OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 4 May 2023

Session 6

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CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
14th Meeting 2023, Session 6

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
*Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)
*Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con)
*Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Kresanna Aigner (Findhorn Bay Arts)
Steve Byrne (Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland)
Arthur Cormack (Fèisean nan Gàidheal)
Morvern Cunningham (Culture Collective)
Murray Dawson (Station House Media Unit)
Rachael Disbury (Alchemy Film and Arts)
Robert Rae (Art 27 Scotland)
Caitlin Skinner (Stellar Quines)
Kathryn Welch (Culture Collective)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

James Johnston

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 4 May 2023

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

Interests

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning, and a warm welcome to the 14th meeting in 2023 of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee.

As a result of a membership change, our first agenda item is a declaration of interests. Before that, I give apologies from Donald Cameron, the deputy convener, who cannot be with us today. I echo Donald Cameron's comments from last week when he was in the chair with regard to the contribution of Sarah Boyack on the committee and we wish her all the best for her new parliamentary duties.

I invite Neil Bibby, who joins the committee, to make a declaration of interests.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Thank you, convener, and good morning. I have no relevant interests to declare.

Culture in Communities

09:00

The Convener: Our second agenda item is to take evidence on our culture in communities inquiry, which is focused on taking a place-based approach to culture. We have two evidence sessions this morning.

For our first session, we are joined by Kresanna Aigner, chief executive officer and creative director of Findhorn Bay Arts; Rachael Disbury, co-director of Alchemy Film and Arts; Caitlin Skinner, chief executive officer and artistic director of Stellar Quines; Arthur Cormack, chief executive of Fèisean nan Gàidheal; Murray Dawson, who is chief executive of Station House Media Unit; Robert Rae—he is not yet with us but we hope that he will join us soon—co-director of Art 27 Scotland; and Steve Byrne, director of Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland. A warm welcome to you all.

This is a round-table discussion and we are hoping that it will be very free flowing, so please indicate if you want to comment or come in. Do not feel that you have to answer every point unless you have something new to say, as time is tight on a Thursday morning, but we hope that it will be a free-flowing and open session.

We have three themes that we wish to cover. Theme 1 is place-based cultural policy, theme 2 is the culture eco-system and theme 3 is unmet cultural need. We will try to cover the three themes but in these situations we usually end up talking about everything at once. I thank you all for your attendance and also thank everyone who has provided a written submission to the committee, which is very helpful.

We will start with place-based cultural policy. We are trying to understand the conditions which enable the development and growth of cultural activity within different communities across Scotland, as well as the barriers which impede cultural activity from taking place. From your own experience, do you have any reflections to share on what has supported cultural groups or events within your communities and what barriers currently exist? I will just go around the room, one by one.

Murray Dawson (Station House Media Unit): As a wee bit of background, I am chief executive and founder of Station House Media Unit. It is based in the regeneration areas of Aberdeen, so we are a community anchor organisation as well as a community media organisation.

We take a place-based approach, so we serve the regeneration areas of Aberdeen. In terms of

culture and place, it is very much about the community owning the activity. Our organisation, of which I am the founder, started in 1997 and is very much about the community taking action and wanting to get involved. In the first instance, it was a film around community regeneration in Tillydrone, which is one of our regeneration areas. It evolved from there, with a management committee being formed and then it became a charity.

The organisation has grown from that first nugget of someone wanting to do something about the community to being a community organisation that now has a turnover of £1.5 million and 40 members of staff. It is quite a considerable organisation, delivering employability work as well as work in prison, a whole range of work with young people, work with adults and community development. The principle is about the community owning it and the management committee involving local people.

The key to the success of our organisation has been community ownership and local people being involved throughout the design and implementation of the organisation.

Also key is partnership across the board—partnership not only in the community but with community planning, with the local authority and with other third sector organisations. If it was not for the partnerships, we would not exist. In the same way, volunteers are key to the organisation. We have something like 150 local volunteers actively involved on a weekly basis, and if it was not for them, the organisation would not exist.

I cannot remember exactly what the first question was but on the idea of a place-based approach, if the organisation is truly considering community and place, it should make sure that the community is involved in the concept and the decision making. The community needs to be actively involved throughout in making those decisions. It is not about a cultural organisation swooping in and delivering 12 weeks of a programme and then disappearing; it is about long-term engagement. We work with young people from the age of 11 and they will stay with us through their school work and our informal youth work through the transition into secondary school and then into adulthood when they get employability support and a whole range of other support. It is not about a 12-week programme or people learning some skills and then moving on to another programme; it is about creating opportunities across the board.

Those opportunities are not just for young people, they are also for adults. We work in the prison, supporting people to engage and build relationships with our organisation and, when they are released from prison, they get support through the gate, meet the same staff and begin to volunteer in the community.

Another key element of our organisation is that it is not just about cultural activity, but about the broad base of support that communities need. We have social workers, community workers and youth workers working with the organisation. We do not just provide cultural activity. When people are released from prison, a lot of the work that we do with them is about stability, making connections and making sure that housing, doctors and so on are all in place. They then take part in an activity such as radio or film or music, paper-based or online publications. They get involved with such activities because they are in a stable and safe place.

It is about long-term engagement and the community being involved in all aspects of the programme, including its design. It is also about long-term funding, which we will probably talk about at some point, and long-term commitment and investment through funding, which is not necessarily for cultural activity but for outcomes. We have secured funding from the cashback for communities programme and from the investing in communities fund. Some funding from the Sean Connery Foundation was announced this week. There is lots of broad investment but it is generally about outcomes—it is not about the activity that is taking place but what happens as a result of that activity.

I have probably rambled on enough by trying to answer all the questions at once.

The Convener: You made very pertinent points, thank you.

Arthur Cormack (Fèisean nan Gàidheal): I agree with a lot of what Murray Dawson said so I will not repeat it. I will give a wee bit of background about the fèis movement. For 40-plus years, it has been supporting Gaelic arts, traditional arts and the Gaelic language in communities across Scotland. There are 47 fèisean in communities across Scotland and not just in what you might expect to be Gaelic-speaking areas but in some of the cities and down as far as Dumfries and Galloway, where Gaelic was spoken at one time.

There is a loose definition of what a fèis is, and they all follow the same sort of teaching model. Beyond that, our organisation does not impose anything on them artistically or culturally. What they do is up to them and it has to be relevant to their local needs. Our job is to support them to deliver that and we do that through a number of means. We have a team of development officers who have a portfolio of fèisean that they look after. We also provide funding, insurance, musical instruments and other things that they need to carry out their activities.

Before Covid, something like 6,000 young people a year took part in the fèisean, and at the moment, it is about 3,500 or 4,000—so we are getting numbers back up to where they were. However, clearly, we are dealing with many more young people than there are in Gaelic medium education, for instance. Young people have a big interest in engaging with the language, even though they are not being taught it in schools.

Caitlin Skinner (Stellar Quines): Adding to what my colleagues have said, for us, like many organisations, we are fuelled by an individual artist who is passionate about their work and sees a need for cultural intervention. Our organisation was started 30 years ago by a group of women theatre practitioners who were frustrated by the lack of gender equality on Scottish stages. Three decades on, our flagship community project, which is funded by the Culture Collective, is young quines. That came about through an extraordinary community practitioner, Rachel-Jane Morrison, who is based in Levenmouth in Fife.

She perceived two distinct things: first, through her work in schools, she noticed that young women, non-binary people and trans people who were in that environment were not able to express themselves in drama or art classes in school. Those were not environments where they could be themselves, which frustrated her. She saw a distinct difference in schools in Fife compared to what she noticed in the cultural centres, and she perceived that there was a need for a space where people could be themselves and express themselves. Secondly, she was passionate about her community in Levenmouth, where she was based, but she was being pulled into urban centres in order to continue to be an artist, as that is where the opportunities were. As a result, the young quines project was born.

For us, what is successful for community intervention is investing in communities as well as citizens and, equally, in artists. We want to develop artists so that they can stay local, have the opportunities to engage locally and make the work and the interventions that they want to make in their communities at a local level. They are truly the experts in that. The second thing that aids participation is for citizens to have the capacity to participate—citizens who have the income, the ability to travel and free time. They need to not be caught in the rat race of trying to survive, and to be able to volunteer and be part of their community and of the culture where they live. We know that there are particular challenges for women around affordable childcare, economic inequality and the way that transport links disadvantage women who are not travelling just to commute, but because they have caring responsibilities.

As my colleagues have said, being able to work over the long term is helpful. The Culture Collective funding that we have received has allowed us to develop our work over a period of two years. Although that is not a long-term project, in terms of arts funding and responsibilities, it is huge. I often tell the story of when I did a residency in a community centre, when a worker showed me into a cupboard that was full of boxes of arts materials and equipment. She said to me, “I do not know what any of this is. All of this has been from short-term arts activities. We got the resources, and then these things have never been touched again.” Our concern now, with the insecurity of the funding situation, is whether all our work is likely to become a relic in a community centre cupboard, which would be devastating.

Steve Byrne (Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland): I am delighted to be here. I am the new director of Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland and I am also a performer and traditional singer and have worked in archives and folklore research over the years, which will inform part of what I will say in the meeting.

Our submission is broadly shaped by our experience over the past year with our People’s Parish project, as part of the Culture Collective. It has also been informed by sustained periods of review and in-depth discussion of our experiences. Through identifying gaps in thinking and provision, we have identified a space in which TRACS could join together several emerging strands of our activities in the traditional arts in communities.

Per the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which the United Kingdom Government has not signed up to, but which the Scottish Government has been active in trying to progress on the ground since 2007—various reports have been involved—our core belief, which informs what we do, is that the decision about which elements of culture should be foregrounded, celebrated and safeguarded should be led by communities themselves.

09:15

Through the People’s Parish project, we are developing the process by which those decisions are reached. By next year, we will have worked with 14 different communities across Scotland, using traditional arts and creative fieldworkers within those communities and doing things with them, not to them, to tell the story of their place.

Traditional arts are fundamentally about place—specifically about people in place—as you will see from our submission and from the one by Fèisean nan Gàidheal, with which I saw many parallels and in which I took a great interest. Traditional songs,

tunes, dance, craft and ways of life all relate to the places where people live. In recent years, there has been growing recognition of Scotland's archival resources, which are unrivalled anywhere in Europe outside Ireland because we have systematically studied our own local cultures, albeit within the academic sphere.

We see our role at TRACS as being to bring that into the public arena or public folklore. We use those archival resources as wellsprings and springboards to allow communities to engage again with traditional culture. We sometimes characterise that, as the Smithsonian characterises some archival work that has been done in recent decades, as "cultural repatriation". That can be something as simple as taking songs from an archive back to the towns where they were originally recorded. I have done that in my hometown, Arbroath, where I taught 600 kids a song about the local mill. That has been a benchmark for me of cultural policy in place.

One barrier to place-based cultural policy is what I would call the "unfinished conversation" about all of that. There should be more detailed discussion with central and local government, as well as in wider society, about the importance of this traditional local culture that we might often describe as "just" local traditions or as the everyday culture that surrounds us all. Traditional arts, and their impact, are often a highly personal and meaningful way to relate to the places in which we live, but they can still be at the margins of our discussions. At TRACS, we see our role as being to promote greater understanding of that.

It has taken several years to get to the stage where the People's Parish model, as laid out in our submission, has gained traction with funders. Ideas about place-based work, localism and 20-minute neighbourhoods have in some way been emphasised by the practicalities of dealing with Covid, so we suddenly found a lot of interest in an approach that has been taken by many community-based traditional artists in recent decades.

As Arthur Cormack suggested, it has been quite natural to sing, write or create about our places and to pass that on. We are formalising that and seeking to bring it more actively into the policy arena, because we think that it has a lot to offer, especially in the areas of health, wellbeing and sustainability, which are key topics at the moment. This is a long-overdue recognition of the vital importance of local culture and what I would call "cultural equity". I will say more about that later.

The Convener: Robert Rae has now joined us, so I will give him a moment to get settled and will bring in Rachael Disbury.

Rachael Disbury (Alchemy Film and Arts): Thank you so much for having us. I am from Alchemy Film and Arts, which is a visual arts and community-engaged organisation, based in the Scottish Borders, that specialises in film. We produce Scotland's festival of experimental film and have an award-winning community engagement programme. Our enabling factors are access to resources, time, money and sustained support, which echoes what Caitlin Skinner said earlier.

I emphasise that we must look at the organisations across Scotland that are doing successful place-based work, such as Alchemy, in the Scottish Borders. That work already exists and the evidence for the benefits that are brought by the arts as a process, rather than just as an outcome, is already there. There are successful case studies.

The investment of funding and support—which we receive through being a Creative Scotland regularly funded organisation and, in particular, from the Culture Collective—has allowed Alchemy to employ a large team of people in the Scottish Borders. We are one of the only creative employers there to have people on the payroll, rather than on the short-term contracts that the creative sector can be notorious for. We are able to pay staff fairly—we pay artists Scottish Artists Union rates, which is also really rare and produces amazing results. We employ staff, artists and trustees who have diverse lived experience in supportive and meaningful ways, and we develop robust policies around inclusion, anti-racism, environmental commitments and safeguarding, in particular.

We have managed to develop a two-year partnership with all seven primary schools in Hawick, which has involved them using the iPads that they have had access to and allowing them to activate that knowledge by integrating film making across the curriculum. We have been mentoring them to do that.

We have been able to produce an engagement programme that involves us going to the spaces of community groups, rather than just putting on lots of public arts events. Instead, we go to them, hear what they want to say and what they want to make and really give a platform to their voices. That includes national health service-supported groups that deal with bereavement by suicide, community gardens in areas that are ranked 1 on the Scottish index of multiple deprivation, Borders additional needs support groups, service users of gender-based violence organisations and young LGBTQIA people.

Our practice is embedded in our region and its people. Through resources such as the Culture Collective and long-term support, we have had the

time to really develop projects with people, to give a platform to their voices and to enable them to develop digital skills, social skills and creative skills, which we can already see leading to employment and education opportunities, as well as to people being able to walk into a room and speak about their lived experience for the first time. We are seeing that on the ground.

The problem is that we do not know what we will do if we have to pull back. It is not a case of being able to scale back a programme or say, “Oh, maybe we just won’t do that exhibition or festival,” because with sustained support over the past few years, we have been able to build a practice that is meaningful to the people who live and work in Hawick and the Scottish Borders, and which is inclusive, energised and has a meaningful impact on people’s lives. We cannot chop a part of that off. We have done our growing, so our focus is on how we sustain what we have built.

Kresanna Aigner (Findhorn Bay Arts): I completely echo what all my colleagues have said, which has been an inspiring and passionate articulation of the power of the work that we do.

I am the creative director of Findhorn Bay Arts. We are based in Forres, which is nestled on the Bay of Findhorn, and we are rooted in the communities around the Bay of Findhorn. Over the 10 years that we have been going, our work has grown to extend across the region of Moray.

We work with and are rooted in people and place. We do that through creative learning programmes, artist residencies and commissions, and festivals and events—mostly notably, our biennial Findhorn Bay festival. Place-based cultural policy is absolutely informed by the needs and aspirations of the people. No one model fits all, because each community is individual, and that is the case even in the villages neighbouring the bay that we are rooted in.

Through the work with the Culture Collective programme—our programme is called combine to create—we have been supporting artists and creative practitioners to connect with communities and one another through long-term residencies, which embed artists in communities of identity and place to work with communities through active listening, taking part and building relationships. We also provide access to the training and resources that they might need to ensure that we and the artists we work with are resourced and equipped to support our communities to express the future that they see for themselves and the culture that they see for their future.

Specifically, our programme is supporting six longer-term residencies, and it has been an absolute gift to have long-term funding. Two years is not actually that long term, but in this sector it can be. We have been supporting six longer-term residencies for 190 days over those two years, working in partnership with community organisations, the education sector and people. I will give some examples. We have artists working in primary schools through embodied learning programmes, with one artist being embedded in one primary school. We have an artist working with children with autism and their families. We have an artist working with young people in the LGBTQ+ community through schools and the local council and youth team. We also have an artist embedded in Moray Women’s Aid, working with vulnerable women.

Another section of our residency programme is the small halls, which are slightly shorter at 30 days, although we are looking at increasing those in phase 2. Through that, we are positioning artists to work with rural communities through their village halls.

We know from our research and feedback that immersion in creativity helps people to cultivate greater self-awareness and to connect with themselves and one another, and that it fosters a great sense of identity of place and community. That is what enables people and communities to build resilience to face challenges and the unknown, to build community wellbeing and community wealth, to have hope and to thrive.

Another really positive thing that the programme has done is enable us to work actively with those community partners and the artists to look at the through roads and next steps. There might be aspects that we continue to be involved with, but we are also looking at how people carry on without us—we constantly do ourselves out of a job. We have already had some successes in that area; for example, after working with artist Jen Cantwell, Moray Women’s Aid has now found some local funding. It is a small pot, but it will enable Jen to stay within Moray Women’s Aid one day a week for another 80 days.

Edinkillie village hall has managed to find a little bit of local funding to support the artists that engage with it to carry on delivering weekly creative sessions. The children and families with autism have really come together and are looking at what they need as children and families, and how we, as artists and arts organisations, can support them to make that happen. That has been a really incredible part of the work that we are doing.

Good place-based cultural policy happens when people are involved. They are very much part of the process. They are invested because their voices are heard, the benefits of taking part are experienced, and the role of creativity and culture, and the contribution to regeneration, innovation,

learning and community wellbeing, are very much understood.

The Convener: Thank you.

Robert Rae, my opening question was about getting a reflection on your experience of what works to support communities and what the barriers are.

Robert Rae (Art 27 Scotland): Thank you. I apologise for being late—I got caught in a security loop at the desk.

Art 27 takes its name from article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which gives everybody as a basic right the right to participate freely in culture. We were inspired initially by the decision of the Scottish Parliament to incorporate the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights into Scots law. We started to investigate that and found that, in the area of cultural rights, which is an aspect that is to be incorporated, there was very little research going on behind that; it was a bit of a neglected right.

We took on the mantle of doing that and then, through the Culture Collective, we started to explore what that might mean in practice and what incorporation would look like. We are based in the south side of Edinburgh, just up the road, which is a very diverse and rapidly changing area, where the impact of global migration has had a very immediate impact. The mosque is there, which has had an impact, and the University of Edinburgh recruiting quite heavily in China and Hong Kong has created a very diverse area.

There is a community centre that sits in the middle of the area. Due to the pandemic, it had been closed, but in talking to staff there, we heard that there were longer-term problems about its use. Therefore, we did a survey locally of the people who worked in and lived around the area to see how much they knew about the centre and how much they could use it. Even standing outside it, some people were completely oblivious to the fact that it was a community resource for them and a place in which they could express their culture.

Through the Culture Collective, we were able to employ a number of artists to address specifically those different communities, including the Polish community, some of the Arabic-speaking communities—the Yemeni and Palestinian communities—and the Hong Kong and Chinese communities through Cantonese. One of the things that we discovered early on was that offering access through first language had become quite an important part of that offer and was a way to encourage and bring people in. In many ways, that was quite liberating for the artists, the vast majority of whom had not had the opportunity to work in their first language before. They could bring a depth to their work, because it did not need the level of translation that they would bring automatically. It also brought in the other communities, through which we came across lots of interesting things.

09:30

For example, we worked with members of the young Sudanese community. By the time they had reached the age of 16 or 17, they were starting to explore questions such as, “What does it mean to be Sudanese? What does it mean to live in Scotland and have that identity?”, but they did not have the linguistic skills to access and find their way into their own culture. Many talked about how they felt quite alienated when they went home because of the language barrier. That coincided with a piece of research that demonstrated that, in the education sector, children who spoke their first language at home did better in English-medium education than those kids whose parents said, “Oh, you need to do that in English, so we’ll speak in English.”

One of the joys of the Culture Collective was that we were allowed to select artists and work with them without many of the usual constraints of, “You have to do this,” or “You have to tick this box or that box.” We could say, “We’ve got this community.” For example, we employed an artist, whose father is a Cantonese speaker and has been here since 1974 but still does not speak a word of English. We looked at how we would engage with those people so that they felt part of the community and had the opportunity to express their cultural rights.

It is both a strength and a weakness, but the lack of that kind of specific direction within the Culture Collective was really helpful. It allowed us to respond to what we found on the ground, which was that although places might be geographically defined, they are about culture and the impact of the people who live or work there and how they create that place. Through working with seven or eight artists to facilitate that, we were able not only to work more in depth with the communities of people who wanted to come forward and be involved, but to show the work to the other communities.

In our research, there was a significant sense that, on the south side, we all lived in little bubbles and there was our culture, their culture, this culture and that culture. Through the Culture Collective, we were able to show things on their terms. We were also able to respond, which is one of the most difficult things in place making. You have to have the flexibility to respond to the changing place.

For example, two Yemeni artists arrived, who had been through Artists in Exile. They had gone to the University of Edinburgh but found that everything had been shut down. The university asked whether we could help, so we said, “Grand—yes, of course,” and we found a way for them to start functioning as artists. They had been exiled from Yemen because they were artists and a couple who were working together. In the context of the war in Yemen, that had made life impossible and they had received multiple death threats. The question was how we could facilitate things for them.

The great thing about the Culture Collective is that we were able to respond. We created some pieces and an art exhibition for Shatha, and she went on to win the John Byrne award for some of her artwork. We did a play that told the story of the cultural traditions in Hadhramout—the part of Yemen that they come from—and some of the obstacles that they faced. We did that in Arabic, but we had English surtitles. Yemeni and other Arabic-speaking audiences came to see it, but so did other people, who had a different experience of understanding the complexity of the culture.

In that piece, we were very keen to work with them and other people who had a sensibility about notions of Islam, women’s oppression and so on, and to look at how we could talk about all that in a way that brought people into the conversation. We addressed some quite complex issues, and the freedom that the Culture Collective gave us to do so was brilliant.

The Convener: Thank you, all. I think that we now have a picture of each of your organisations, which is very helpful. That said, we are tight for time, so please be succinct in your answers. We want to cover as many topics as we can.

I now invite questions from my colleague Mark Ruskell.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Thanks very much for those introductions and, indeed, stories. You are all good storytellers, and you have given us some great examples.

I want to drill down a bit and look at what actually works with regard to funding, partnerships and so on. It sounds as if a diversity of connections is being made between your organisations and, say, statutory agencies, councils and other organisations in your area. Can you drill down into that and be quite succinct about what actually works? In previous evidence sessions, the committee has heard, for example, about the NHS in England employing people to go round and find social prescribing opportunities, and we have also heard about some of the partnerships that have emerged from community planning partnerships.

I am interested, though, in hearing your perspectives on the essence of this. How do you develop the funding partnerships that allow you to undertake more longer-term work in your projects? That question is open to whoever wants to come in.

Arthur Cormack: The fèisean movement that we are involved in has been successful because it has received investment for a long period of time now—indeed, 40-plus years. As I said, the first fèis was in Barra in 1981. Over that period, we have been fortunate to have had support almost without a break from the Scottish Arts Council and, now, Creative Scotland. On top of that, we have been able to pull in funds from other agencies such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise for the fèisean in the Highlands and Islands and, more recently, from Bòrd na Gàidhlig. We also work with local authorities; most notably in our case, we have worked successfully with the Highland Council, Argyll and Bute Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar over the years.

As for your question about what works, I suppose that the fèisean movement would not be there after 40 years if did not work. When you look around Scotland’s traditional music scene, you will see that most of the young people in it will have been involved in a fèis at some time in their lives, probably when they were younger.

More recently, during the second Covid lockdown, the Scottish Government approached us to get involved in a project that would help deliver the national islands plan while offering regular work for freelance artists and supporting communities. The project, which we devised very quickly, was eventually called Treòir Voar Virr, and it encompassed Gaelic, Orcadian and Shetlandic. The challenge for us was to offer it in all island schools in Scotland, and about 80 per cent took up the opportunity. The project itself was very much rooted in those communities; although it was happening in schools, they are a part of communities, too, and the artists who were going into schools very much came from those communities and involved the young people in local storytelling, local songs, local tunes and visual art. The project worked really successfully and, if the funding were there, we would be very willing to continue it.

As another part of that, we have worked with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in the past few months on its celebration—or commemoration—of two ships, the Metagama and the Marloch, which took more than 1,000 people from the islands to America and Canada. It is 100 years since that happened, and the council wanted to mark it. We worked with schools in the Western Isles to produce locally based events that encompassed

the story and songs and tunes connected with that.

Those things work, but the challenge is always in the continuation of funding for such things. As I have said, the regular funding for our core work has been fairly secure over a long number of years, but it is worth saying that it has been on standstill for six or seven years, and it will be for another couple of years. That is having a real effect on our ability even to sustain what we are doing now, never mind develop it. The cost of everything has increased, so the cost of delivering everything has increased, but the funding has not. If we want the kinds of things that have been successful to continue, that needs to be looked at. I know that the committee is not looking at funding in particular as part of its inquiry, but it is hard to divorce that from the reality of trying to deliver stuff in communities.

The Convener: Murray Dawson and Steve Byrne want to say something. If anyone else wants to come in, they should indicate that.

Murray Dawson: Around five years ago, we decided to diversify our financial strategy for the organisation. We recognised that we were too dependent on funding. We are not regularly funded, but we were too dependent on funding, so we wanted to look at contracted provision. As I said earlier, we have an annual turnover of £1.5 million, and around £600,000 of that is contracted income. We are contracted to deliver employability programmes, and we are contracted by Aberdeenshire Council to deliver foundation apprenticeships in creative and digital media and information technology and software development. We work with more than 100 pupils across the year.

There are other contracts, but those two main contracts allow us to build our staff team—to build the workforce. Rachael Disbury mentioned the importance of building staff who are part of the team and are not necessarily all freelance, so that folk can be given proper contracts. If people are delivering our contracts, they can also be available to deliver other work, so we can be nimble and flexible, and we can respond to community need.

As I said, around £600,000 of the £1.5 million is contracted provision. As long as the contracts continue and we deliver on them, that work will be on-going. We can build our team around that. That allows us to apply for funding, to be nimble, and to be successful with our funding bids.

Steve Byrne: I suppose that I have done all the sort of piecemeal projects that Caitlin Skinner referred to, whereby people end up with a community centre cupboard with bits and pieces or remnants of previous projects, and they do not know what to do with them.

The Culture Collective has given us the space, flexibility and freedom to be in a place for a year or more. From a folklorist-traditional artist point of view—from that particular perspective on a community—we tend to see ourselves as seeing the joins between things. We see ourselves as joining the dots with a cultural heritage view. We have found that that has been a radical change for us in being able to do the kinds of things that, aspirationally, we wanted to do for a long time, but—I referred to this in my first comments—we had never really found a willing funding partner. There is freedom and flexibility without always focusing necessarily on sheer numbers and outcomes.

Rachael Disbury talked about process versus outcomes. The process of engaging with a community every Monday in a community centre in Langlees, which is one of the deprived areas of Falkirk, has been phenomenal. Sometimes there might be only half a dozen people and, the next week, there might be 20 people, but we are making connections and building confidence through having that facility and a relaxed element. That allows us the flexibility to build the project, to do that active listening—I think that someone else mentioned that—and then to respond quite readily. We know that we will be there for the next nine or 10 months or whatever, and we can put things in place. One of our People's Parish projects is in Falkirk, which has a very low score in the SIMD. We are staying there for an additional year, because we found the process to be so useful. That is key.

One thing that does not work and which we have found difficult is our relationship with local councils, in respect of council cultural provision. That is because the arm's-length organisation model is not consistent. As I mentioned in the submission, local people do not necessarily know even what those organisations are called. ANGUSalive and OnFife have nice active-sounding titles, but they are not the council arts department. The parallel in Ireland is that people can look up a list of all their council arts officers to find out who they are and what services they offer, which is interesting.

09:45

Finally, I will flag up the encroaching danger of the loss of third spaces that are not work or home. Looking at Falkirk's strategic property review, we find that 133 community spaces will potentially be divested from its estate in the next two years. Some of those are key community centres that we meet in for the People's Parish project. All those reactions and unintended consequences might be responses to short-term financial problems but,

ultimately, there are longer-term problems for communities if some of those centres shut down.

Caitlin Skinner: The point that Robert Rae alluded to about being responsive has been a key part of the Culture Collective. Because we have been allowed and encouraged to run pilots, we have discovered that a lot of the barriers that our participants face are relatively bespoke, and the only way that we can find that out is by trialling things. We were able to trial hubs in different local areas, and we discovered that one of the major barriers for our young people was about food—we actually needed to feed people so that they could come. We also needed to provide taxis so that they could come, but there was no way that we could have known those things in advance. The Culture Collective has given us an opportunity to learn, be a network and develop socially engaged practice in Scotland by learning from each other. There is nothing else like that here, and it has been significant for us.

The other thing that we alluded to was the challenge of working with local authorities. It feels as if we are being pitted against front-line services for our expenses. I have had meetings with the organisations that have been mentioned, and I know that they are just trying to keep the doors open and meet that front-line need, so when we come in and try to talk about a feminist youth theatre, it feels like an extra—something additional. That makes our work really challenging, because we know the benefits of it.

The inquiry will have heard this many times, but the situation with arts funding—the arts have been chronically underfunded and on standstill for so long—creates a limit on what is possible. Our organisation has been on standstill funding since 2015.

Socially engaged practice is a relatively new part of what we do, and we want to do more of it. In 2018, we applied to Creative Scotland to do more of that work in a significant way, and that funding application was initially rejected. In fact, the organisation was completely cut, along with the other theatre companies that fill the equalities remit—companies that work with people with disabilities and with young people. After public outcry, funding was reinstated, but at standstill level. Only Covid funding has allowed us to achieve our ambitions.

Looking forward, it is unclear what the picture will be and whether we will be able to continue.

Robert Rae: I support what Steve Byrne said. We have direct experience of working with a local authority in relation to a centre. Article 27 has been adopted as part of the cultural policy brief of the City of Edinburgh Council but, as Steve alluded to, access to public spaces is not being driven by sustainability. That is because of finances, really, and it leads to models of programming in public spaces that are about revenue generation. That is an incredibly complex web for us, an experienced arts organisation, to go through but, for community organisations such as the Sudanese or Senegalese community organisations, to try to negotiate that or even book a space is virtually impossible.

The complex thing that emerged in our case was that many of the structures around community centres and community spaces have gone through a sort of democratisation process whereby they have a fairly unaccountable management committee. That means that there can be one department in the city that is very supportive of cultural rights and how to do that but another department could be saying, "Well, actually, we are about sustainability, so how do we keep that centre?" You then have to deal with a management committee. In our case, that was a group of people who had been very engaged in the centre, but around 10 or 15 years ago; some had even moved out of the area. We were trying, therefore, to find routes in for the changing community, and that was kind of blocked.

There is also a plethora of various committees around that, such as the Southside Association and community planning groups—all those sorts of things. We have found it complex to negotiate a way through that, so it must be virtually impossible for a relatively small community that wants a space to celebrate its culture to do so.

Rachael Disbury: Mark Ruskell asked what we needed. It is important to understand that we—or at least I—spend 60 or 70 per cent of our time writing funding applications that are often for small pots, and they always need new ideas. What we actually need is trust, flexibility and support in what we do, because we have the evidence—you can see that in our communities. We are based there and we live there; we are of the community, and we work with communities every day.

The Culture Collective has allowed us to build in significant access budgets so that we are not just running fun and meaningful creative projects. We know how to do that—it is almost the easy part. The hard part is getting funding so that we can provide descriptive subtitles for deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences and audio description for blind and partially sighted audiences, and for other access costs, which are high. All those things are core elements, but they are potentially not seen as exciting in our funding applications. Initiatives such as the Culture Collective have allowed us to be flexible, and to really hear about what participants need and deliver supportive long-term work.

Kresanna Aigner: I will try and whistle through a couple of thoughts quickly. Partnership working

is absolutely integral to the way in which we work. We work with a range of partners and stakeholders from the third sector and education, as well as with community groups and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. We work in collaboration with local artists and arts organisations, and with local and national networks. The Culture Collective network has been a fantastic resource for shared learning and opportunities to participate in training and upskilling for both the organisations and the artists that we work with.

Quite simply, working in partnership helps us to improve and broaden our impacts, and it delivers shared outcomes as well as allowing us to share skills, expertise, information and knowledge. We can learn from one another, and reach the people with whom we are all looking to engage, and whom we want to engage with us.

We are in Moray, and our local authority cut the arts and culture budget by 100 per cent back in 2010. The creative sector rose to that challenge by coming together as a sector, and through strengthening our networks and building cross-sector relationships. We engage with a number of departments in Moray Council, such as the youth, economic development, education and health and social care teams. Those relationships are positive, and the teams engage with us, but there is no money—there is no funding. I know that the committee's inquiry is not about funding, but that is an important discussion.

We need to recognise that not only has there been standstill funding within Creative Scotland, but that is coupled with local authority budget cuts, and with services being picked up by the third sector and the cultural sector. That presents an unprecedented challenge for trusts, foundations and local funding, such as local wind farms and other organisations and businesses that might provide support, and for Creative Scotland. We are all trying to do what should be happening as a basic human right with resources reducing. That really needs to be heard.

The Convener: Mark, do you want to come back in?

Mark Ruskell: I am happy to allow the discussion to move on.

The Convener: Okay. I call Maurice Golden.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): As a follow-up to Mark Ruskell's questions, I know that we have said that the inquiry is not about funding, but I actually have a question about funding, because I think that it makes a difference to how we build a place-based culture approach.

Caitlin Skinner made a point about Covid funding via Creative Scotland. I am aware that that particular funding is due to end in October 2023, later this year. I am interested to know what the impact will be on projects and on your organisations with regard to delivering your cultural outcomes.

Robert Rae: We came into being with the Culture Collective, so the ending of that funding is pretty catastrophic for us in relation to sustaining the relationships that we have built up with various communities. We are trying to mitigate that and almost warn the communities that we are working with so that we do not lead them up the garden path and then leave them, but that is the reality of the withdrawal of the funding.

We are applying for little pockets of money. For example, there is funding around loneliness. We are having to work out how we can shape what we do to fit that, but it comes with all sorts of things that we have to do and achieve in that context. The ending of the funding will leave us looking to see how we can pull together little bits here and there to sustain the work that we have done with the communities. It is going to be tough without that funding.

The Convener: Does anyone else want to comment—fairly briefly, if you can?

Caitlin Skinner: The situation is pretty critical in the arts because of the longevity of the issue. We need to start talking about the arts in Scotland living in poverty, because that is the situation that we and our organisations are in. The Covid funding has plugged a gap and has kept many organisations going. I guess that we need to see the gap—the period between one thing ending and another thing starting—as a critical moment. There is an emergency to be avoided when it comes to arts funding, because so much can kind of come in on itself.

Rachael Disbury: It is simple, because it is crucial. People have found a cultural home in our organisation because of our sustained work and the way that we have been able to improve all aspects of our practice. I do not think that we can go back. We cannot just remove things, because they are not single elements. They are weaved through everything.

It is important to note that a lot of the groups that we work with in the Scottish Borders are vulnerable in different ways and are from marginalised communities. They need to know that we are not going to disappear after two weeks, or after six weeks. Our practice is really ingrained, and we now know that it would not work without that, because we have seen the successes.

Caitlin Skinner: The project has allowed us to show how it could be and what might be possible. It has allowed us to dream in a way that has not

otherwise been possible recently, so its ending is really sad.

Kresanna Aigner: I agree absolutely, and I note that our communities want it to continue. We are supporting children and vulnerable people. We are looking mindfully at the expectations and, as we said, at working actively with other organisations. We are considering how threads can be pulled through, but it is not the same as having longer-term funding for professional expertise to support the process.

The Convener: After Murray Dawson has commented, we will go back to Maurice Golden and I will then bring in Ben Macpherson, who has a supplementary question.

Murray Dawson: We need the funding to be continued. We have talked about long-term funding, but funding for two years is not long term.

In Aberdeen, we are leading a consortium of all the cultural organisations in the Culture Collective, and that work has been about embedding culture in community planning. Certainly in Aberdeen, culture tends to be recognised as something that exists around economics—around economic development, the night-time economy and tourism. Over the past two years, we have been embedding it in community planning, so that every project is linked to that and to the local outcomes improvement plan. That takes time, but we have now embedded it and we have the right process, so the projects are being noticed not just in economic terms, but across the board.

Two years is a short timeframe. If you give us another two years of funding, we will really make an impact.

Maurice Golden: Given the time, convener, I will leave it there.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): The third sector has said that one of the advantages of the pandemic funding was that the process was more trusting. As Rachael Disbury said, that allowed funding to move quickly to organisations with strong credibility and a reputation for delivery. Are there lessons to be learned from the way that the funding was facilitated and provided in the creative space during the pandemic?

10:00

Rachael Disbury: A crucial aspect of the emergency funding through the Culture Collective was its criteria, such as that no role should be less than six months and that a certain amount of the funding—at least 50 per cent, I think—should go towards artists' fees. Such criteria meant that we could be flexible but kept accountable. That has allowed us to improve the sector over the past two years, and we cannot allow that to go backwards.

Arthur Cormack: My experience of applying for regular funding from Creative Scotland the last time around was that the application ran to something like 30-odd pages. In relation to Covid funding, three questions were asked. I hope that Creative Scotland has learned from that that you can get really good outcomes from organisations if you trust them. If you ask applicants the right questions, you will get the outcomes that you are looking for, but there is no need for hugely long applications from organisations that have been funded for a long time. I hope that lessons have been learned from that, because we all spend an awful lot of time filling in forms, which is, I think, unnecessary for organisations that have been funded for a long time.

Murray Dawson: Another thing about the Culture Collective was that it looked not for projects but for principles. The opportunity to be trusted to develop a project alongside the community, instead of us coming in with specific projects, was really beneficial and refreshing.

The Convener: We will move to the next questions.

Neil Bibby: We have heard this morning about the impact on organisations of the cost of living going up. I want to explore the costs for users. According to the Audience Agency, 90 per cent of people have indicated that they will cut back on leisure and entertainment costs. One of the biggest groups to say that was families with children under the age of 16. Last week, the committee heard from Professor David Stevenson about the importance of getting to people at a young age when it comes to accessing culture.

I was struck by what Caitlin Skinner said about affordable childcare costs being a barrier. Obviously, that is a challenge, but is there a solution in there at the same time? The Government is talking about having more of a focus on childcare not just for pre-school children but for school-aged children. Cultural organisations do work all year round—there is a Fèis Phàislig summer camp, for example—so is there an opportunity to provide affordable childcare? That would allow parents to access culture, but it would also give parents quality childcare as well as cultural opportunities for children outwith a school setting, which is what they want.

The Convener: I have a right-hand bias, so I will go to the other

side of the table first this time.

Robert Rae: It is key that our practice is free at the point of delivery. In each community that we work with, we appoint a co-ordinator who has the same language as the community that we are dealing with. We rely on that co-ordinator to deal with access issues, and we can address access costs through our pot of funding. Our offer is always free at the point of delivery. If someone wants to get involved, they get involved. If there are obstacles to getting involved, we do everything that we can to make involvement possible, although there are obviously limits to what we can provide.

That is how we have tried to address the issue in some of the communities that are being hardest hit by the cost of living crisis, where people are really struggling. Like others, we offer food at times as part of our offer; we provide community meals and things like that.

One of the difficulties with the instrumentalisation of culture and the arts is that you have to prove that you are doing little bits here and there. However, offering that level of support in participation in culture means that people feel comfortable with that and can access it comfortably without any of the stigma that could be involved. Like all the other arts organisations here, we are very conscious of the reality of what is going on, particularly in poorer and working-class communities, and we are finding creative ways of mitigating that through the projects to try to overcome those barriers.

Arthur Cormack: I will, I hope, be brief. If young people take part in a cultural activity for a period of time, that is, perhaps, a period in which their parents do not have to provide childcare. I am not suggesting that the work that we do provides cheap childcare or anything like that, but it is a solution for some people.

We try to make everything as cheap as possible so that young people can take part. All the fèisean try to ensure that everybody has access, and there are free places available, too, for those who cannot afford it.

However, with regard to audiences at events, the harsh reality is that the cost of everything is increasing, and that has had an impact on ticket prices. I have not seen a negative impact from that in our case—people are still coming out to events. After Covid, it has taken a long time for them to be comfortable doing that, but, now that they have started to do so, I do not think that the ticket price has been a barrier for a lot of people. I am very aware that ticket prices have risen, but the costs of venues, providing accommodation for artists and all those kinds of things have risen, too, and it is inevitable that that will have a knock-on effect on the price of tickets.

We talked in our submission about local authorities' support for culture. In our case, the only viable venue for the kind of work that we do with the fèisean, certainly in rural areas, is a school, and schools are now being rented out for something like £5,000 for two days by some local authorities. In fact, one of our fèisean faces a bill of £16,000 from the local authority to provide what it provides all year round after school on a Wednesday and for a week-long fèis in the summer. The costs are massive. If local authorities are looking at their obligations with regard to providing cultural activities to people, I suggest that one of the things that they need to look at is the cost of schools.

Steve Byrne mentioned this earlier, but the problem is that a lot of the schools are now managed by third sector organisations or organisations at arm's length from the local authorities, with the result that accountability has been taken away from councillors. When you approach councillors and tell them, "The cost of your schools is ridiculous, by the way", they will say, "It's not up to us—it's up to the organisation that's renting them out." There are difficulties in that respect that have to be overcome, but it is certainly having a huge impact on our work, and I am sure that we are not alone in that.

Kresanna Aigner: We face a number of barriers, from financial worries and mental health issues to poor transport links that leave people isolated and unable or less likely to participate in activities and events.

Alongside that is the issue of people feeling that culture is relevant when it is done to them. Again, I sing the praises of our programme and the work that is being carried out by the organisations around the table and so many more. What helps to overcome barriers is embedding artists in communities and building long, robust and meaningful relationships. Cross-sector partnership working also allows us to bring in bits of resources.

We have talked about food. We, too, find that there is a need for food when running activities. We have, as part of our budget, an access fund that covers lots of things, including transport and travel costs and, when it is needed, food. We are committed to reducing ticket prices, asking people to pay what they can and having loads of free events to enable access, but all that requires funding.

Murray Dawson: The answer to the question is yes—the cultural sector could deliver that kind of support for schoolchildren and, indeed, probably does. However, we would want to look at long-

term contracted provision in relation to after-school support. For example, we do a range of informal youth work with young people throughout the week and every weekend, and that is on-going, year on year. We have to fundraise for that, whereas, if it was contracted provision, the whole thing might not be paid for but we could match that money with secured funding.

Caitlin Skinner: As has been said, the barrier is often not the price of the ticket but everything else around transport and other things. We suggest that, if we want to achieve cultural democracy, we need to look at gender justice. Actually, achieving gender justice would probably help with cultural democracy and cultural participation.

In relation to how we build the capacity for participation, we and the Government are interested in what a four-day working week or a universal basic income would mean for cultural participation and in how affordable childcare would affect people's ability to invest in their community and be part of the cultural life of where they live. That could be a massive benefit. We would always be nervous about the extent to which arts activity could be childcare—that is a bit of a problem for us—but we are interested in how those things can work together to improve the lives of our citizens.

Steve Byrne: I have some thoughts off the top of my head about how that process could work, based on some of our experiences with local authorities. What is the process? What would be the discussions? What channels would we need to go down to bring forward proposals?

I ask those questions because, as I said, there is inconsistency in cultural provision at the local level. That might relate to arm's-length organisations or to the disconnects that we find in local councils between community learning and development, education and the arts. In one area, I have gone through the whole process with almost no involvement of those in community learning and development, even though they are just across the street from where we normally meet. We are a third sector arts organisation with a partnership with the Corra Foundation in that area. We have also been involved in community action planning. We have looked at barriers relating to local transport, the reasons why budgets have been cut, the sustainability agenda and so on.

I am not clear on how we would start that conversation in some of the areas where we have been working. Who would we approach? What are the mechanisms to have that discussion?

Robert Rae: For us, it is about cultural rights. The notion of cultural rights is broader than the cultural sector; it impacts on food, housing and everybody's way of life. In the end, culture is what makes us human beings, and that is not limited to what happens in the culture houses. It is important to understand that.

In relation to how we bring about joined-up thinking, I am a strong advocate for cultural rights. Across the world, there is now a recognition that cultural rights are key to the health of communities and societies, and cities are beginning to adopt such approaches. Scotland is one of the only countries that is not yet engaged in that process through United Cities and Local Governments.

Cities such as Barcelona and Rome have adopted cultural rights. Crucially, in relation to delivering those rights, the right for people to participate in cultural life has been recognised right across the council—the policy has been adopted by the city council at the top level and has then gone down. The policy involves looking at how each department is functioning in the context of granting people their cultural rights. All the different departments are brought together and asked how cultural rights can be delivered and how we can ensure that all citizens get access to their fundamental human right to a cultural life.

There is a need for that kind of initiative. The Scottish Parliament's adoption of cultural rights would give us the opportunity to have a broader consensus. I think that there is a consensus on cultural rights, but how do we make that real? I do not think that it will become real until it becomes a public duty, and it will not become a public duty until it is incorporated into law.

The Convener: Those are interesting thoughts.

I will bring in Dr Allan.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Good morning, everyone, agus gu sònraichte madainn mhath dhan nàbaidh agamsa an-diugh, Art bho Fhèisean nan Gàidheal.

I want to ask about the concept of unmet cultural need. I want to start with Steve Byrne and Arthur Cormack in the context of traditional arts and then perhaps broaden the discussion to everyone to talk about what they understand by the concept.

I want to start with Art Cormack, because, traditionally, traditional arts have not historically featured as a priority in educational or cultural policy in Scotland. As people have said, that is now changing for the better. Is there still an unmet cultural need in Scottish traditional culture, and is there a more general unmet need in other areas of the arts that we should also try to fill?

The question is for Art and Steve first, then for everyone else.

10:15

The Convener: Steve Byrne, do you want to go first?

Steve Byrne: Sure. Are there any rules against singing, convener?

The Convener: Certainly not, if it's you that's doing it.

Steve Byrne: There we go.

Alasdair Allan: I hope that they have recorded that in the *Official Report*.

Steve Byrne: I have a wee verse fur ye:

Fae Abbotshaugh tae Coblebrae
Alang the Carron River
Whaur we wid aften wend oor wey
When the days gaed on fur ivver
Doon the Bank tae Forganhall
Whaur the bairns they pleyed sae glad
Whaur monie a lass fae Bainsford
Met and woo'd a Langlees lad

That sounds like an old song, but it is brand new—it was written by me a couple of weeks ago. It sounds like an old song, because it is full of cultural memory and place. There are about seven markers that would appeal to—and have meaning for—people from that particular part of Falkirk.

Meeting unmet cultural need is about recognising localism and local distinctiveness. We at TRACS think that that gives people local cultural confidence. It is not about nativism, but about recognising what we have on our doorsteps and the strength of local diversity. That distinctiveness and that difference gear us up in a way that allows us to go on and engage with cultures from elsewhere. Communities all across Scotland are increasingly finding ourselves incorporating other traditions into our own, but that is something that we have done for generations.

I will skip through it, but I will read a little something by Alan Lomax, who wrote about the idea of cultural equity, which I mentioned earlier. He says:

"All cultures need their fair share of the air-time."

He then says, in slightly dated language:

"When country folk or tribal peoples hear or view their own traditions in the big media, projected with the authority generally reserved for the output of large urban centers, and when they hear their traditions taught to their own children, something magical occurs."

We have seen that at TRACS. He also says:

"They see that their expressive style is as good as that of others, and, if they have equal communicational facilities"

and opportunities,

"they will continue it."

Finally, Lomax says:

"Practical men often regard these expressive systems as doomed and valueless. Yet, wherever the principle of cultural equity comes into play, these creative wellsprings begin to flow again"

and

"even in this industrial age, folk traditions can come vigorously back to life, can raise community morale, and give birth to new forms if they have time and room to grow in their own communities."

I always come back to that idea of the traditional arts, which can be the poor relation. We have taken much about our local ways of life and local language for granted. I was struck by what Robert Rae said about having a local co-ordinator who has the language of the community that they are working with. Ah hae the language o the fowk in Falkirk, and Ah wis spikkin tae thaim the hale time in Scots, and it made a real difference in engaging with folk. That is a striking and universal truth about communicating with people on their own terms.

Alasdair Allan: That wis fair braw that Ah set that up. Fowk micht jalouse Ah hid set it up, but Ah hidnae.

Art Cormack is a fine singer too. I do not know if he has a song.

The Convener: This might get out of hand.

Alasdair Allan: I can bring him in, either in continuous prose or in song or music before I open it up to everyone else. No pressure, ma-thà.

Arthur Cormack: I could probably sing a verse of a song, but I have not done my warm-up this morning.

Ach, I am gonnae do it, because I am not gonnae let Steve have the upper hand. [*Laughter*.] This song talks about the Isle of Skye, where I come from. It was written by Màiri Mhòr nan Òran—Mary MacPherson—and talks about the effect that the ownership of land has had on local culture. I will sing one verse and then I may say something.

Ged tha mo cheann air liathadh,
Le deuchainnean is bròn,
Is grian mo leth-cheud bliadhna
Air ciaradh fo na neòil;
Tha m' aigne air an lìonadh
Le iarrtas tha ro mhòr,
A dh'fhaicinn Eilean Sgiathach
Nan siantanan 's a' cheò

That is enough of that. I will send the words to the folk who are trying to record it.

Going back to Alasdair Allan's question, I would say that there is an unmet demand in what we do. There are certainly communities out there that are interested in engaging with the traditional arts, but the reality at present is that we cannot support them all, so there are unmet needs in that sense.

It is not that there is a lack of ability to support the organisations—there is simply a lack of resources to enable us to support everybody. There are folk out there who want to engage with Gaelic culture and the traditional arts. We run a couple of schemes on behalf of Creative Scotland, through Fèisean nan Gàidheal—a small grant scheme for traditional arts, which is always oversubscribed, and another one specifically for Gaelic arts, which again is oversubscribed—and it is clear from those two schemes that there is much more demand out there than we are able to meet. That is separate from Creative Scotland's own work, but there is definitely a lot of interest in traditional arts and we are not currently able to support everything.

The Convener: In the previous session of Parliament, the Education and Skills Committee, of which I was the convener, undertook an inquiry into music tuition in schools, and it led to the policy commitment of not charging for music.

In my home area of North Lanarkshire, all the musicians, from the symphony band, the jazz band and the rock band, are brought together on a Friday night. We have Gaelic-medium teaching and traditional music, and a pipe band, there, too. I am often struck by the cross-pollination that happens and the support of other musicians for music that they might not always come into contact with; indeed, it led to people having a huge amount of pride when the pipe band was featured busking in Grand Central station during tartan week. That absolutely galvanised the community.

Alasdair Allan mentioned education. Do we perhaps not understand enough about what is going on in education? Is this sort of thing not being shared in the communities as much as it possibly could be? Perhaps we could have some reflections on that, starting with Rachael Disbury.

Rachael Disbury: It is perhaps less about traditional forms of art than about the way in which arts organisations are joined by Scottish histories and heritages and are using contemporary methods. As I said earlier, all the children in the schools in the Scottish Borders now have iPads, but do not necessarily have the know-how to use them, and organisations such as Alchemy Film and Arts are teaching them how to explore things like the reivers and the common riding—the strong heritage of the Scottish Borders—through contemporary methods, using those iPads.

Everyone has the capacity to make films, and arts organisations are leading the way in using historical and cultural points in local areas, and engaging young people who previously might not have engaged in such things. There is a risk of those heritages dying away, but we are trying to reinvigorate interest through contemporary digital methods.

I am not going to sing, but last year we ran a musician-in-residence programme and established a new folk song for Hawick that was based on property relations and historical points. It featured the voice of a young woman in Hawick who, at the weekend, sang to an audience of 200 people and made everyone weep. We are working with young people in that way and using really creative methods to pull everything together.

Also last year, we ran a residency in which we explored the black histories of Hawick, which are not told. When people go into cultural spaces, they cannot see those things, and it takes black artists and people of colour to come to a place like Hawick and unearth those histories, based on lived experience and research. That is important, too.

Robert Rae: Again, I agree with Steve Byrne about the importance of local traditional culture to people's self-confidence and self-worth. That very much extends into migrant communities; for example, we are doing a project that includes a musician from Senegal, a Fochabers fiddler, an Irish musician, a musician from Hong Kong and a musician from the working-class tradition in Lancashire. Through that project, they are exploring and respecting their traditions.

As for Scotland being a place of welcome for migrant communities, I think that taking that respect for our traditions and affording the same dignity to those communities are key, but that is not happening. For various reasons, they are not being given that space and that opportunity, but they have a lot to give and share through their respect for their traditions. They are often in exile from very difficult situations, so those traditions are incredibly important to their wellbeing and in feeling confident about living in Scotland.

Caitlin Skinner: It certainly feels that there is an unmet cultural need. One way to understand where that need might be is through artists on the ground and their connections with communities. There is a question about the representation of those artists, who those artists are and whether our arts leadership is representative of the people of Scotland. Do we have that diversity, and are we encouraging artists from diverse backgrounds to pursue a career? Do we keep those connections going?

We have found a lack of data in some places, not just data that looks at one level of inequality but particularly intersectional data on how people who face multiple inequalities experience barriers. That is the fragility in our understanding of where that need is.

The Convener: I want to ask you for some final quick points. Is there anything that we have not covered but which you would like to say a few

words about before we close this evidence session?

Steve Byrne: I just want to tie together some of the things that we have been referring to with regard to validating local ways of life. Earlier in the week, I had a particular experience in my home town of Arbroath when I was talking to secondary 1 pupils and telling them about something about the town that I grew up knowing—that the Cargills, the Swankies and the Teviotdales were the traditional fisher names in the town. In essence, my anecdotal evidence is that that knowledge is pretty much gone, which feeds into what we have said in our submission about alienation and loss of meaning.

Cultures, particularly local cultures, have a role to play in that. As Robert Rae has said, it is often very personal. We are not always bashing on about Scottish traditional culture; what we talk about are local cultures in Scotland, and ultimately they can be from anywhere in the world. That is a key principle for us.

The Convener: Does anyone else have any final thoughts?

Rachael Disbury: My final point is that everyone participates in culture and that having good cultural opportunities is a marker of a healthy community. Our culture is a method for social change. This discussion is not just about making artworks, sculptures and things like that, although all of those things are brilliant; including people in the cultural progress of their place is integral to everything, too.

Robert Rae: I want to make the case for socially engaged practice. Although everybody has talked about the huge amount of strengths that the Culture Collective has, one area that we were unable to facilitate was engagement with and getting feedback from communities. As an artist, I felt that the emphasis on fair work for artists was much appreciated and was great, but at times we asked, "How do we bring the communities themselves into this discussion? How do we facilitate that?" It is a complex task.

There is a case to be made for looking at Culture Ireland, which is set up as a separate institution. It looks at socially engaged practice, and it is able to do that breadth of work and consultation on it, not only from the artist's or the organisation's perspective but from the perspective of the people who engage in the culture. There is a case for having a separate body that looks at socially engaged practice from all the different angles and which can offer a coherent view.

The Convener: Thank you very much for all your contributions—I see that we have finished on time. This has been another interesting evidence session, and it has been good to hear from you all about the amazing work that you are doing in your communities.

Thank you for the singing, too. I know that we are not allowed props, so I do not know whether we have crossed any barriers, but it was wonderful to hear both of the witnesses sing.

On that note, I briefly suspend the meeting for five minutes, after which we will move on to our second panel.

10:30

Meeting suspended.

10:36

On resuming—

The Convener: On our second panel are Kathryn Welch, programme lead, Culture Collective, and Morvern Cunningham, creative lead, Culture Collective. A warm welcome to you both. We had an interesting session this morning in which we heard very positive comments from the panel about the Culture Collective. What has been different about the Culture Collective's approach that maybe was missing from past projects?

Kathryn Welch (Culture Collective): Thank you so much for having us. It is lovely to be here and it is nice to follow the evidence that was given by the seven Culture Collective projects this morning. By way of context, there are 26 Culture Collective projects in total and Morvern and I, along with two colleagues, Matt Hickman and Arusa Qureshi, are freelancers. We make up the programme lead team, which is designed to support, look after, champion and connect those 26 projects and the artists and groups that they work with to create the Culture Collective network.

It has been a joy and privilege to see the quality of that work and the care that all those projects bring to their work, as well as how they have all become completely different in response to their local environment while sharing depth of thought, depth of care and long-term commitment to their places and to the people they are working with.

On how the Culture Collective has made a difference, lots but not all of these projects or organisations existed before, but I think that, in every case, the Culture Collective has been a huge step change.

There are two reasons behind that. The first is the funding model. As you heard earlier this morning, it was designed by Creative Scotland to prioritise extended time and a real level of trust and flexibility for the projects. It is funny—when we first started with the Culture Collective, I would

quite often take calls from the co-ordinators or from the projects, saying, "Something's a bit different from what we expected," or, "We've tried something and it didn't work and now we've got a great idea but it is not what we wrote down originally—is that all right?" and it has been brilliant throughout to be able to say, "That is not just all right—that is the point." What we are trying to create is a model that grows, changes and adapts and goes where the need is and the interest is and learns from what is happening within an individual project and shares that learning across the network.

The second reason why the Culture Collective has been a step change for many is the commitment to looking after artists, treating them well and creating sustainable opportunities for artists and for freelancers—not least me and Morvern. There is now a network of around 500 creative practitioners across Scotland who have been employed by Culture Collective projects.

As someone mentioned earlier this morning, 50 per cent of funding was restricted and was to be paid directly to artists in artist fees and salaries. The requirement was that the vast majority of contracts should be a minimum of six months in length. It is always worth noting that they are not long-term contracts—six months is not very long—but in an inherently and chronically underpaid and insecure sector, it has made a huge difference. People are now being paid Scottish Artists Union rates and they have stability in their career and work. That has an impact ethically, because it brings in a broader diversity of artists who are genuinely representative of the communities that they are working in, but it also has an impact on effectiveness. If you pay artists well and allow them to focus on the work that they are doing, and if you do not spread them so thinly that they are doing 10 jobs at once and working all hours, they can do a better job. It is not rocket science. It means that we benefit from the expertise of people who bring a much broader range of lived experience to their work. There is some brilliant work going on with single parents and new parents that is informed by the fact that we can employ artists who have caring responsibilities and they can be looked after in their projects.

Those are two of the things that stand out for me in how the Culture Collective has enabled that step change.

Morvern Cunningham (Culture Collective): We heard from the panel earlier this morning about the flexibility, freedom, ability to be responsive and the trust that can come from long-term financial support, although two years is not as long-term as it could be. There is an issue there about building relationships and the work that those projects are already doing in their communities to build those long-term relationships.

To add to Kathryn Welch's comments, I will speak a little bit about our role. We are a freelance team that works part-time and focuses on facilitating a network, which has been a positive addition. All the projects, and more that are working in participatory settings outwith the Culture Collective, are doing fantastic work in their communities. A network has the power to enable the exchange of knowledge and ideas, to direct conversation and to have national conversations, and it has been valuable and a privilege to work with those fantastic organisations.

The Convener: We move to questions from the committee.

Mark Ruskell: I have a lot of questions about how to sustain what has been created and how to develop the partnerships that have been established by the various projects and make them sustainable for the long term. It seems as though the Culture Collective has seeded all that work in the communities, but how do you then build the network for the long term and get partners in that network to feed into it, recognise its long-term value and move beyond that period of great creativity and innovation that has lasted for the six months or two years? Ultimately, the need is there, the benefit is there and the commitment to communities is there, and expectations will have also been raised. Where do you go next?

Morvern Cunningham: I should point out that we have a contract for this month and we hope to get it extended until October or November, which is probably when our programme lead team contract will finish.

In my role as creative lead, I am focusing on the creative practitioners in the network who, as Kathryn Welch mentioned, are in the hundreds. One thing that I am focusing on is how we can give the practitioners the tools that they can use to reap the benefit of peer support because, in the short-term and foreseeable future, we will not be there to answer queries and facilitate support.

It is interesting to note that there is a national network, but we have also been able to create small, informal networks with the projects and the practitioners within them. Practitioners often work in isolation and it has been a benefit for them to be able to work with their peers and in their place as well as at the wider level. As an example of some of the work that I have been doing, I have been working with Lindsay Dunbar of Coaching for Creatives to equip practitioners with skills and tools such as action listening sets and listening circles. Along with our engagement co-ordinator, Matt Hickman, we are working with some of those

specific peer groups in the network that will then, I hope, continue to support one another as the project comes to an end.

10:45

Kathryn Welch: As Morvern Cunningham has said, we are in this strange situation in which—the projects talked about this earlier; they are in the same situation—we are trying to build a sustainable network that can exist beyond our contract and the known lifetime of the Culture Collective, while at the same time knowing that it will never be enough and that this should not be a short-term initiative. We are feeding two masters at once: trying to do the best that we can in the time that we have and recognising that more time is the solution to the problem. Those two things are almost incompatible. Trying to wind down in a healthy and sustainable way is not what we want to be doing, but it is the best that we can do with the resources that we know we have.

In thinking about what next, we have to start talking more about how we support this kind of work over the long term. It was fascinating to hear Arthur Cormack talk earlier about the support over 40 years for the fèis movement, which gives a sense of how much can be achieved with that kind of long-term funding. There is still work to do, of course, and it will continue to be needed.

We have had two years of funding, and we will have had two and a half years by October. That came from Covid emergency money, but this is not a Covid emergency need. Long term, our communities need and deserve culture; our artists need and deserve sustainable jobs; and we as citizens deserve to benefit from all that.

The need is, like the topic of this inquiry, to think about how we prioritise culture and community and how we recognise that as more than just a nice add-on for the culture sector. For so long, the participatory or community bit has been considered as cute, sweet and nice and as an add-on to more national or renowned projects. The long-term success of the Culture Collective would be to start to shift that conversation so that we see the community element as the heart of the culture sector. For lots of people, this is what their cultural life looks like, and it feels as though enabling participation across Scotland will take more than two and a half years. It absolutely deserves that time, too.

Mark Ruskell: I am interested to know to what extent, over the two-year process, there has been a different conversation in local communities about funding? Have discussions been galvanised about a transient visitor levy, 1 per cent for culture or funding from other sources? Is that embedding itself into future partnerships and future funding sources, or is it still embryonic? The momentum that you built up has to go somewhere. If, fundamentally, it is about funding and commitment over time, what are the areas that the community and peer-to-peer networks are trying to push forward? Are they trying to move the conversation on at local level about how things will be supported?

Morvern Cunningham: I was just thinking a little bit about the fact that the Culture Collective was seeded from Covid recovery funding and, earlier, Ben Macpherson, I think, mentioned lessons from the pandemic. There has perhaps been a shift to there being more of a focus on participatory work in communities because of the fantastic response from community-based organisations during the pandemic, when cultural institutions and other third sector organisations closed their doors and were unable to move the Titanic.

The organisations that rose to the challenge are those that are embedded in and have knowledge of the needs of their communities and that have the flexibility and ability to respond that we have talked about. There were community-based organisations in Edinburgh that pivoted to become food banks, while, as I said, the institutions closed their doors.

It was a prescient choice for the inquiry to take place now, so that the committee could look at the lessons that came from the pandemic. There was conversation earlier about seeing the economic value of culture versus its health and wellbeing and social value. It feels as though, for far too long, there has been deeply embedded inequity in the cultural sector, whereby one form of culture—bums on seats, as I like to call it—is put on a pedestal above other forms of culture. As Kathryn Welch suggested, what if we had engagement and participatory practice at the heart of what we are doing in the cultural sector in Scotland?

The programme lead team has had the ability to experiment and trial new ideas, and one of the things that we like to embed is a concept of how we would like it to be. How would we like it to be in order to create an aspirational goal and work towards it. The Culture Collective has allowed us to do that in all forms of access and support. I would like cultural participation and community engagement at the heart of the cultural sector.

Kathryn Welch: We have seen a shifting demand in communities. I had written down "need and demand", but actually, I mean demand—that sense of, "I want more of this. This has been great. Can I keep coming?" That is where we have seen the shift: from the question of how we engage to how we can keep meeting that need. That question is shifting, which is exciting, and, as people were saying earlier, it comes with an

obligation with regard to how we honour and do justice to that offer now that we have made it.

On the question of where money comes from, I was struck by the fact that Rachel Disbury said that she spends 60 to 70 per cent of her time fundraising. It is horrifying but really common that that is the case. Certainly, those organisations will be very aware of where they might get money from for their projects. It takes up a huge amount of brain space, time and energy and causes heartbreak.

That is why the Culture Collective has been so brilliant—because it is funded at scale. It is a tricky thing to say, because it feels greedy to say that it is brilliant because it is a significant investment. However, we take that very seriously, because it has enabled projects to shift the question. Previously, the question was, "How can I do this work cheaply with the dregs of money that I have been able to get hold of?" For so long, community work in particular has existed with the dregs of funding, and people work miracles with practically no money. However, proper investment allows the question to shift to, "What is most needed? How can we be most effective and most brilliant?" It allows us to work with ambition and ask, "How could this be as brilliant as possible?" as opposed to, "How can we do this cheaply because that's all we've got?"

With regard to the future, projects will be scrapping around for every possible funding source that they can find, which in itself actively takes away from the potential for people to serve their communities as well as possible.

Maurice Golden: During the earlier evidence session, we heard from Robert Rae that the impact of the funding cut would be catastrophic. From your perspective, what, if any, would be the legacy effects beyond the end of the funding?

Kathryn Welch: With regard to legacy, we are focusing on building a network that exists sustainably without our support. So much of the culture sector, as I am sure is true in lots of sectors, exists on the basis of word of mouth, who you know, who has jobs going and who you can ask for advice. In the past, it has been a lonely gig. It feels as though you are the only person ever who has held a session that no one turned up for or the only person for whom anything has ever gone wrong.

Building a network of peers is almost about making friends—it is about having someone who you can ring up to say, "This is really tough. Have you been through this? What was it like? What did you do?" and the openness that comes with that, so that someone can say, "Oh, we really screwed that up, so here's how you might do that differently and learn from that."

We see a huge impact in terms of enabling everybody to progress further and faster than they might do on their own, so we have been working hard, as Morvern Cunningham has mentioned, to embed that network, so that people genuinely know each other and so that, in future, that brilliant resource of participatory artists and people who are committed to working in a community-engaged way feel that they have peers, colleagues, advocates, allies and people who they can ask for work. That feels like a real possibility as a result of the Culture Collective and something that I think will continue to bear fruit, particularly for the artists who are often most disadvantaged when it comes to that word-of-mouth network.

Morvern Cunningham: I would also love to see cultural policy being influenced by the Culture Collective. It grew out of Scotland's culture strategy, but there is a wealth of knowledge in the organisations, and among the hundreds of freelance practitioners who are currently part of the collective. There is a real possibility of influence, and—as Robert Rae mentioned—of groups emerging from the network. There is also the possibility of guidance and best practice when it comes to working in participatory ways. It feels like there is so much knowledge that could be harnessed right now, which could potentially get lost or disappear in the near future.

Maurice Golden: To set the issue of funding aside for a moment, you mentioned in your submission the importance and impact of the Culture Collective. I wonder how that could be replicated throughout Scotland, in particular in areas that are not served by existing organisations. If funding was not an issue, what would that model look like? Where are the current gaps, for example?

Morvern Cunningham: There was always an intention—well, there was at one point, I believe—for the network to expand and take on other project members. As I have mentioned, there are great organisations out there doing participatory work that are not part of the Culture Collective.

In that scenario, I would like to see the network continue to grow and become more diverse and representative of Scotland as a nation and its many cultures. I would like to see it continue to sustain practitioners who enjoy going into places and learning about them and researching them, and serving those communities. It should also sustain those practitioners who are getting an opportunity—in some cases, the first opportunity that they have ever had—through the Culture Collective to work and earn a living in their place.

Kathryn Welch: The nice thing, which always feels exciting, is to see people's roles within the Culture Collective evolve the longer they are involved. There are multiple examples of people

who were first referred by a general practitioner, for example, to take part in an activity and who have since gone on to lead that activity. There are community groups that were brought together by an artist and are now self-sustaining and leading their own activities.

There are artists who were commissioned to be part of a Culture Collective project who are now coming together as collectives of freelancers to apply for funding to lead their own work. That feels like a long-term shift: to keep providing a pathway, not just for artists or organisations but for individuals and communities, to enable them to shape and increase the ways in which they are able to be part of the provision, and to keep dipping in and out of it as they want. Not everybody wants to lead everything; sometimes it is nice just to turn up and have a good time.

Maurice Golden: Is there time for another little question, convener?

The Convener: A very small one.

Maurice Golden: Policy makers love metrics, particularly those that are associated with funding. How can you sell what you do?

Kathryn Welch: We have been clear from the beginning with the Culture Collective projects that we ask for metrics. When I say "we", I should be clear that reporting from projects goes to Creative Scotland, and Creative Scotland writes the report templates and decides what metrics are collected.

One thing that Creative Scotland has done that has worked brilliantly is to ask for metrics only on the employment of artists. We can tell you exactly how many artists were employees, and exactly what proportion of that budget has been given to artists. Throughout, however, we have intentionally stepped away from asking projects to report on how many people came to a session, for example, and to get away from reporting on a scale of one to 10 on things like, "How is your health and wellbeing today as opposed to a month ago?"

Metrics such as that have been really harmful, as I think that people will be aware. It has been transformational to shift the conversation from how many people came to a session to how those sessions are going and what people are getting out of them. For example, we might have people coming to those sessions who might not have been able to do so in the past.

You are right—metrics are always powerful, but the collection of metrics can be harmful. I suppose that the question to ask in response to that is: how do we shape policy through storytelling, and how do we recognise not only what metrics can do but what they cannot do?

11:00

Morvern Cunningham: We can perhaps find some new metrics or something. There is, as Kathryn Welch has said, a danger of squeezing cultural organisations that work in a participatory way to provide health and wellbeing metrics and using that to compete with hospital beds. I know that there is an issue in that regard.

Moreover, the use of economic metrics is why there is currently a disparity in the cultural sector. Perhaps we need a better way of gauging the impact and importance of the organisations and the work that they do.

Neil Bibby: Good morning. You have told us about the benefits of the Culture Collective and the guidance, best practice and knowledge that can be shared, and we have also heard about the challenges in relation to funding, Covid recovery and so on. Given how much has happened in the intervening period, would it be of benefit to revisit the cultural strategy of 2020 to take into account the positive work as well as the difficulties and challenges that we have seen over the past few years?

Morvern Cunningham: That work might be under way at the moment through the refresh of the action plan, which is looking at the specific outcomes of strengthening and empowering culture. "A Cultural Strategy for Scotland" is a great document, and it is a shame that its timing coincided with the onset of the pandemic. As I have said, the Culture Collective did not grow out of the pandemic and the Covid recovery fund; it grew out of the cultural strategy and is a testament to that document.

The Convener: I will ask a couple of questions, and reflect on our previous evidence sessions. I do not know whether you were able to watch it, but, the week before last, we had a session with local authorities and some arm's-length external organisations that are providing local authority-level support for culture. Interestingly enough—if I remember correctly—we spent a long time talking about metrics. How smooth do you think that that process is? Are there any geographic gaps? Are different approaches being taken by different authorities? After all, we have heard this morning, particularly from Steve Byrne, about the disconnect between what local authorities and the Culture Collective have been doing in our communities.

Kathryn Welch: "Disconnect" is the word that is often used here. Obviously, the situation will vary hugely, depending on where you are, who you know and who in your local authority is doing what, but often the local authorities and ALEOs feel like such huge, faceless, corporate organisations that it is hard to get a handle on who

is there and how we might form a human relationship in order to make some good stuff happen. The smaller organisations are not only nimbler and more flexible; they are much more human, and they are able to forge personal relationships with people and use them to build provision that works.

As we heard earlier, it is not that those big, faceless organisations are not filled with great people—it can just be hard to get to them. Certainly they are less able to work in that nimble and flexible way that has been so effective in communities. It is just part of the nature of how they are built.

That said, I think that, in some areas, there have been really positive relationships with local authorities. One of the partners—I say "partners", but in this case, I mean "people"—involved in the Inverclyde Culture Collective works in Inverclyde libraries. She has been a brilliant ally and has provided a brilliant way into that resource being used for communities. That is because of how that person works. Finding that human connection that allows you to ask, "How can we figure this stuff out together?" is difficult with local authorities.

The Convener: Do you have any thoughts, Morvern?

Morvern Cunningham: It is worth pointing out that some of the Culture Collective's 26 projects involve collaborations between multiple organisations, which is slightly different from organisations that do lone projects. It would be great if local government had greater involvement in the Culture Collective projects and nice if it were to be a partner in the future.

Kathryn Welch: An important issue throughout all this is how and where we value expertise. The role that Morvern Cunningham and I play is to provide national-level support for local projects and, right from the beginning, we have approached the brief by acknowledging that the real knowledge and expertise lie in the communities and that everybody else's job up from that is to support and enable that, not to try to guide things or tell people what to do. I would like that to be echoed more broadly and genuinely across cultural conversations.

It would be fantastic to have lots of local authorities and, indeed, people at a national level involved—the more, the merrier—but, throughout, the perspective that we have to try to focus on is this: unless you are in the community or are working directly with that community, your job is to support and enable that work, say yes and make stuff happen for those people instead of trying to lead things. The reshaping of where that expertise lies is what has been at the heart of the Culture Collective and is something that I would like to be continued.

The Convener: With regard to the overall approach to participation in culture, the Scottish household survey is held up as the information that we have on the culture that people are participating in and where that is happening. Does the work of the Culture Collective in communities feed into that process, or does a lot of it go under the radar in that respect?

Morvern Cunningham: I would imagine that it does not feed into the process.

Kathryn Welch: There is a nice thing about a lot of the projects that work in a public sense in communities. The example that I am thinking of is the evolve project in Seedhill near Paisley; it is almost a play park for the surrounding flats, and the people involved hold a series of open public events for those who live in the flats overlooking the park. The lovely thing—anybody who has worked in communities will recognise this—is that, first of all, all people might do is look out of their windows to see what is going on; then, what quite often happens next is that, the next week or the next month, they will bring their kids down and show them off to us or sit on a bench at the side. Those sorts of engagements definitely do not appear in the household survey, but they often provide the foundation to people feeling confident enough—perhaps after the third, fourth or fifth time—to step forward, get involved and say, "Some of this might be for me, too."

That shows up the limitations of those sorts of metrics. Any artist who has worked in communities will be very accustomed to looking out for those people who might have walked past with their dog four times in the past hour, who might be sitting on benches nearby or who might be pushing their kids forward. Those actions often provide the foundation for people getting involved themselves.

The Convener: I remember taking my son to a taiko drumming event in a community centre in a very challenging area of my constituency. The local kids were all drawn to the noise, but the community learning and development officer had the sense not to shoo them away and instead invited them in to see what was happening. It was an incredible experience, and it absolutely illustrates the point about why these things need to be right at the centre of communities.

Finally, I wonder whether you can reflect on the democratisation of people's access and so on. We have talked a lot about social prescribing, but is there more that we can do to empower people? Should they have, say, a social prescription for culture, the right to a cultural voucher of some kind or something else that would empower everyone by giving them the choice of how they wanted to

use that offer to do whatever cultural thing they wanted to do locally?

Kathryn Welch: I am slightly sceptical about that, but I am always keen to give something a go—whatever it takes, essentially. Sometimes, however, there is a risk that we lose the joy. Those of us who take part in cultural and creative activity do not think, “I need to go there, because it will be good for my mental health”; you go somewhere because you had a whale of a time the week before, or because your mates are there and so on.

We need to normalise the joy of taking part by, for example, ensuring that there is a warm invitation to people to come and have a brilliant time. Along the way, people might well get to meet their neighbours; they might feel great about themselves; or they might find that others who live next door want to take on and champion a local issue collectively. Those things do come; indeed, we see that all the time. However, there is a risk that, in starting from that point, you lose the bit that makes it magic—that is, that you do something because you really enjoy it.

The Convener: The motto of a local music charity, which has been going for more than 20 years now, has always been: “It’s youth work we’re doing—but with stealth. Nobody knows that.” It is all about getting people to go along and, for example, play guitar or make films, and its approach is that such things do not need to be about mental health. Instead, it should be about giving people the right and the opportunity to choose to be involved in something.

Ben Macpherson has the final question.

Ben Macpherson: It has been interesting to hear your reflections on how, through this proactive initiative, the projects have created interest and engagement, and have had huge benefits for those involved. Last week, we heard some interesting evidence about how the pressures on people’s time, particularly as a result of the cost of living and the challenges that it presents to households, can be a barrier. From your experience and the Culture Collective’s 26 projects, is there anything that you want to convey to us about the challenge of enabling people to have the time to participate locally in culture?

Morvern Cunningham: This is all about enabling, and we have already talked a little bit about aspirational goals and how we would like things to be. As you have heard from us and the earlier panel, this work is already happening locally, in organisations and on the ground. It takes time to build relationships, trust and respect among a range of stakeholders, including community members and participants. We must recognise that, having invested this much time and made so much investment in that, we need to keep it going. Let us not let it stop.

The Convener: That has exhausted the committee’s questions. Thank you very much for a really informative session.

Meeting closed at 11:12.

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