

Planning for Culture: enabling better cultural activation through cross-sector collaboration

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Enabling better cultural activation through cross-sector collaboration

Over the past year at New London Architecture (NLA) we have worked with the City of London Corporation and a range of stakeholders to ask some difficult questions about the future of culture in our city.

How can we ensure that cultural projects have the support and systems in place to deliver for a wide audience whilst providing opportunities for up-and-coming talent and our communities? How do we stop the monopoly on commissions that we have come to expect from a range of both public and private sector developments? Who is responsible for the overarching cultural strategy for London? and more importantly who SHOULD be responsible? And finally, how do we measure what 'good' looks like? Both in terms of social value and commercial impact?

These questions are not simple to answer. Responsibility and accountability need to sit across the sector. We at NLA believe that third party organisations like ourselves, Centre for London, Future for London and others, can play a vital role in bringing together public and private sector activators and professionals with the creative industries, including new and emerging talent across multiple sectors to start to tackle some of these issues.

At our Think Tank on the 15th September David Taylor noted in his write up that:

"Developers should be brave and opt for less well-known names rather than the usual suspects when it comes to selecting artists and other creatives in cultural placemaking projects. But public sector bodies should also take more of a lead and a London-wide view in a sector where there is still too much concentration on capital expenditure and buildings - rather than money and thought - devoted to cultural programmes that have a lasting legacy."

The standard for what 'good culture' looks like is something we need to address collectively, and to borrow a phrase from Kate Anderson in the Royal Docks team, we need to ensure that culture encompasses both the 'epic' and the 'intimate'. Large scale events and installations that obtain press and large footfall really help to put locations on the map, but just as important are the smaller projects with more bespoke aims and audiences, these often make the difference between good and bad places.

Our planning system needs to include cultural champions that understand not just the planning implications of sites and projects but the added value that these can bring for residents and of course businesses. Which brings us to the link between culture and commerce, not an easy one to quantify.

I often speak of the value added to Canary Wharf by the hugely successful winter lights festival, taking an area that saw footfall in the low thousands at the weekend and turning that into hundreds of thousands had a clear and measurable value on the businesses in the area. But not all interventions can be so easily measured... how can we quantify the commercial value of greening our streets or placing one off installations? This metric of value is something that needs to be developed in partnership between the public and private sector and I believe the City of London Corporation along with NLA can play a vital role in helping to realise a set of standards that cover not only commercial value, but social and aesthetic value in addition to ensuring high quality cultural projects are delivered across London.

What is clear from the range of events and activities we have hosted focussing on this issue is that partnership working is the way forward. Ensuring the best minds with the most relevant experience are in the room to tackle these issues is critical, ensuring we have a clear system of accountability to support London through the recovery.



For more information

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