arts Council (TAC) grant recipients were able to postpone or adjust projects affected by the pandemic without penalty from the council. Organisations receiving core funding were not required to have replacement programming for events or activities delayed or cancelled due to COVID-19. This and similar approaches – intended to reduce the pressure on core arts institutions – were typical across World Cities Culture Forum partner cities, many of whom introduced flexibility into their requirements.



CHAPTER 2
WHAT WAS
THE ROLE OF
THE WORLD
CITIES CULTURE
FORUM?

Alongside the partnerships and networks we observed at a city level, our Creative Recovery research also focused on the international network constituted by the World Cities Culture Forum itself. As explained in the introduction, one of our research questions focused on the role of the Forum in supporting urban cultural policymakers to respond to the challenges of the pandemic. In this shorter second chapter, we discuss this second question – before further developing key aspects of this discussion in Chapter Three. In doing so, we draw upon the webinar transcripts, focus groups/interviews, and our survey.

Over two-thirds of the survey respondents said the connection to the World Cities Culture Forum was useful in helping them to respond to the challenges arising from COVID-19 – the majority of whom described the relationship as very useful (n=10). By contrast, only a quarter of respondents said the connection was either not very useful (n=4) or not useful at all (n=2) in helping them to weather the challenges of the pandemic.

Over three-quarters of survey respondents agreed that the connection to the World Cities Culture Forum allowed them to ‘learn from the experiences of other cities to implement new policies and projects’. In general, the representatives who completed the survey found the full range of resources provided by the Forum to be useful (see Figure 10). However, the strongest support can be seen for the Annual Summit and the Leadership Exchange Programme.

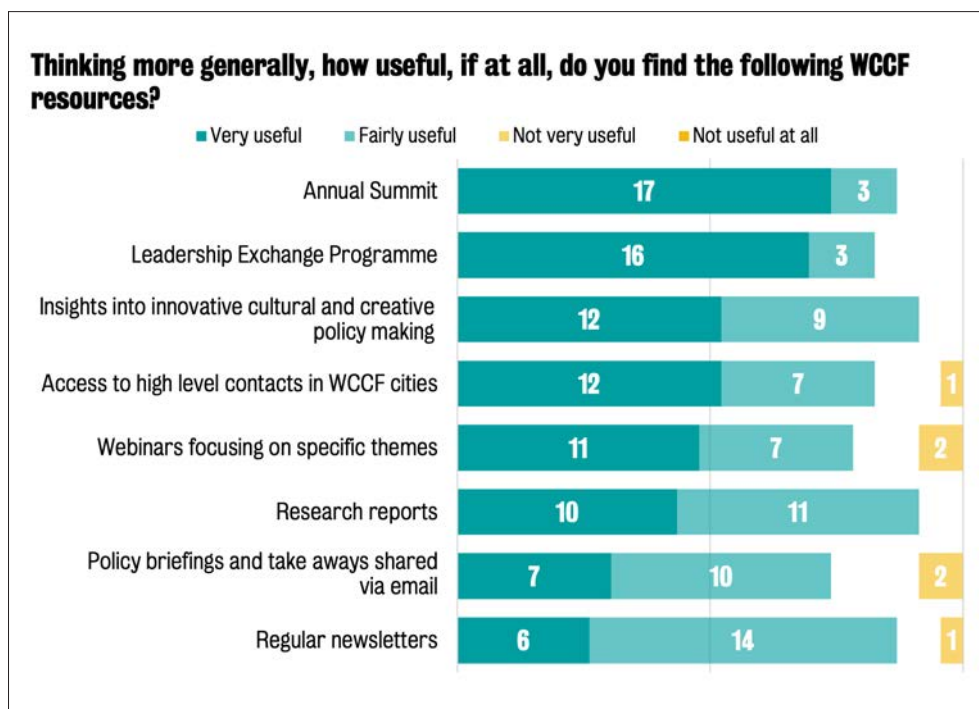


Figure 10. Usefulness of World Cities Culture Forum resources (source: survey (n=23 respondents), ‘Don’t knows’ not shown)

We also asked how the resources supplied by the World Cities Culture Forum helped cities to respond to the challenges arising from the pandemic, focusing on webinars, summits, and the network overall. The most important aspects of the webinars tended to be the act of sharing and learning from others, rather than addressing a specific theme or challenge – though a majority of respondents found all of these functions useful to a degree (see Figure 12). Yet it is notable that over half of those surveyed found it very useful to learn from policy and project examples of what worked in other cities (13/23 respondents), and to share challenges and solutions with other cities (12/23 respondents), and to share challenges and solutions with other cities (12/23).

In general, the representatives who completed the survey found the full range of resources provided by the World Cities Culture Forum to be useful.

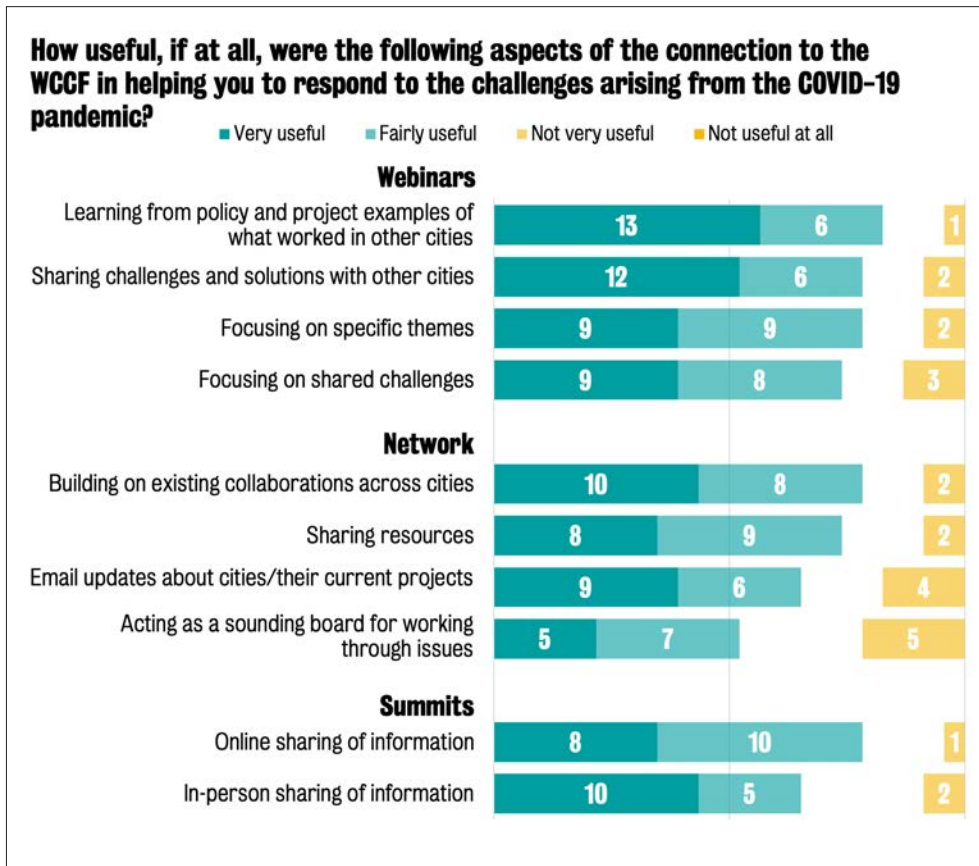


Figure 11. Usefulness of the World Cities Culture Forum webinars, network and summits during the COVID-19 pandemic (source: survey (n=23 respondents), ‘Don’t knows’ not shown)

The value that partner cities place on the opportunity to learn from the practices of others is also borne out in the webinar transcripts. This includes examples of ‘policy transfer’, with emphasis on the value of sharing ideas and experiences:

So, we have our Creative Enterprise Zones and also the Creative Land Trust, both of which are around creating affordable spaces in London. And that means affordable spaces not just for the immediate future, but for future generations as well. And it might be worth noting that the Creative Land Trust actually came through this forum from San Francisco. That was where we got the idea from. So it goes to show that idea sharing is very, very, very helpful. (London, The Future of Cultural Funding webinar).

The most important of the four functions asked about in the survey were building on existing collaborations (approximately four in five respondents said they found this useful) and sharing resources (three quarters found useful). The role of the World Cities Culture Forum as a sounding board for working through issues had relatively lower importance: only half of those

surveyed felt this was a useful aspect of the connection to the network during the pandemic, though there was marginally more support for learning about what was happening in other cities via email updates (see Figure 11).

The importance of collaboration and sharing is also reflected in the cities that World Cities Culture Forum partner cities looked to learn from and connect with during the pandemic. When asked to name up to three cities they felt had dealt well with pandemic related challenges, survey respondents mentioned a range of cities, with approximately three in five of these references being to members of the World Cities Culture Forum network. Yet when it comes to cities that partner cities actively contacted to talk about addressing the challenges arising from the pandemic, the balance of partner cities is much higher, at four in five of the cities mentioned. In all but one of the remaining cases, the connections made outside of the network were in the same country, or via another network – the Music Cities Network. The Forum therefore clearly had a brokering role in facilitating connections across geographic boundaries, with the global scope of these connections highlighted in Figure 12.

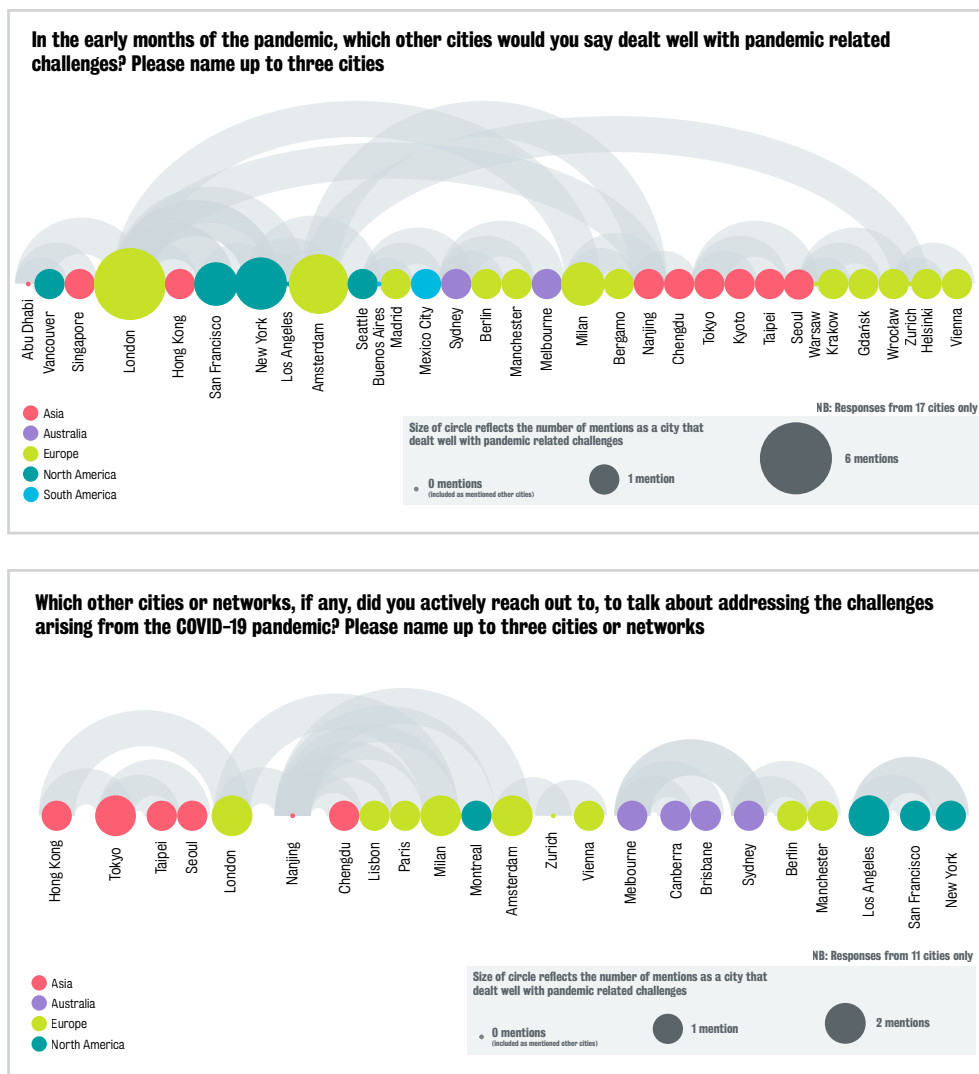


Figure 12. Network map: cities identified as responding well to pandemic challenges (top), and cities contacted to discuss pandemic challenges (bottom). Grey lines indicate one city identifying another as responding well to pandemic challenges (top), or contacting another city to address pandemic challenges (bottom).

There were several reasons why these individuals sought to learn from and collaborate with these cities, revealed through an open text question in the survey.⁵ The most common reason given was that they were experiencing similar challenges, be it the impact on the sector or having a sector profile that is similar in its needs, facing similar restrictions from national policy, or being further along in experiencing the impact of the pandemic. Learning from the experiences of other cities that were first impacted by COVID-19 was a theme that arose in focus groups:

I remember that Milan, you were the first ones to lock down. [...] In Portugal, we started our measures after speaking with Milan because they were the ones who taught us. Because the first impression in the very early stages of COVID was that, “okay, these events are not going to happen. Maybe the city doesn’t need to give this [money] for these events”. And from Milan, they [...] were saying, “No, No, you are going to need a lot of money for things not to happen”. (Lisbon, Europe focus group).

Hearing from other cities that were ‘further ahead’ in some of their experiences also applied to policy delivery as well. In the topics discussed in webinars this included, for example, hearing about whether measures that began as temporary may be adopted on a longer-term basis, such as the introduction of al fresco dining, discussed in the Night Time Economy webinar. It was this sharing of information that one interviewee saw underpinning agility in the face of future crises: ‘we hope we don’t have a COVID crisis again, but we need to be ready to manage crisis, so having a quick response [by learning from others] is part of what we are looking for’ (Buenos Aires, interview).

Many World Cities Culture Forum partner cities seemed keen to learn from and collaborate with particular cities, proclaiming their openness to sharing challenges, solutions, and lessons learnt. This not only included sharing of experiences and data on how cultural and creative communities were impacted, but also being open about failure:

The third theme [in today’s webinar] has been unlocking culture safely. [...] As we’re all on various parts of this COVID journey, what has been super helpful is just to share what we’re doing and how we’re managing it, and what we’ve tried and how we’ve failed, and what we can learn from each other in unlocking culture in a safe way. (Making Space for Culture webinar).

In the webinars, there were also articulations of the ‘advocacy role’ of the Forum and its partner cities, within the conditions of uncertainty posed by the pandemic. As indicated above, in the **Milan city case study**, this included the benefits when making the case for a policy within your own city of being able to point to a similar approach being taken in another:

I think what is very successful from this period is that all the cities responded with the same answer, or more or less the same approach. So, it was very easy for us saying, “Hey, we’re doing what London is doing and we’re doing what Paris is doing, we’re doing what Rotterdam is doing. We’re doing what all the other cities in the world are doing.” So basically we were not alone. Also, we inspired other Italian cities, and I think somehow this being a kind of global response to this crisis by transforming tactical urbanism methodology from a niche thing to a kind of mainstream, it was very helpful in order to say, “Hey, we’re just doing what everyone is doing”. (Milan, COVID & the Public Realm webinar).

For some cities, their experiences during the pandemic confirmed the ongoing value of international networks, and of the World Cities Culture Forum in particular.

⁵ Also to note: the size of London in the top graph is likely to be partly a function of key aspects of how the World Cities Culture Forum functions. It is based in London and chaired by London’s Deputy Mayor for Culture, Justine Simons, so London has a particular visibility and influence within the network.

Relationship with the World Cities Culture Forum and how it could help in the future

For some cities, their experiences during the pandemic confirmed the ongoing value of international networks, and of the World Cities Culture Forum in particular. A representative from Oslo explained, 'I think the pandemic helped solidify the importance of international networking in all sectors and in all departments. So definitely there was never a discussion of "should we still pay for being part of the World Cities Culture Forum?"'. It was never in any danger.' (Oslo, interview). For a representative from Buenos Aires, the network continues to have importance as the city turns towards recovery, with learning from other cities vital in developing future approaches:

Now, for example, working on recovery, we are launching a new programme that looks to foster international filmmaking in the city. And we are working with Sao Paulo and with other cities that already have these programmes, to understand how they work, how did they manage to implement them, and which resources they had. So yes, we usually work with other cities to understand how they are dealing with the problems, and how they are measuring the results. And it's really useful for us, it was really, really useful. (Buenos Aires, interview).

When asked how the Forum could best support them in meeting their priorities for the future, three distinct yet interlinked themes emerged within open text responses in the survey:

1. Enabling sharing of experiences (mentioned by 10/23 respondents):

The importance of discussing and sharing examples of best practice across the globe, as well as where things don't work. This can serve, for example, to 'inspire others in planning and policymaking' (anonymous survey respondent) and to 'promote the value of diversity and mutual understanding' (anonymous survey respondent).

2. Opening lines of communication (mentioned by 7/23 respondents):

Building relationships among partner cities, particularly through facilitating interactions to meet and talk with colleagues from other cities. Two respondents also specifically mentioned the importance of continuing to support leadership exchanges, both online and in person – as takes place through The Leadership Exchange programme.

3. Sharing knowledge (mentioned by 7/23 respondents):

Sharing knowledge via workshops, case studies and evidence on specific topics – including effectively implemented practices.

The importance of the World Cities Culture Forum in brokering global connections can again be seen in the cities that partner cities are looking towards as models to learn from, as they move towards recovery and renewal. In all but one case (Singapore), the cities that survey respondents said they are seeking to learn from are formally part of the network (see Figure 13). Moreover, many of these links cut across continents, with a clear focus on looking to Europe for models, particularly London (mentioned by eight of 12 cities that responded to this question), Paris (four of 12) and Amsterdam (three of 12).⁶

⁶ Only three cities that responded to this question were located in Europe.

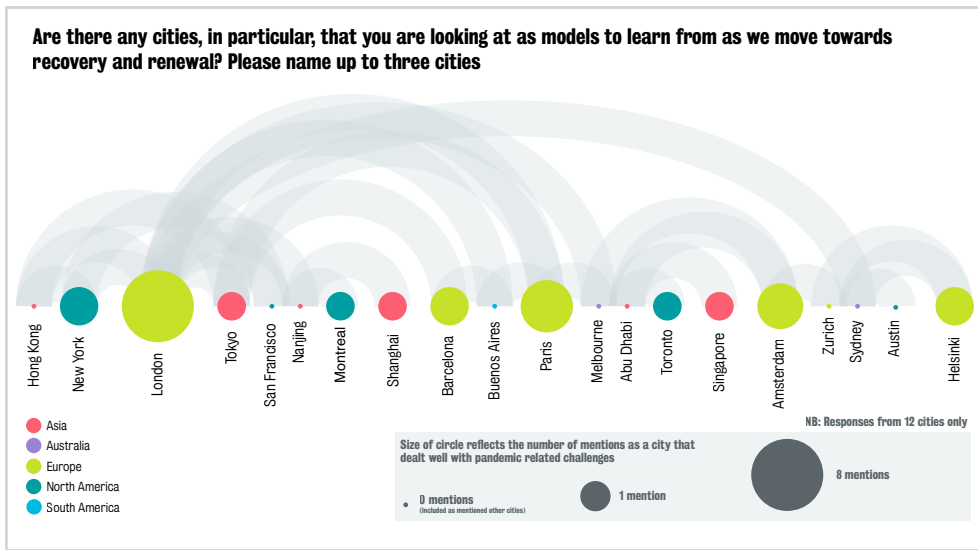


Figure 13. Network map of cities that World Cities Culture Forum partner cities seek to learn from for recovery and renewal

In an open text question, the most common reasons given for looking to these cities was due to their economic model (for example, creative and night time economies, or the development of alternative funding models in general), or innovative practice. Innovative practice, here, was not just in terms of integrating digital technology. It also included, for example, pioneering ‘smart innovation in how to deliver work for the community’ (anonymous survey respondent). Others also emphasised models for rethinking physical spaces, with Paris and Barcelona singled out for ‘leading the way’ with the 15-minute city model; ‘urban renewal based on an idea of people-centred development as well as cherishing local culture’; and also models for ‘safeguarding cultural assets against the permanent closures and losses that the pandemic exacerbated’ (anonymous survey respondents).

The World Cities Culture Forum, then, has not only helped its partner cities to respond to the immediate challenges posed by the pandemic. Its role has also been to support them to look to the future. We now move to Chapter Three, where this role – and a range of factors that can support city cultural policymakers to creatively imagine and developing post-COVID futures – are discussed in greater detail.

The World Cities Culture Forum has not only helped its partner cities to respond to the immediate challenges posed by the pandemic. Its role has also been to support them to look to the future.

CHAPTER 3
CULTURAL
POLICY &
POST-COVID
URBAN
FUTURES

The widespread disruption, loss and suffering experienced during the pandemic was accompanied by discussions of brighter futures, including how to ‘build back better’. In conducting this research with the World Cities Culture Forum, our concern was not only to understand how cities responded to the pandemic in support of culture. It was also to understand what implications these responses have for the future: in particular, for the role of cultural policy in shaping post-COVID urban futures. We address these implications in this chapter, drawing particularly on our focus groups and the webinar transcripts.

3.1 Conditions for imagining & developing post-covid urban futures

How the future is imagined – and who is involved in imagining and developing the future – is a key question for democratic policymaking (Urry 2016). In the first half of this chapter, we examine the challenges and opportunities that city cultural policymakers experienced during the pandemic, specifically with respect to their capacity to imagine what the future could and should be like. In doing so, we identify a set of conditions that may support policymakers in exercising and extending their capacities to imagine and develop possible futures for their cities.

3.1.1 Extended time horizons

Speaking at the webinar devoted to the Night Time Economy, in September 2021, a representative from Amsterdam said:

One thing I am struggling with is [...], we want to have all these discussions with the night time economy, with the night time cultural sector, about the much more long-term approach. How can you make sure that it's not only about the short-term measurements regarding space, funding, permits etc, but how can you make them part of that delivery for a much more long-term approach. That's something we are trying to figure out, how we can strike a balance between it. (Amsterdam, Opportunities for the Night Time Economy webinar).

This illustrates an important aspect of the pandemic experience for urban policymakers. Under the pressure to respond to urgent challenges, the short-term loomed large. The data tells us about the immediacy of the timeframes within which World Cities Culture Forum partner cities were often working whilst contending with the challenges of the pandemic. Within some webinars, for example, the upcoming arrival of winter was highlighted as a key time horizon, due to the limitations it would put on the use of outdoor spaces. One delegate explained, ‘for me, the question is mainly how we are going to cross this winter? This is the main challenge’ (Opportunities for the Night Time Economy webinar). Within the ongoing uncertainty of the mitigation phase, much attention needed to be paid to the immediate and near future.

Nevertheless, it was also possible to look further ahead. In the webinars and focus groups, reference was made to city strategy documents setting out plans several years hence, and a range of contributors looked to the longer-term future without specific timeframes. In discussions of the idea of the 15-minute city, for example, a webinar presenter indicated that this approach to urban planning preceded COVID-19 – and has become newly visible and

significant within the conditions of the pandemic – but that it also has the potential to speak to future challenges, including those posed by the climate emergency.

It is understandable that during acute phases of a crisis the focus of policymakers is on the present and the immediate future. But what makes it possible to also look further ahead, and to think expansively and creatively about the future? This is an important consideration for policymaking, both during times of upheaval and otherwise. Within ‘normal’ times there can also be significant constraints on longer-term future thinking. The experience of World Cities Culture Forum partner cities during the pandemic indicates that one important factor is to be able to extend time horizons. There may be a range of ways in which to do this in practice, including via involvement in supportive professional networks and partnerships.

3.1.2 Supportive professional networks & partnerships

In Chapter Two, we saw that part of the role of the Forum during the pandemic was to create a space for its partner cities to share their experiences. But what the cities gained from their involvement during that period was not only the opportunity to share immediate solutions to pressing problems, but also to look further to the future. The webinars involved future-focused thinking in a variety of ways, including how sessions were framed – such as The Future of Cultural Funding and The Future of Major Cultural Events. Within the discussions, participants were directly asked about the future. In the webinar on the 15-minute city, for example, a facilitator posed the question,

But what does the future look like? Even as we recover from the pandemic, we’re likely to see people spending more time in local neighbourhoods. According to a report by Arup and LSE in London, it’s likely people will return to office spaces in the centre, but only for 3 to 4 days a week. So they’ll still be spending more time in local areas. (The Future of the 15-Minute City webinar).

During a period of rapid change and ongoing uncertainty, it was part of the role of the World Cities Culture Forum to create conditions that would support partner cities to extend the time horizons in which they were working, thinking beyond the immediate and near future. As documented in Chapter Two, in addition to participation in webinars, our survey respondents also reported the value of a range of bilateral conversations between cities, sharing experiences and ideas, through which to imagine and develop new possibilities. Some of these conversations took place between partner cities, but also between partner cities and cities beyond the network, too. This indicates that one of the conditions that can help policymakers to imagine and develop possible futures is supportive external relationships, partnerships, and networks.

3.1.3 Opportunities for policy innovation & acceleration

It is part of policymakers’ work to imagine and develop possible futures. As indicated above, however, the conditions in which this work is undertaken will vary greatly with regards to the range of possible futures conceivable. A theme emphasised strongly within our focus groups was the desire to keep open the conditions for ‘policy entrepreneurship’ and innovation experienced during the pandemic. With the need to move quickly, and with many ordinary bureaucratic processes and procedures set aside, urban cultural policymakers observed rapid transformations in their ability to generate ideas, and put them into practice. For many of our contributors, the pandemic was a time of experiment, iteration, and innovation.

This is reflected in the language used in some webinars, where city representatives refer to the range of ‘experiments’ that have taken place. One contributor to the Night Time Economy webinar, for example, referred back to the previous session, saying, ‘it was interesting, especially from Milan, to look at how they had just experimented with a lot of public realm experiments, just to remove cars and create mini parks, and put eateries onto the streets’ (Opportunities for the Night Time Economy webinar). Discussions followed with regards to a variety of other urban experiments made possible by the circumstances of the pandemic. Having had this greater freedom to experiment, iterate, and innovate, the question

What the cities gained from their involvement during that period was not only the opportunity to share immediate solutions to pressing problems, but also to look further to the future.

that many were then asking was, ‘how can we continue to do this?’ Here, a representative of Austin explained that one of the biggest challenges they were facing was:

Maintaining the momentum for the innovation that we’ve been doing in government during the pandemic. So, we really switched to this culture of policy entrepreneurship and “just do it” kind of mentality, where we came up with ideas, and we immediately implemented them, and evaluated them afterwards. That basically never happened in government before, it is a very slow process. And I’m feeling, and I hope it’s maybe it’s just me, but I am feeling like we’re getting back into the old ways, more so, in government – things are really slowing down here at City Hall. And how do we keep that culture of innovation going when the reality of staff shortages, and all this other stuff is piling up and slowing down the machines of government? [...] I think that is the part that is just crushing my heart right now, to look at everything we were able to do in those two years, and then now see all those bureaucratic restrictions, from the purchasing department, or from our own internal economic development departments like, “Oh, you can’t use these exceptions anymore”. “You have to go through this nine-month process to get something approved”. “You can’t do this anymore”. And it’s just like, but, we could do it, and the public saw that we could do it, and they expect us to now be able to do things quickly. (Austin, North America focus group)

Whilst, then, many of our participants emphasised the value of the new opportunities for experimentation, iteration, and innovation that opened up – there is also concern, articulated powerfully by this Austin representative, about the apparent trend of policy systems to return to pre-pandemic modes of operation, diminishing the greater flexibility and room for innovation that had been experienced.

Opportunities for innovation were, in many cases, processes of policy ‘acceleration’. The language of acceleration is found frequently within the data. For example, a contributor to the webinar on the Public Realm summarised some of the conversation as, ‘we’ve learned that COVID has allowed us to accelerate lots of public realm improvements. We heard that sometimes things can take a year that in COVID we managed to do overnight’ (COVID & the Public Realm webinar). In the webinar on the 15-minute city, too, the language of acceleration was used repeatedly. This was a policy idea being discussed and developed before the outbreak of COVID-19. But the pandemic ‘accelerated’ these discussions, giving greater visibility and impetus to the need – and the possibility – for decentralising urban life, including where urban infrastructures are located, where people work, and where people enjoy their leisure time. As one representative put it, ‘COVID, of course, has accelerated the ambition of the 15-minute city, and, for example, our mayor has implemented a lot of temporary bike lanes and outdoor terraces, and now they are going to be permanent [...]. So it has considerably accelerated the planning’ (The Future of the 15-Minute City webinar).

The conditions for policy innovation and acceleration reported include the relaxation of many pre-existing processes of decision-making, including funding mechanisms and licensing arrangements. Several cities gave examples of innovating in the use of public space, made possible by such changes in ordinary processes and procedures. One counterweight to opportunities for making decisions quickly is the importance of democratic accountability. It may be the case that some types of decision-making are appropriate at times of acute crisis but not at others. In considering how to keep open conditions conducive to experiment, iteration, and innovation, then, questions of democratic process and accountability will be pertinent. In this context, a question for further consideration is whether valuable processes of democratic accountability can be differentiated from unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles.

3.1.4 Effective processes for identifying citizens’ needs

In section 2.1.2 we indicated that professional relationships, partnerships, and networks can be an important condition in support of policymakers’ futures thinking. But conversations through which urban cultural policymakers imagine and develop possible futures are not only with their fellow policymakers. As discussed in Chapter One, during the pandemic, in some cities new conversations were developed between city culture teams and their citizens, either informally or via new consultation processes or advisory bodies. For example, in Montreal, a ‘24/24 Night Council’ was set up to advise on the support needed for the night

Many of our participants emphasised the value of the new opportunities for experimentation, iteration, and innovation that opened up.

time economy. We also heard examples of innovative approaches to public consultations which preceded COVID-19 that became increasingly important during the pandemic. Oslo's 'Advice Office', for example, became newly significant during the pandemic. Similarly, in another city, use was made of participatory budgeting, applying to 25 per cent of the city's spending every year. This was an approach already employed, but a representative explained that it has the potential to take on greater importance post-COVID, as part of moves towards new models of urban governance oriented towards 'community empowerment' (The Future of the 15-Minute City webinar).

Here we see new processes emerging to consult citizens regarding their needs. Such consultations may address very immediate needs. But they also have the potential to involve citizens in sustained and systematic processes of imagining and developing possible futures for their communities, and for the city as a whole. In some cases, cities highlighted the need to involve citizens directly within processes of post-COVID planning. In one city, for example:

We thought, 'How do we restart the economy after COVID in a sustainable way?'. And the end of last year we had an advice report for the elements of the economic affairs. And it was in co-creation with the tourism sector, meaning the hotels, the restaurants, the shops, the attractions, the cultural institutions – a very important part – and also the residents and [...] local marketing organisations. So, they were all involved, and we had a six months period of co-creations. And we had a strategy, a redesign of the visitor economy. (Cultural Tourism in a post-COVID World webinar).

The conditions within which urban cultural policymakers imagine and develop possible futures, then, may be those provided by process of stakeholder and citizen consultation and decision-making, as well as via the international knowledge sharing made possible by the World Cities Culture Forum.

The question of how to keep open conditions for policy entrepreneurship and innovation, whilst doing so with suitable mechanisms of democratic accountability in place, raises considerations about how urban cultural policymakers identify the needs of their citizens. As the analysis presented in Chapter One indicates, it is part of the job of policymakers to identify the needs of their citizens, and to seek to meet those needs. One of the important aspects of urban cultural policymaking during the pandemic – again, as documented in Chapter One – was the wide range of needs that they were meeting, extending beyond a narrow conceptualisation of the role of cultural policy, and in some cases taking on a broader responsibility of 'care'.

But the identification of needs – and the development of policies to meet those needs – will always be contested. For example, partner cities reported instances of measures taken during COVID-19 meeting some opposition, including with regards to the uses that are made of public spaces. In Milan, for example, the creation of new bike lanes met important public needs, whilst also being opposed by some motorists. In London, the pandemic saw new uses made of the streets in central London locations, such as Soho. This was a great success from the perspective of many businesses, but local residents ultimately complained about the noise and littering associated with too many users of street space.

Here we see how opportunities to act quickly during the pandemic opened new possibilities, but also posed sometimes difficult questions. Some cities addressed these questions by putting new processes in place to ensure that a wide range of voices can be heard in helping to shape future arrangements, such as post-COVID licensing provisions. In London, for example, the City Culture team has encouraged London's boroughs to create night time strategies:

One of the first steps in developing the night time strategy is to set up both internal working groups within the borough council, but also with the public and businesses, because we want people to start having these conversations about what they want to see in their boroughs at night time. It can't just be the council making these decisions on their own. It has to be a two-way conversation. And we really feel that this strategy is going to make a difference on that front. (London, Opportunities for the Night Time Economy webinar).

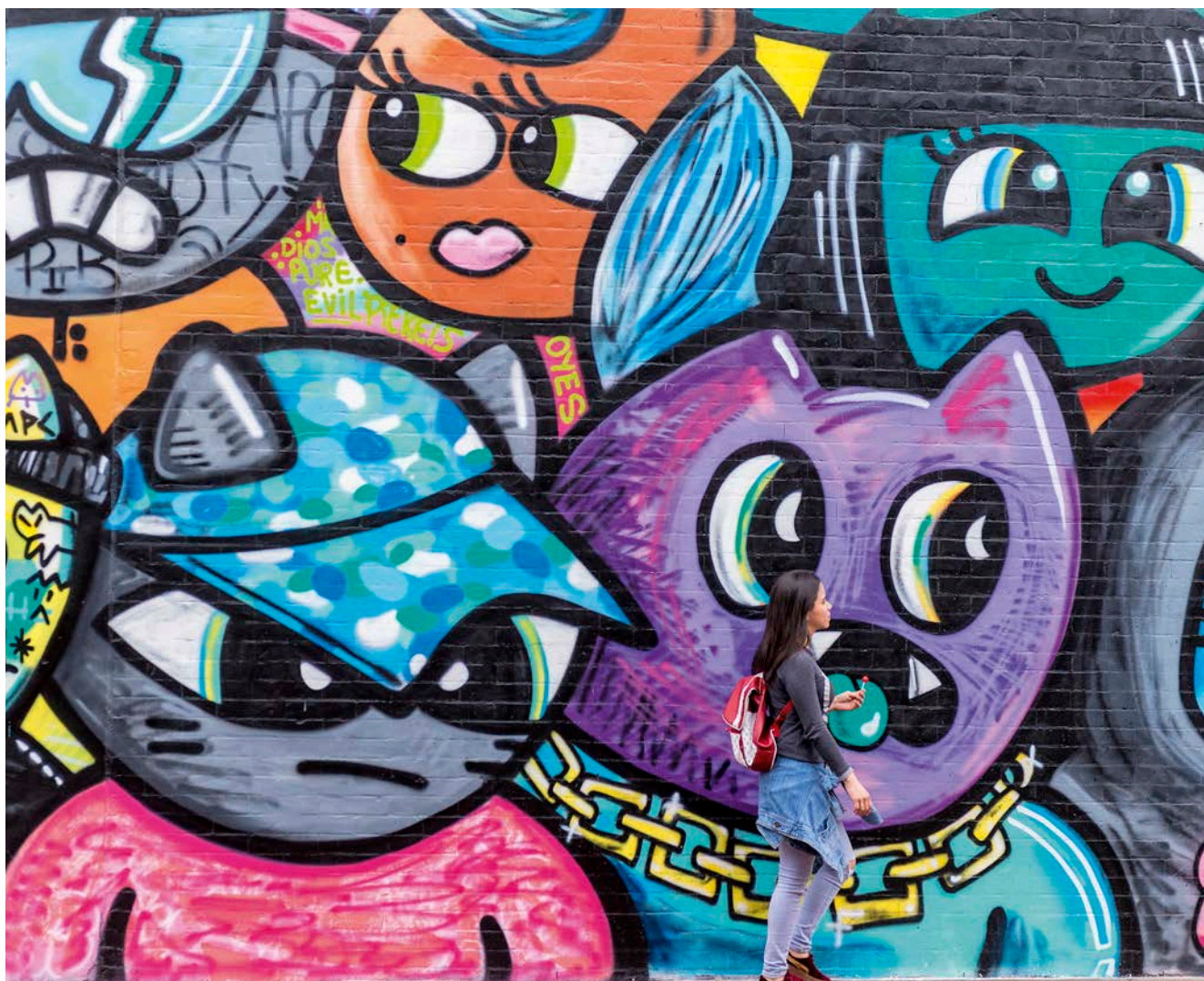


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We see new processes emerging to consult citizens regarding their needs.

During the pandemic, then, there were opportunities to innovate and accelerate policymaking. Unsurprisingly, the measures taken were not always universally welcomed. What the future could and should be will always be contested (Sardar, 2010). Changes will rarely be regarded entirely positively by all. COVID-19 created specific conditions for policies to be tried and tested. It will be important to track how these changes play out over time – but also to consider exactly what processes are employed to identify public needs. The processes through which policymakers identify needs is often implicit and informal. Indeed, the identification of needs is a crucial but often overlooked aspect of public life, what American political philosopher Joan Tronto calls ‘the needs-interpretation struggle’ (Tronto, 2013). There are opportunities to shift to forms of cultural policymaking that are more directly oriented towards the identification of a population’s cultural needs (Gross & Wilson, 2022; Wilson & Gross, in press). The experience of World Cities Culture Forum partner cities during the pandemic points towards some of these possibilities – via new relationships between municipal culture teams and their city’s publics, including existing and emerging innovations in processes of consultation and decision-making.

3.1.5 Effective approaches to uncertainty

A key feature of policymakers’ experience of the pandemic was uncertainty. The data is full of descriptions of not knowing what the future will hold. One representative, for example, explained that:

The main and the most crucial [challenge] is this total kind of uncertainty. It has been very challenging to work under uncertainty [that comes with] the global situation and COVID restrictions. We have our mind on unpredictability. We constantly create new scenarios. This is the first edition [of our festival], and we are creating our own practises and processes. But in the same time, we are all the time replanning, and rebudgeting, and rescheduling everything. And we have to speculate, and do plans and decisions without having better knowledge about the future, what will the next month bring. (The Future of Major Cultural Events webinar).

The future is inherently uncertain. But during times of upheaval, such as the pandemic, levels of uncertainty can increase dramatically. One of the implications of this for partner cities was the need for contingency planning. The webinars document the intensity of scenario and contingency planning that took place. In a webinar in January 2021, for example, a representative from one city shared experiences of responding to the ongoing uncertainty, saying:

Obviously I can't tell the future any more than the rest of us on this call. I think what we've all learned is the need for planning. And definitely planning for several scenarios and making room for tweaks as we go along. [...In 2020] a lot of people just had to halt not just budgets, but activities. And [...] we definitely learned that we need to plan for scenarios A, B, and C on the budget side as well, because we don't know where [...] someone we're working with [...] will be sitting going forward. (The Future of Major Cultural Events webinar).

In combination with contingency planning, this city representative also emphasised the importance of working closely with key partners, in government and more widely within the cultural and creative ecosystem in responding to these conditions of uncertainty. Similar experiences were also reported from Toronto, where the city culture team explained that in addition to producing their own events, they support and promote events organised by other agencies and companies. In doing so, they encourage these partners to 'start with the backup plan. [...] So rather than say, "What can we scale back should numbers [of COVID cases] rise?", we're saying, "you've got to start with the online version. You've got to start with the safe version, and be ready to pivot towards allowances for audiences."' (Toronto, The Future of Major Cultural Events webinar).

Urban cultural policymakers, then, became highly sensitised to the unpredictability of the environment they were operating in. Summarising part of the discussion in the Major Cultural Events webinar, one city representative said that 'big takeaways' from the conversation were,

Plan, re-plan, plan again. We started with the idea of a COVID Plan B. I think we've ended with the idea of a COVID Plan A, a COVID Plan B, and a COVID Plan C. We talked about this need to constantly be fluid, able to redesign, to reschedule, to remodel in this environment of constant uncertainty. I think that is a very big [...] theme for us. (The Future of Major Cultural Events webinar).

The webinars make very clear the difficulties of facing the future during an acute crisis. But they also point towards some of the approaches – such as contingency planning or working closely with key partners – that can be implemented to meet some of these challenges.

3.1.6 Conditions for hope

The human dimension of policymaking is too often overlooked. In analysing the data, we paid attention to contributors' attitudes and sentiments regarding the future. In the webinars there are expressions of concern, worry, and anxiety. For example, speaking in May 2021, a webinar contributor observed, 'it's a scary time, I think, for cities in general' (Culture's Role in City Recover Plans webinar). In June 2021, a representative from London reported that:

The webinars document the intensity of scenario and contingency planning that took place.

Whilst the pandemic involved many kinds of loss, and fear of further loss, policymakers were often keenly aware of positive opportunities for the future, too.

What worries me is that there will be a third or fourth wave, and that already very vulnerable businesses within the cultural sector just won't be able to survive. [...] I'm worried that here in the UK, the UK government has announced the postponing of the easing of social distancing for another month whilst at the same time not allowing another month's financial support to those businesses, to deal with that interim. (London, Cultural Tourism in a post-COVID World webinar).

But alongside anxiety, worry, and concern, the data also evidences a range of ways in which – even within the difficulty of the conditions being experienced – policymakers expressed hope. In some instances, this was hope that specific policy measures would be possible, or would be a success. In other cases, this was communication of a more general view that new opportunities were opening. As one city representative said to a webinar held in February 2021, for example, ‘I want to share with you my conviction. I am totally convinced that COVID-19 – this is [an] incredible opportunity for transforming our lifestyles radically, for achieving, peaceful green streets. Mobility [...] by foot, by bike – to develop the “one point shop”, to have the multi-purpose locations to propose the multi-services in the short perimeter’ (The Future of the 15-Minute City webinar). The language of ‘opportunity’ is widespread within the data. Whilst the pandemic involved many kinds of loss, and fear of further loss, policymakers were often keenly aware of positive opportunities for the future, too.

In some cases, hope was located in signs of recovery in which public behaviours gave policymakers hope for the restored resilience and vibrancy of their cultural and creative ecosystems. A representative from Buenos Aires, for example, identified some ‘good news’, explaining that ‘there’s a lot of interest in cultural activities in the city. People want to enjoy themselves, want to go to the cinema, want to practice sports, everything is like “wow”. And also, there are new ways of using public space. And that’s something that’s a good consequence of the crisis, new ways of enjoying public space, with culture’ (Buenos Aires, interview). Here, as elsewhere in the data, aspects of public feeling are highlighted, including collective confidence and fear. In the Night Time Economy webinar, for example, there is reference to how much fear was experienced during the pandemic, and the need to support members of the public to feel comfortable in returning to shared city spaces.

Along with despair, pessimism, and cynicism, fear is one of the opposites of hope (Govier, 2011). Cultural policy has the potential to be deliberately directed towards the promotion of conditions of hope (Gross, 2019), and in some instances within our data, we observe measures taken with a specific aim of promoting hope. This included the use of public art in Toronto, using the city ‘as a canvas’ for murals and banners. ‘That helps bring hope and messages of solidarity and support for essential workers into the public realm. And there are quite a few developers who are inspired by using their sites to help do that’ (Toronto, Making Space for Culture webinar). Some measures are aimed at supporting hope by initiating a collective project with the potential to focus attention, and promote collaboration, towards a desirable future. A representative from Barcelona gave one such example. Two months previously, they decided to apply to host Manifesta 2024:

We have been for a long time thinking of hosting Manifesta. Manifesta is a European Biennale, and we think in terms of the transversal art of this international event, it could fit with our local policies. But I have to say that we were hesitating about hosting Manifesta in Barcelona. But it was because of this crisis, it was because of the situations that we are currently facing in Barcelona and abroad that we decide to go for the Biennale in 2024. Why? The first thing is to give a strong message to our local cultural sector. We need, really, to mark that there is light at the end of the tunnel, so there will be something at the end, and we should run for this. (Barcelona, The Future of Major Cultural Events webinar).

Crises can involve terrible experiences of loss and fear, and, at the same time, experiences of hope – possibilities for imagining and developing positive new futures (Solnit, 2009; Gross, 2020). This applies not only to the scale of individual human experience, but also to policymaking. A theme emphasised by many partner cities was the need to recognise how things were done differently during the pandemic – in responding to the awful effects of the

crisis – and to draw lessons regarding the conditions that support policy experimentation, iteration, and innovation. If a crisis makes some kind of ‘new start’ a necessity, there is the potential to learn from the experiences of such moments, and, at less difficult times, cultivate the conditions conducive to positive, creative change.

3.2 Possible & preferred futures

Within academic research on the future, known as futures studies or *futureology*, a taxonomy is sometimes used – categorising accounts of the future as ‘possible’, ‘plausible’, ‘probable’, and/or ‘preferred’ (Sardar, 2013). In the second part of this chapter, we discuss what our data shows regarding the possible and preferred futures for post-COVID urban cultural life articulated by partner cities of the World Cities Culture Forum within the data. We do not assess plausibility or probability, but do invite readers to also consider these dimensions of the topics discussed.

3.2.1 Change, or a return to how things were?

The data presents a mixed picture regarding the extent to which policymakers judge that they can know what the cultural life of their cities will be like post-COVID. As discussed above, knowledge of the future is inherently uncertain, and times of crisis can intensify this. Uncertainty is identified by our contributors in a variety of respects. One city representative from Dublin, for example, highlighted uncertainty regarding the future of cultural participation, saying, ‘I think the shape of our communities and the shape of our participation will change, has changed. And I think we don’t know where that’s going yet’ (Dublin, Europe focus group). In some cases, uncertainty is focused on aspects of the city’s cultural and creative ecosystem that the pandemic made newly visible, and whether they will continue to be visible and supported – for example, the new emphasis on local cultural life. This representative from Dublin further commented on the increased ‘importance of cultural access at a very local level’, and whether that will be sustained:

Only time will tell that unfortunately, I think it’s way too soon. But the role of culture in communities – the role of local culture, and the importance of cultural access at a very local level, and not just centralised, and that there are a number of different facets of cultural participation, not just high art or the traditional arts – I think is something that was quite apparent [during the pandemic], and is something that is part of the conversation. We have to fight now to make it stay there. (Dublin, Europe focus group).

As these remarks indicate, part of the reason that there is uncertainty regarding post-COVID cultural futures is because they will be contested. In this context, some participants, such as this contributor, highlighted the active role that needs to be played by policymakers in ensuring that ‘preferred’ consequences and possibilities of the pandemic are sustained. Desired changes cannot be taken for granted.

Notwithstanding these dimensions of uncertainty, there are some respects in which more confident claims about possible futures were made. This included contributors who indicated with some surety that particular aspects of the pre-pandemic status quo will not be restored. A representative from Milan said, ‘something that is changed and won’t go back is [...] digitalisation. The way, for instance, libraries have improved the way they reach the public, the borrowing of the books. It’s all more digitalised now. And I don’t think those things are going to go back after this experience’ (Milan, Europe focus group). The representative from Dublin observed more broadly, ‘I don’t think we will ever go back to what it was. [...] I think in the beginning, we had a notion that things were going to return to normal, and that was the motivation in those first two lockdowns, normal normalcy. What we thought of as normal is no longer’ (Dublin, Europe focus group).

Our research participants frequently communicated the desire to change the pre-COVID conditions in which they made policy.

In some cases, research participants discussed pre-COVID circumstances that they wish to re-establish. This included discussions of how to restore footfall within city centres, and audiences for entertainment and festivals, to pre-pandemic levels. However, much more common within the data is the discussion of how things can and should change. As discussed in the first part of this chapter, city representatives frequently communicated the desire to change the pre-COVID conditions in which they made policy, in order to sustain the conditions for policy entrepreneurship and innovation experienced during the pandemic. But the data is also replete with policymakers seeking to come out of the crisis with momentum behind wider changes within their cities. This is reflected in the language of ‘building back better’, and similar phrases. A representative from Oslo, for example, reported that:

The festivals had to take a break and now they've had more time to think about like, "OK, how can we come back better?". And that includes like, "how can we come back greener?", which is really interesting. People have been able to sort of sit back and reflect on a lot of things and like, "how can we do things better and differently?". And we've tried to help fund new ways of doing things, testing, mushroom tools, all of these things. And so I think that's created a bit of a momentum for that. (Oslo, interview).

In relation to tourism, a city representative summarised a range of developments within the partner cities of the Forum, observing, ‘there’s also been an opportunity to reset rather than just thinking about returning to tourism pre-pandemic, promoting a more sustainable and inclusive model. For example, cities have been looking at models which promote a better balance between the interests of tourists and locals. [...] It’s also been an opportunity for greener tourism’ (Cultural Tourism in a post-COVID World webinar).

In some instances, there was explicit emphasis on how the pandemic has made visible existing inequalities, and that it also thereby constitutes a new opportunity to do things differently. For example, a city representative commented in one webinar, ‘our mantra [...] has been, “if you re-open your doors to the same people you closed them to last March 2020, we’ve lost a fundamental opportunity to be better and to recover better”’ (Cultural Tourism in a post-COVID World webinar). The policies through which cities are seeking change varies between contexts, and according to their aims. But there is a widespread interest in how things can and should be done differently. One representative, for example, explained the significance of the new ‘equity office’ within their city’s administration. This is part of a new situation, in which ‘equity’ is now:

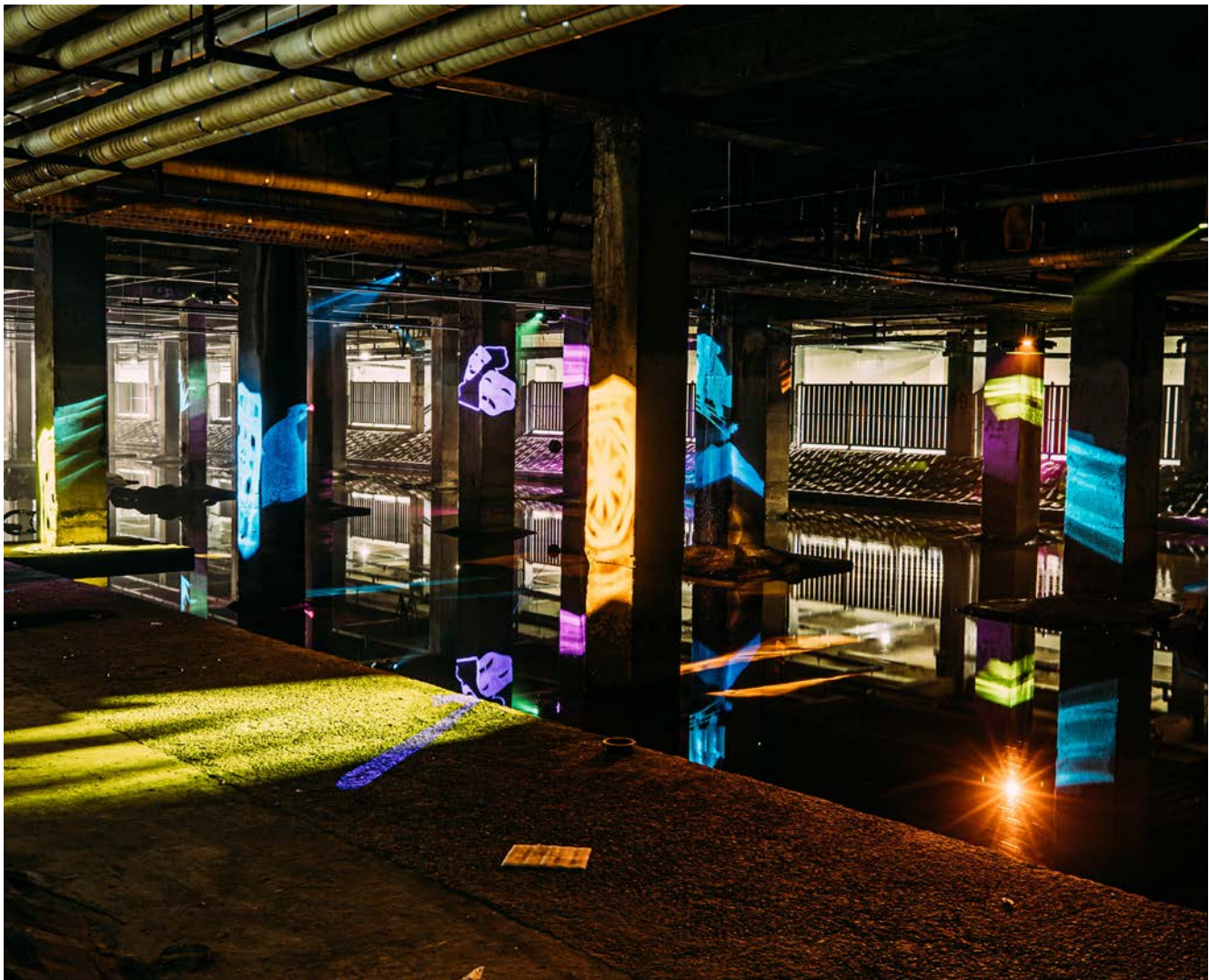
A civic imperative from the government side, from the community side. And people who haven't bought into that concept, or aren't along on the journey, are eventually going to just have to get on board or have to leave the train altogether. We're not really giving the option of a middle ground. We are committed to a new normal, a new future that doesn't look like the past. We're reshaping, and we're shedding that skin because we know it's been damaging. (The Future of Cultural Funding webinar).

It is important to observe, however, that there is not a consensus with regards to what a desirable post-COVID future looks like. Whilst our data does not allow us to report comprehensively on this, we can see that there are differences in emphasis with regards to preferred futures. This includes, for example, a variety of priorities spanning: the development of cities as sites of cultural tourism; creative industries growth; expansion and diversification of cultural participation; and promotion of cultural equity.

3.2.2 Who will shape the future?

The diversity of potentially preferred futures raises the questions, who gets to shape the future? Who is responsible for the future? Across the webinars, focus groups, and interviews, there is a widespread implication that the policymakers within the World Cities Culture Forum network have agency. They can take actions that will make a difference. However, the data also draws attention to the limits of that agency. Most notably, there are discussions of the ways in which future possibilities for the cultural life of cities are dependent upon

The data is replete with policymakers seeking to come out of the crisis with momentum behind wider changes within their cities.



HONGJE YUYEON. SEOUL IS MUSEUM. IMAGE COURTESY AND © SEOUL FOUNDATION FOR ARTS AND CULTURE.

decisions made elsewhere within city government (and sometimes on the limitations of city governments vis-à-vis national governments). As illustrated above, some participants lament the row-back they are already observing regarding the significance of culture within city policy priorities. In this context, there is discussion of a familiar theme: how to ‘make the case’ for culture, to justify its worth, to draw the attention of other policymakers to this area. In these ways, the possible futures of the cultural life of cities will be shaped not only by those with ‘culture’ in their portfolio, but also by a range of other municipal decision makers.

It is also the case, however, that the experience of the pandemic has pointed towards the expansion of decision-making responsibilities to members of the public in new ways. As discussed above, in some cities experiments are taking place in formulating policy ideas and taking decisions, such as Montreal’s 24/24 Night Council. In two cities, they employ participatory budgeting. In Hong Kong, an expansion is taking place in the range of ‘stakeholders’ involved in cultural policy processes:

I think the change really, in how the government of Hong Kong makes policy, is that we are now involving more stakeholders. I think, in the past, when we say stakeholders, mainly it is really the artists, the people [who] will perform, the people who paint [...], the artists themselves. But now, as we want to map the blueprint for the development of arts and culture in Hong Kong, with the establishment of a Commission, we are actually involving more related stakeholders, more leaders, even from the business world, from related sectors, from education, not just artists, so that we can actually look into all directions and see how we can have this whole thing worked

out. I think that is [...] one of the major changes in the policymaking. (Hong Kong, East Asia focus group).

In addition to more formalised decision-making bodies, some cities report substantial developments in their informal communications with the professional cultural sector, and with partner cities of their wider public. The post-COVID cultural life of cities will be shaped not only by who takes the decisions, but also by the information base upon which decisions are taken.

As discussed in Chapter One, the pandemic saw new relationships, partnerships, and networks develop within urban cultural and creative ecosystems. In the webinar on The Future of the 15-Minute City, a city representative summarised a theme within the discussion:

We've seen the emergence of new local models of cultural productions, so this idea of hyperlocal, lots of things happening on your doorstep, in your neighbourhood, as people have not been able to move around as before. We've seen the role of the city change, pivot, in many ways. Many cities are working with groups, with individuals that they normally wouldn't work with. Normally, cities sit in this more strategic place, but lots of us have found ourselves working directly with individual artists, with individual communities. So the city's role has been changing in this pandemic. (The Future of the 15-Minute City webinar).

A range of cities report that these new ways of working with stakeholders, and wider populations, has been a significant part of their experiences during the pandemic. A representative from Oslo, for example, comments on the importance of new opportunities for exchange, saying, 'What I think personally is the most important thing is the dialogue. It was the basis for a forum that we didn't really have [before], because [responding to COVID-19] was a purpose to meet, and especially for the politicians to meet, several organisations and several businesses, and institutions together, which we haven't had before. [...] It is something that I think we'll see the effects of in the future' (Oslo, interview). Similarly, a representative from Buenos Aires anticipates that lasting changes have taken place in the relationships between policymakers and a range of agents within the city's cultural ecosystem, including greater 'trust between the parties' (Buenos Aires interview).

Some city representatives indicate that the new relationships formed within the pandemic will be long lasting, with new partnerships and programmes having the potential to be sustained as indefinite components of municipal cultural policy provision. The extent to which these new relationships, partnerships, and networks will be sustained and developed is an open question. It will depend on a range of factors, potentially including the presence or absence of more formalised mechanisms of citizen involvement. The range of possible futures will be shaped, in part, by the practices of public consultation, information gathering, decision-making, and policy co-design that are put in place (or not) on an enduring basis.

3.2.3 Who and what is urban cultural policy responsible for?

One of the effects of the pandemic was to force urban cultural policymakers to (re)consider exactly who and what they are responsible for. As discussed in Chapter One, during the pandemic they were meeting a wide range of needs, and these needs changed rapidly with the onset of the pandemic. One of the effects of the pandemic was to raise the question, in new ways, of exactly what are the needs that urban cultural policymakers should be meeting? In some cases, this was a question of whose needs should be met. For example, is it only professional artists and their audiences? What range of grassroots and community groups? The pandemic thereby also demanded new consideration of what kinds of resources would be required in meeting a city's cultural needs. A representative from Los Angeles reflected, 'there's a lot of focus right now on facilities. And it's interesting, as we're moving forward on continuing to develop facilities, what [do] those look like? How do you design them so that they speak to what we think are the needs for the future, which we don't even fully know yet' (Los Angeles, North America focus group). This raises the question of the methods – including processes of public consultation – policymakers have (and could have) available in

One of the effects of the pandemic was to force urban cultural policymakers to (re)consider exactly who and what they are responsible for.

anticipating future trends, including future cultural needs, and which of these methods would be most valuable.

The pandemic also required new consideration of the geographical scales at which urban cultural policy operates, and for which it is responsible. COVID-19 saw city leaders working with local communities in new ways. There were shifts to the ‘local’, in practice and in policy, which may have enduring effects for how people choose to live, and the scale at which policymakers seek to support the cultural life of their cities. In Barcelona, for instance, there is a move towards ‘decentralising’:

We want to work on decentralising culture in Barcelona and creating new centralities. So it's not just spreading the cultural activities, but facilitating that to create new clusters of culture all around town. Not as much in terms of specialisation, but just to make sure that in all the areas of our city there's genuine cultural life going on, not just the one that the City Council wants to take place in there. (Barcelona, Culture in Recovery webinar).

Similarly, in Toronto, whilst there was a 10-year culture plan in place prior to COVID-19, during the pandemic there was a shift towards cultural district planning. In some of the city's neighbourhoods, particularly in what are referred to in Toronto as ‘equity deserving communities’, there are ‘many folks who are saying, “give us an opportunity to tell our own stories. Let us tell our own stories in our own voices. You know, support us to be autonomous. We're not looking for a handout. We want to be a vibrant part of the city, but we want to do it on our terms.” So that conversation is beginning to happen through cultural district planning, and this has come up very strongly through COVID’ (Toronto, North American focus group).

To what extent are such initiatives continuing, ‘post-COVID’? Moreover, to what extent can urban cultural policymakers successfully work across multiple scales? City representatives also have roles which are beyond the local, and, in some cases, are regional in scope. One city representative explained, for example:

For the far future, [...] I think it is really looking at what is needed in your local and regional community. For us in [our city], it's very important to bear in mind the sort of creative capital role that our city plays in the wider region, and that there are areas that don't necessarily have the platform that we have here, nor the support. And it's something we have quite close to heart to ensure that in the regional ecosystem of creativity, that we're able to support with initiatives. (The Future of Major Cultural Events webinar).

The pandemic has given new impetus to the local, but cities continue to have regional, national, and global roles. It remains to be seen what the enduring effects will be of the experience of the pandemic with regards to the geographical scales for which urban cultural policymakers take active responsibility.

Finally for this section considering cultural policy's scope of responsibilities – in some cities, changes during the pandemic have included moves towards less siloed, more integrated approaches. As presented in Chapter One, for example, a representative from Tokyo reported on the new integration of previously separate government functions: ‘cultural promotion’, ‘creative industries’, and ‘sightseeing’. Similarly, a representative from Hong Kong indicated that a new Culture, Sport and Tourism Bureau had recently been created, bringing these areas together for the first time.

3.2.4 New possibilities for the public realm?

As new uses were made of public space, urban cultural policymakers and cultural leaders indicated the lasting effects this could have. As one London representative commented, ‘public space, public realm is going to be a whole new ballgame post-COVID’. They continued, ‘in the UK for the very first time we're seeing outdoor cinemas, drive-through cinemas. So I think there's lots of different ways in which we need to reimagine the public realm’ (London, Making Space for Culture webinar). Similarly, a contributor from another

The pandemic has given new impetus to the local, but cities continue to have regional, national, and global roles.

city indicated that the pandemic had created opportunities to increase the significance of culture within public policy, due to its new visibility and importance within the public realm:

I think along with culture, parks and gardens, we share this rather unglamorous forgotten space. We have to make a lot of noise to be heard. Culture and parks and gardens, we're kind of a lost distant cousin. [...] And I think the opportunity we have with COVID is we can now really have that conversation quite seriously at a very different level, because culture is happening in the outdoor space. (Making Space for Culture webinar).

There is uncertainty about many aspects of the changes that occurred during the pandemic – including which turn out to be temporary, which are lasting, and which develop in new directions. This includes the policy ‘agendas’ that arose. If the experience of the pandemic brought particular topics into greater visibility, such as the future of culture in the public realm, policy agendas are inherently contestable and changeable. Documenting some of the agendas for the future articulated during the pandemic – as this report does – can serve as a reminder, and as a resource, for discussions about what should be on the list of priorities for urban policymakers during future phases of ‘post-pandemic’ agenda-setting.

3.2.5 New narratives of value within post-COVID urban life?

It has been widely observed that the pandemic led many people to re-evaluate what was important in life. It also led to (renewed) articulations of the value of art, culture, and the creative industries. As was commented upon within a webinar:

A “go-to” kind of metric for cities is always the economic because people understand that. And we always talk about the human connection. The kind of quality of life, how it opens your mind, all of [...] these things that are harder to measure. But [...] it is something that has really become tangible in the pandemic, because we've been completely deprived of human connection. And that's the thing that culture gives to us. It is as people coming together, friends, family in this collective shared kind of experience. And I think it's on us to really draw that out and remind people of the value of that, because I think people are ready for it. (Opportunities for the Night Time Economy webinar).

City representatives pointed towards the manifested ‘value’ of culture in their cities in a variety of ways, including these comments from Buenos Aires:

Although we had a hard time, I think culture proved the case of being really vital for our city, and really vital in the regeneration of different parts of the city. For example, we are now working on how to bring people back into the city centre, into the financial and historic centre of the city, and we are basing most of the city's strategy in culture. Hosting cultural events and festivals in the financial district. So, I think it was really clear the role that we play in the city. (Buenos Aires, interview).

The discussion and contestation of ‘cultural value’, and making the case for policy support for culture, is likely to be a perennial concern. So long as policymakers have competing demands upon their time and resources, and prioritisation is an inherent part of political process, those who seek to support art, culture, and the creative industries will need to advocate. Our research with the World Cities Culture Forum partner cities suggests that the pandemic points towards both the familiar narratives of economic benefit, but also has the potential to expand the range of arguments being made – including the role of cultural life in supporting thriving, well-connected urban communities.

3.2.6 Is the pandemic the main factor shaping possible futures?

It is clear, in many instances, that the pandemic has brought about significant changes in urban cultural and creative ecosystems, and is playing an important role in shaping cultural policy thinking. But we also see cities identifying a range of underlying and emerging

The pandemic points towards both the familiar narratives of economic benefit, but also has the potential to expand the range of arguments being made for the value of culture to cities.

factors at play, too. Possible futures are being identified, developed, and contested at the intersections between pre-existing challenges and opportunities, and the specific conditions brought about by the pandemic. This is articulated, for example, by one contributor to the 15-minute city webinar, saying, ‘the success around the world of this concept, in my opinion, is the convergence [between] on the one hand climate change – because we need to propose a new urban lifestyle – on the other hand, with COVID-19, the new constraints for living differently’ (The Future of the 15-Minute City webinar).

Whilst COVID-19 has had enormous consequences, it is of course not the only causal factor involved in shaping the range of possible futures, or in influencing urban cultural policymakers in their futures thinking. In Hong Kong, for example, their current policy approach, in which they are ‘shifting from remedial to more forward-looking policies’, is influenced not just by the dynamics of the pandemic. ‘COVID may be one of the factors. Another factor is the national policy of the development of culture in Hong Kong’ (Hong Kong, East Asia focus group). Other cities also indicated that the future of culture in their city – and their city’s futures thinking – has not only, or even primarily, been shaped by the experience of COVID-19. Instead, existing priorities and agendas continue to strongly influence their plans.

At any point in time, the existing conditions within a cultural and creative ecosystem are, of course, a powerful influence on its possible futures. It is not the case, however, that policymakers are either fully constrained by the past, or that in seeking to shape possible futures, they must thereby set aside what has come before. Policymakers may, for example, deliberately draw upon historical precedents in creatively shaping the future. This might be a particularly important consideration at times of crisis. We heard several cities in the USA, for instance, refer to the artists programme of FDR’s New Deal in the 1930s – famously developed in response to the socioeconomic crisis of the Great Depression – as an explicit inspiration for some measures taken in their city in response to COVID-19. This same New Deal precedent was also referred to by a representative from Brussels. In exploring possible futures for the cultural life of their cities, policymakers do not have to start from scratch. Indeed, they may actively draw upon possibilities from the past: be it from well-known, half-forgotten, or overlooked episodes of history.

Policymakers may deliberately draw upon historical precedents in creatively shaping the future.



BARA, PART OF YANANURALA. IMAGE COURTESY AND © CITY OF SYDNEY.



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CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The data indicates the extent to which the pandemic constituted an experience of rapid learning for city cultural policymakers. The lessons of this extraordinarily difficult time have the potential to feed into future planning and action. This includes with regards to how policymakers can mobilise in response to an acute public health crisis, in support of the cultural life of cities. But the new ideas and practices that were developed have broader applicability, beyond crisis situations, regarding how cultural and creative ecosystems can be supported. This includes, not least, via the range of experiments in policy consultation, decision-making, co-design, and partnership that were developed during the pandemic, as cities implemented new ways of holding conversations with their populations. These experiments potentially have enduring consequences for urban cultural policymaking, and for the cultural life of cities.

A key question is the extent to which conditions for experimentation, iteration, and innovation can be sustained. A representative from the city of Austin commented, “I’d love our city manager to say, “I’m appointing a czar of *doing things differently*” [...]. Let’s bring that commitment into an operational model where we can actually see what we did during that pandemic, bring it forward, continue to do it’ (Austin, North America focus group). There are many possible futures for urban cultural policy ‘post-COVID’. Our research indicates the challenges of holding open spaces for creative, democratic processes of city cultural policymaking, as well as the opportunities. Has it, then, been a creative recovery? It’s too soon to tell.

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