

Glasgow Culture Plan: SCAN Members Feedback, 18 February 2020

Background

SCAN (Scottish Contemporary Art Network) is a member led network committed to championing and supporting the contemporary art sector in Scotland. See more at www.sca-net.org. SCAN's membership encompasses artists, organisations and art workers across all of Scotland, from national institutions to artist-led spaces. A large proportion of its members are based in Glasgow.

On 23 January 2020 SCAN held a meeting for Glasgow members, attended by individual artists, sector leaders, curators and art workers. Around 50% had already been engaged in the Culture Plan process. The results of that discussion are summarised below, as well as in the visual notes provided.

What do you welcome about the plan?

Our members felt that long-term planning is positive and welcome, as is the commitment to equalities. It was also noted that we speak not just as professionals working within the cultural sector in Glasgow, but as participants and consumers of that culture. We are all in Glasgow for a reason, and culture plays a big part in that.

'It is good to acknowledge that culture is at the roots of our city and that there is an ongoing and deep commitment to equality.'

'Morally and ethically its spot on but there is a lack of acknowledgement of the fragility of the ecosystem.'

What are the barriers to embracing the plan as is?

Our members felt that there is a lack of ownership of the plan.

We feel there is a lack of clarity around the position of Glasgow City Council in relation to the Culture Plan and to the cultural sector more widely.

Without commitment from the city, we as a sector cannot deliver on these outcomes.

'There's a lot of goodwill in the sector but it can't be down to the resources we have to solve this.'

What are the primary concerns?

1. Current context/crisis

There is a sense of anger about the plan, and of how it is pitched at a time when the future of several organisations and numerous jobs has been and/or is still at risk. There are clear tensions around the wider ambitions and language around Glasgow's culture sector and the reality on the ground; particularly around the idea of the 'new', as expressed in the prologue, without due acknowledgement of the richness of the sector as it is, and how it is under threat.

'The plan comes at the same time as we're getting emails telling us to prepare for redundancies.'

'When we're fighting for funding against the people who've commissioned this it is very hard to look at the ethos of it.'

There was some discussion around the wider funding context and how this plan sits within budget challenges to the Council as a whole, and to Scottish Government.

'Is the plan a cry for help?'

2. Broadness of language

There was some concern about the types of language used; for example, the term 'everyone' – how do we measure that? Does over-dilution make this aim unachievable? Similarly, the reference to power and leadership – what does power mean to Glasgow Life, and how do we make sense of that as a sector? The fact that culture is not fully defined also presents a potential risk, as the term is too open to interpretation.

'It reads like a marketing strategy rather than a genuine strategic document.'

3. Strategic function

Our members were keen that any Culture Plan should be understood and bought-into by all departments of the council and its ALEOs as well as bodies that represent business and inward investment. By extension a greater understanding of the contemporary visual arts sector and its important contribution to Glasgow's cultural identity would be welcomed.

We also felt that many of the leaders and innovators were right here in Glasgow's cultural scene already, and their expertise had yet to be tapped when it came to aspirations raised in the Culture Plan, such as diversity.

'We did talk about city property and DRS in the engagement sessions and to not have that more explicitly written into this is disappointing.'

'Compare this plan to the Carbon Neutral Pledge – this had the acknowledgement that they didn't have all the answers and they would need to work with partners to achieve their aims.'

'Is the right hand talking to the left hand?'

'Where is the cultural literacy of council colleagues?'

'The language throughout the plan is risk averse – and a crisis requires risky and radical thinking. The woolliness of the document is dangerous.'

What actions would we like to see?

We would urge a series of commitments, which could be made along the lines of:

- As the council / Glasgow life we will...
- The sector will / sector supports...
- As a resident / citizen / visitor you can expect...

1. Commitments

We would ask the council / Glasgow Life to commit:

- To protect and maintain what already exists
- To long-term investment in cultural buildings
- To holding strategic conversations with artists and leaders
- To structural change to ensure a true power-shift
- To fully explore other models of investment and funding
- To define the cultural sector and its particular application in a Glasgow setting
- To cross-department understanding of what culture means for and to Glasgow
- To a working group to explore programmes and projects that are already delivering the aspirations laid out in the plan

2. Acknowledgements

We would suggest the following acknowledgements within the plan:

- That models of good practice and leadership are already here in the city
- That Glasgow's cultural assets are recognised and described
- That Glasgow's reputation is built on a unique combination of world-class collections, architecture and artist-run and independent spaces
- That the plan needs to go further than the term 'challenge'; to be more explicit about the tasks and commitments entailed
- The need to further explore the cultural sector's relationship with education
- The investment artists make to cities, and how they are incubators of its cultural scene

3. Further actions

- Provide tangible examples of the sort of work that already exists on the ground that meets many of the challenges and aspirations raised
- Enable existing cultural leadership to be in the driving seat, for example through an independent cultural consortium where cultural leaders are green-lighters, not Glasgow City Council or Glasgow Life
- Please no more usage of the term the Glasgow Miracle; we have moved on, and this statement does not reflect our current experience
- Convert challenges to opportunities, and to each attach a SMART objective, an owner and investment

'Rinse through with realism. This would give us confidence. Look at this critical point in Glasgow's history, look back and look around you to look forwards. Can Glasgow be different?'

/ends

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