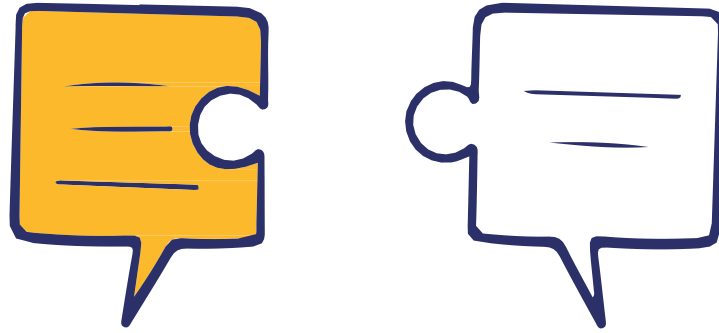




Creative Space as a Catalyst for Community Wealth Building

Eilish Victoria, University of Dundee

Community Innovation Practitioner Case Study

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Creative Communities is funded by the
Arts and Humanities Research Council
UK (Grant Agreement No
AH/X001555/1) and hosted at
Northumbria University, Newcastle.



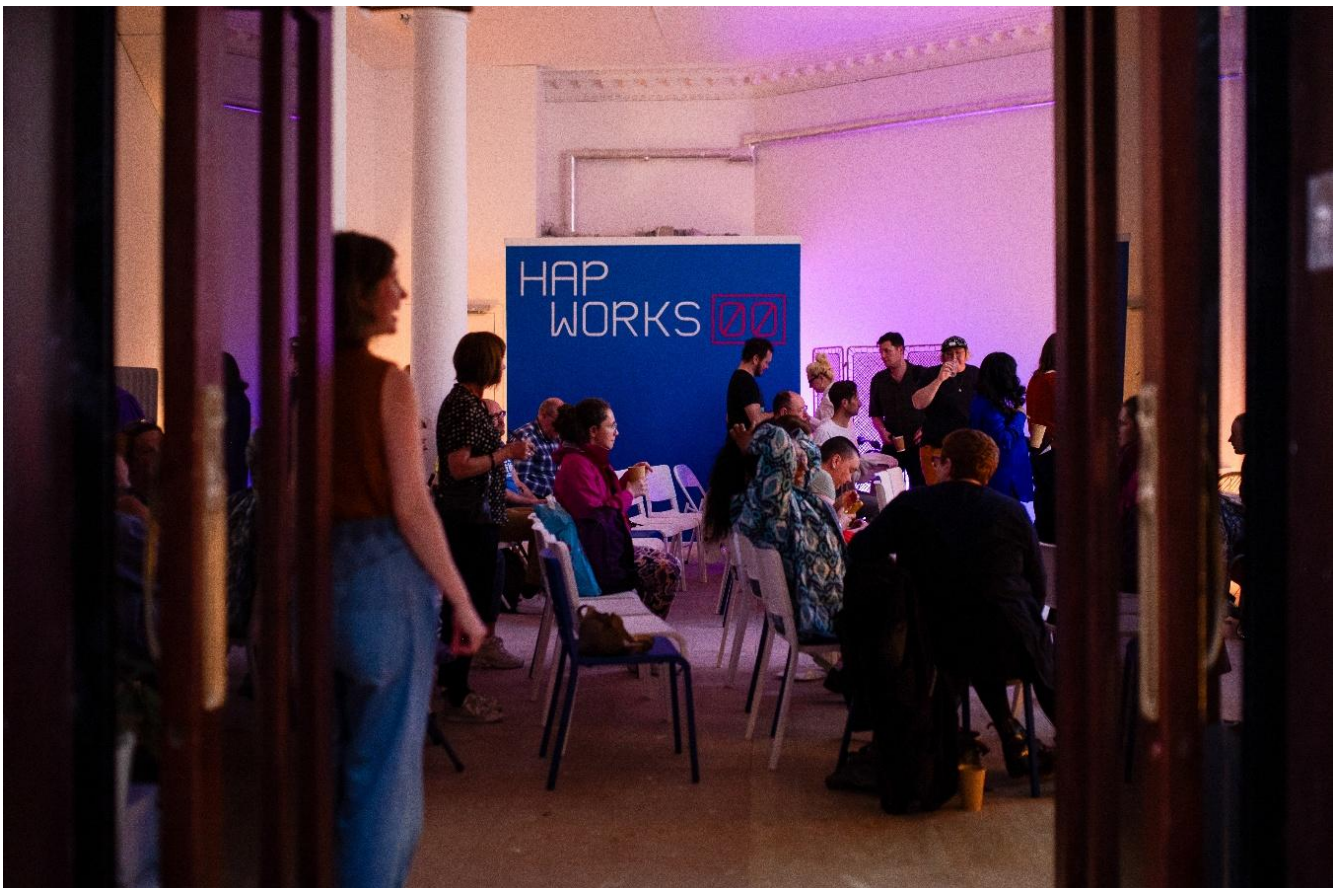
Summary

As Scotland seeks to realise the ambitions of the new [Community Wealth Building Act \(CWB\)](#), the role that creativity and culture can play in delivering the act is yet to be fully recognised. To harness this opportunity, creative communities need access to long-term space to deliver Community Wealth Building in action and play a leading role in the equitable transformation of our economy and places.

In Dundee and across Scotland, a lack of secure, long-term creative space is currently preventing this.

This research aimed to initiate the partnerships needed to foster a new ecosystem of creative spaces in Dundee, unlocking space for artists, designers, makers, performers, and games developers to make, collaborate and share work; creative businesses to grow; and communities to gather, imagine and act.

Building on previous community-led work through Creative Dundee's [Hapworks project](#), and expertise from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design's Space Taskforce, this research focused on the city-wide partnerships and national advocacy necessary to influence strategic long-term change at a devolved national level.



Hapworks_00 was a pilot creative coworking and event space occupying and animating a vacant unit at 7 Castle Street in Dundee City Centre from February 2024 to June 2025. Image Credit: Holly Quinn.

Introduction

Dundee has a reputation as a creative city and is well-known for using culture as a driver for city region regeneration and supporting creative talent through its academic institutions. The creative and digital industries are [a major driver of the city's economic, social and cultural identity](#), and Dundee has been recognised as one of 12 [high potential creative clusters](#) and the UK's only UNESCO City of Design.

Despite this, lack of access to affordable and sustainable space remains a significant barrier to growth for Dundee's creative communities. [Research by Creative Dundee](#) found that 96% have struggled to find space to produce work while 59% have considered leaving the city specifically due to this lack of capacity.

Creative practitioners, freelancers, creative businesses and communities are vital to the economic resilience, social cohesion and equitable regeneration of cities like Dundee. To realise their potential, we must invest in an ecosystem of creative spaces that enable the building of networks, the development of skills, the fostering of collaboration and the enabling of innovation.

My work as a Community Innovation Practitioner suggests that this happens when creative communities, anchor institutions and the private sector cluster together in partnership to deliver the essential creative infrastructure necessary to support inclusive growth, community wealth building and social cohesion.



V&A Dundee

Research Context

Community Wealth Building is a new economic approach from the devolved Scottish Government that seeks to create the conditions for wealth to be generated and retained locally, creating and equalising opportunities for local people and places. The Community Wealth Building Bill was passed unanimously by the Scottish Parliament in March 2026. Its ambition is for Scotland to become the first country to implement CWB on a national scale. The Scottish Government now has 18 months to provide guidance to local authorities on how CWB could be implemented across 5 pillars: Inclusive Ownership, Spending, Finance, Workforce, and Land and Property. Scottish national arts funder Creative Scotland is named in the Bill as one of the key public bodies to be consulted in the development of CWB guidance, giving culture a statutory foothold in the CWB framework.

Scotland's 32 Local Authorities each have three years to establish local planning partnerships that will produce local or regional action CWB plans, identifying measures for implementation to support transformation across the five pillars. This devolved approach is typical of how national strategies from the Scottish Government are passed onto Local Authorities. They are trusted to lead the development of place-based approaches which best meet the needs, opportunities and challenges of their local context which in Scotland varies drastically between different local authority areas.

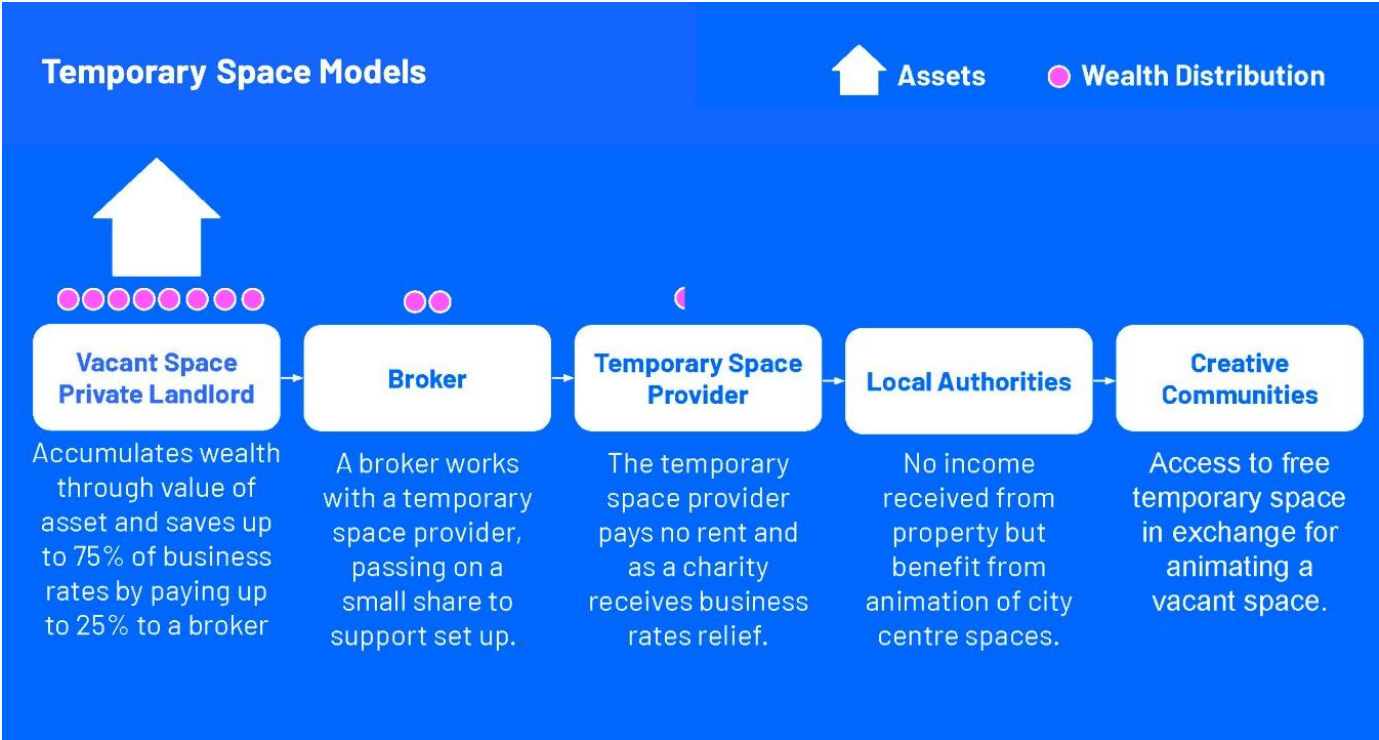
Creative communities are [already demonstrating best practice across all five CWB pillars](#) and have the potential to help Scotland realise its CWB ambitions. Often deeply rooted in their place, creative communities made up of place-based cross sector partners can advocate for and demonstrate the multiplier benefits of a CWB approach. However, to do this, better creative space infrastructure is needed.

[A Culture Strategy for Scotland](#) emphasises culture as a public good, recognising its role in community wellbeing and resilience, not just as an industry or tourism asset. Increasingly, cultural investment from the Scottish Government also seeks to benefit local people and places. This is where CWB and Scotland's devolved approach to culture is aligned but hasn't reached its full potential. To meaningfully combine these two approaches, cultural organisations need to be recognised as important community anchors rather than simply grant recipients, with investment in culture seen as generating local wealth and cultural infrastructure recognised as everyday infrastructure.

Alongside developments in CWB, Scottish cities are being forced to reimagine their city centres due to retail decline and increasing vacancy rates. Many Scottish local authorities, including Dundee City Council, have implemented vacant property business rates, charging landlords of vacant properties commercial business rates after their property has been

vacant for more than six months in a bid to activate empty units.

Since 2020, temporary space providers have profited from this and they now constitute the dominant creative space model in Scotland. These temporary providers work with the landlords of vacant properties to secure short-term low-cost space to creative communities, usually in empty city centre retail and office spaces. Although this provides accessible creative space for some, it predominantly benefits private landlords, generates limited tax revenue for local authorities and does not provide creative communities with sustainable spaces that they can invest in or long-term assets they can use to accumulate and retain community wealth.



This diagram shows how wealth and assets is distributed amongst private landlords, brokers, temporary space providers, local authorities and creative communities in meanwhile space models. Source: Eilish Victoria.

If Scottish Government is to meet the aims of its Community Wealth Building Bill, it must develop new models that equip the creative sector with the resource, networks and policy to build the place-based capacity required to unlock inclusive social, cultural and economic growth.

Community Innovation

My role as a CIP sat at the heart of Dundee's cross-sector creative community, convening city partners and creative practitioners with national representatives from Scottish Government's [Community Wealth Building](#) and [Culture teams](#), [Creative Scotland](#), [CLES](#), [Community Enterprise](#), [Social Enterprise Scotland](#) and the [Improvement Service and Community Land Scotland](#).

My research aimed to:

- **Unlock creative space pathways** by demonstrating the ways that creative communities embody and support Community Wealth Building.
- **Deepen understanding of Dundee's existing creative space infrastructure**, working with local creative communities to identify existing assets, access challenges, and opportunities for cultural place-making.
- **Explore and document place-based models of grassroots creative space development**, through research trips that investigates the cultural, social, and policy conditions enabling sustainable, community-led regeneration.
- **Build cross-sector capacity and collaboration** by establishing a Creative Space Assembly that brings together academic, civic, creative, and property sector stakeholders to develop shared strategies for equitable cultural infrastructure.
- **Support long-term, community-led cultural regeneration through knowledge exchange and advocacy**, using events, workshops, and digital platforms to amplify creative practitioner voices and influence systems change.
- **Generate and share research-led insights through a case study, policy paper and podcast**, translating project findings into practical recommendations for local and national devolved policymakers, funders, and cultural leaders.



Research Activities:

Creative Space Assemblies

In Dundee, a lack of creative space has been recognised as a barrier to delivering the city's culture strategy [Dundee: A Creative City \(2024-2034\)](#). Our research addressed this barrier by founding and convening a new series of Creative Space Assemblies. These quarterly assemblies aimed to establish a network of creative practitioners and place-based organisations that could initiate cross-sector and city-wide collaborations to better support the development of creative space infrastructure in Dundee. The group included representatives from the [University of Dundee](#) and [Abertay University](#), cultural organisations [Creative Dundee](#), [Leisure and Culture Dundee](#), [UNESCO City of Design](#) and [Creative Scotland](#); and city partners [Dundee City Council](#) and [Dundee and Angus Chamber of Commerce](#).

Four freelance creative practitioners were paid to participate who were also associated with existing creative spaces and communities including [Generator Projects](#), [Dundee Ceramics Workshop](#), [Forgan Arts](#), [Biome Collective](#) and [Cooper Gallery](#). Despite holding valuable knowledge, experience and insights about creative space provision in the city most had not had the opportunity to be heard beyond their peer group. This was a chance for them to build connections with those who held power in the city and influence the conversation about how spaces are used, recognised and valued.

Activities across the four assemblies aimed to create opportunity for knowledge exchange around property, creative space models and existing and emerging policy such as Business Rates, Community Ownership and Community Wealth Building.

With a better understanding of the challenges, opportunities and shared goals, the assembly participants began to think about where they each held power, who they needed to influence and what levers might exist or need to be co-created to enact change.

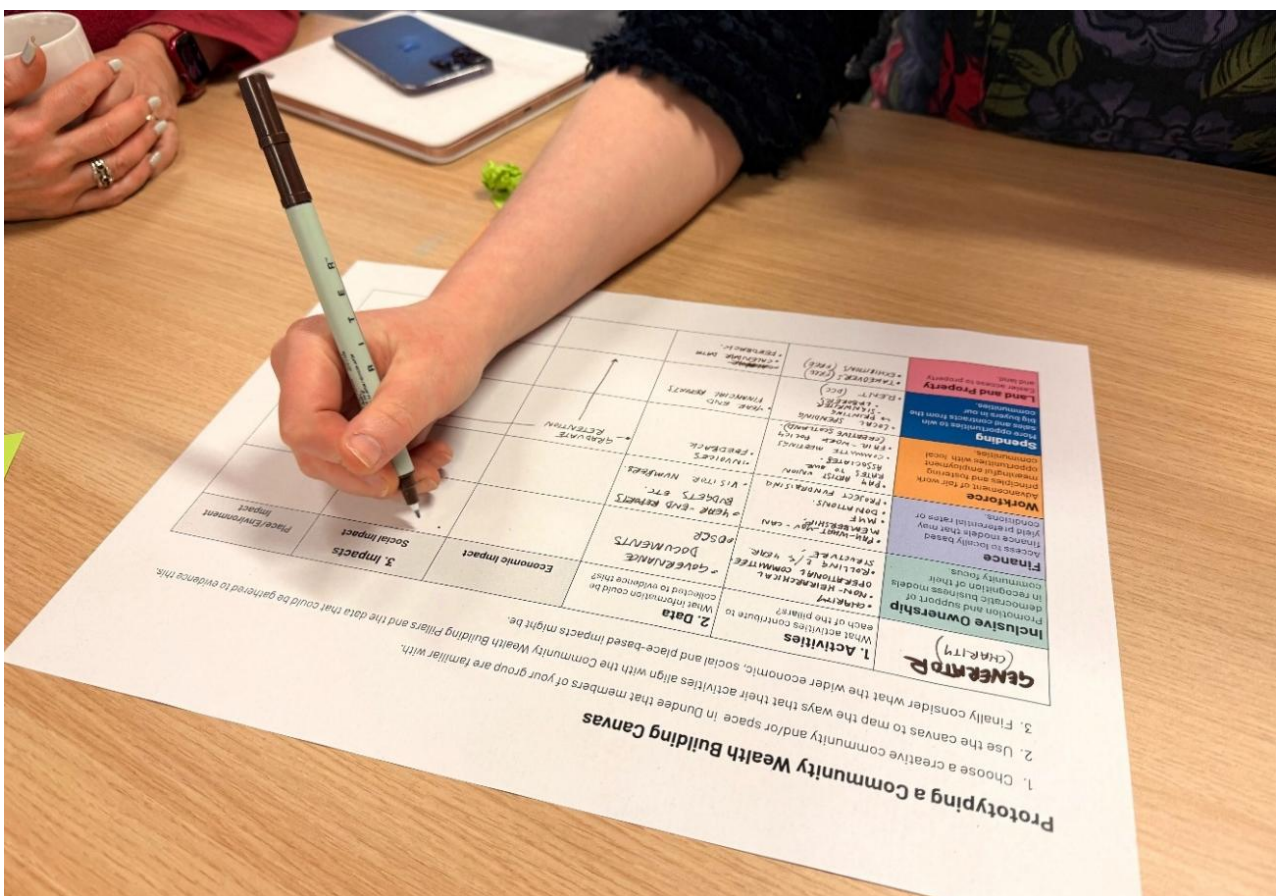


A key barrier that emerged through a Power Mapping exercise was a lack of collaboration and connection between Dundee's creative community and the private sector. Assembly participants recognised that they could act as a connector and develop new mechanisms to encourage better collaboration and support from the private sector.

Community Wealth Building was explored as a key opportunity to unlock space but the requirement for local authorities to achieve 'Best Value' on a publicly owned property was highlighted as a barrier. In response, the assemblies co-created and prototyped a new Community Wealth Building Canvas.

Community Wealth Building Canvas

A key challenge to accessing publicly owned space is the statutory duty for local authorities to consider 'Best Value'. This requires public bodies to consider both the economic benefit and social benefit of community routes to space such as Community Leases or Community Asset Transfers to ensure publicly owned resources are being used for public benefit. But without a clear framework to measure social value, economic value becomes the dominant measurement in this analysis, making it difficult for communities that provide high social value to compete with those that provide higher commercial impacts.



Testing a CWB Canvas. The first iteration of the Community Wealth Building Canvas tested at Creative Space Assembly #2. Here creative practitioner Luck uses the canvas to explore how artist-run space Generator Projects is already demonstrating Community Wealth Building across all five pillars. Image credit: Eilish Victoria.

With Community Wealth Building set to become intrinsically linked with community routes to space through the land and property pillar, the assemblies co-created a new ‘Community Wealth Building Canvas’ that aims to help creative communities articulate their social value in relation to the CWB pillars. The prototype canvas was tested with our Creative Space Assembly cohort and as part of [Tending To/gether](#), an event with Scotland’s creative networks.

Community Wealth Building by Creative Networks



This resource is designed to help you identify the ways your network may already be practicing Community Wealth Building and articulate this to others, such as local partners and funders.

Inclusive Ownership	Finance	Workforce	Spending	Land & Property
Democratic business models such as social enterprises, co-operatives, and community ownership.	Use of finance models which benefit, support and create opportunities for your network and wider community.	Implementation of fair work principles and offering meaningful employment opportunities.	Investing locally by buying from local business and commissioning local people.	Investing in or acting as a custodian of property or land through occupancy, ownership or project based work.

1. What are the ways your network demonstrates Community Wealth Building in each of the above pillars?

2. What data do you have or could you gather to tell this story?

3. What economic, social or environmental impact does this have?
Can these impacts be aligned with local or national plans such as culture, wellbeing or place-based strategies?

This resource is a prototype, part of an ongoing Creative Dundee project. If you would like to share feedback, please email eilish@creativedundee.com

Community Wealth Building by Creative Networks Resource. A version of the Community Wealth Building Canvas adapted for Creative Dundee’s Tending To/gether event for creative networks from around Scotland. The layout was changed based on feedback from our Creative Space Assembly cohort and descriptions of the pillars adapted to make them relevant to creative networks.

Key Learning

Recognise and Support Creative Community Anchors within CWB Planning and Action

Creative and community organisations are deeply rooted in their place, are already demonstrating Community Wealth Building in action and are able to act as trusted connectors in response to local challenges and opportunities. Although they are often small in size, these agile organisations provide critical forms of place-based social and entrepreneurship infrastructure, offering opportunities for skills and ideas to be developed and networks to grow. As local authorities develop their new CWB partnerships and anchor institution networks, this research shows that they must recognise creative organisations as anchor partners in their own right, not solely as delivery organisations or grant recipients. Embedding creative anchors within CWB governance structures will strengthen place-based collaboration and support more inclusive and community-led approaches to growth.

Embedded Social Value in Asset Transfer Decisions

Social value is not sufficiently embedded within Community Asset Transfer decision making in Scotland. Many local authorities lack a robust, standardised framework for measuring social value in Community Asset Transfers (CAT) and property decisions. As a result, economic value often becomes the dominant metric under Best Value duties with social and place-based outcomes harder to evidence.

Through the Scottish Government's CWB guidance there is an opportunity to require Local Authorities to co-develop social value measurement tools with communities in line with CWB pillars as part of the CAT programmes. This would provide a framework for creative communities to better articulate their social value and compete with market-led proposals.

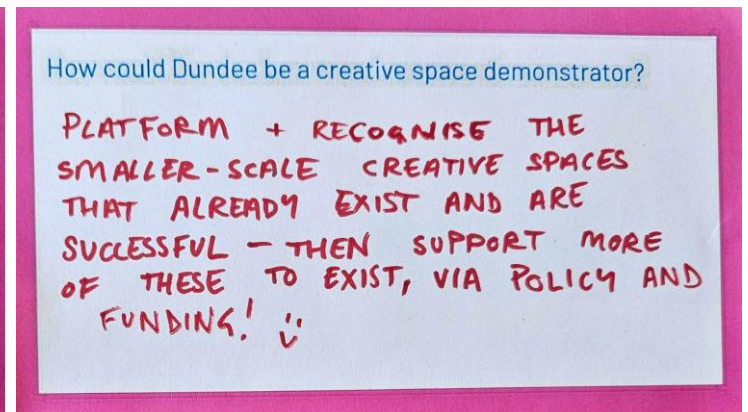
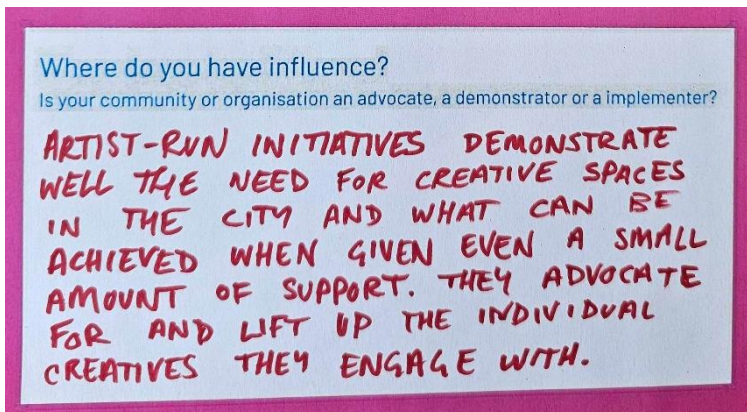
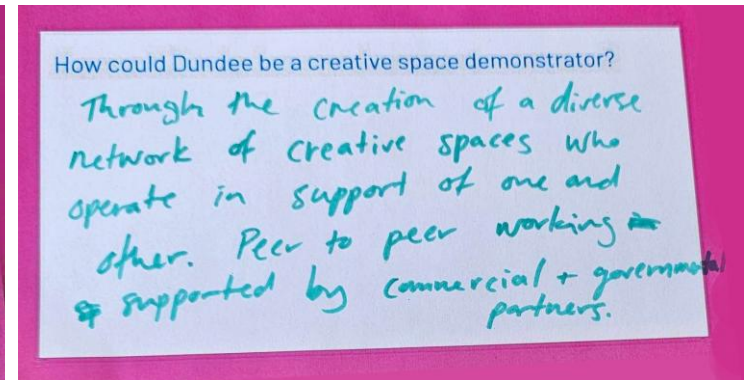
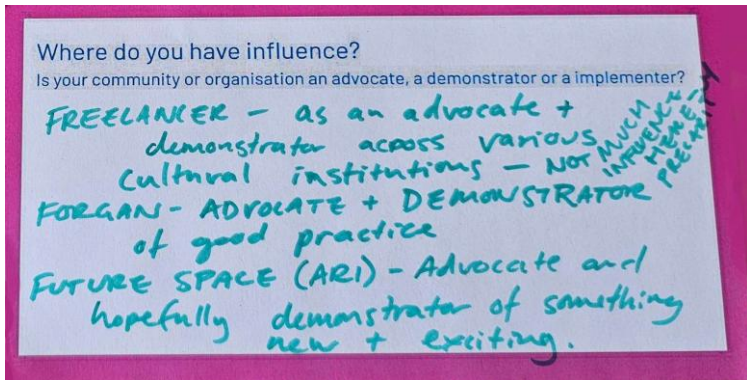
The Community Wealth Building Canvas should be built out in collaboration with creative communities, local authorities and national organisations to create a new framework for better articulating social value in CWB.

Aligned Public Funding with Asset-Building Objectives

A significant proportion of creative and community organisations in receipt of Scottish funding operate under precarious and short-term commercial lease agreements meaning that a portion of the investment that they receive goes straight out of the sector to private landlords, representing a leakage of public investment. This research has evidenced that Scotland's key funding bodies should review their policies and funding programmes to better support creative communities to access, steward and acquire land and property to ensure wealth is retained locally and within the sector.

Reform Vacant Property and Business Rates Incentives

Meanwhile space initiatives are becoming the dominant creative space model in Scotland due to a lack of provision for long-term space. [Our research](#) shows that these models disproportionately benefit private landlords, are reliant on local implementation of [business rates](#) on vacant properties and do not support creative communities to evolve, build wealth and accumulate assets. Scottish Government should re-align rates relief and vacancy policy to reward long-term community use that meets the ambitions of local and national strategies like CWB, rather than short-term meanwhile activation, with support for place-based demonstrators that activate publicly owned vacant space.



Reflections from Creative Space Assembly Participants.

Recommendations

The issues explored in this work are not unique to Dundee: many cities across Scotland face the challenge of retaining their cultural identity while simultaneously struggling to provide the creative infrastructure for the creative practitioners, businesses and communities that their reputations are built on and sustained by. The Scottish Government's CWB approach presents an opportunity devolved to local authorities to address vacant city centre space in collaboration with creative communities to achieve city centre regeneration in a way that is reflective of its CWB ambitions, generating wealth and opportunities locally.

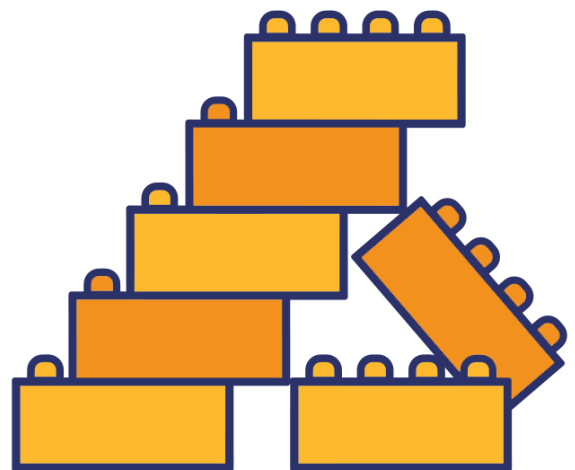
To encourage the equitable partnerships that are required to make this happen, this research recommends:

Support creative communities to be involved from the start

Creative communities know best what space they need and the barriers they face within current systems. Too often they are excluded from early conversations, not resourced to take part, or are expected to give their time for free alongside representatives from institutions receiving a salary. Creative communities need paid opportunities to be part of this work and their experience and skills recognised and valued.

Be patient, building trust takes time

Equitable spaces which bring together creative communities, anchor organisations and the private sector are essential for establishing and supporting long-term creative space infrastructure but building trust and understanding between different stakeholders who speak different languages takes time. Only once this is established will productive partnerships emerge and momentum build.



Resource the connectors and translator

This work requires people who are resourced to act as connectors and translators between the range of local and national partners, building trust and understanding the needs and motivations of each stakeholder, something that the AHRC Creative Communities programme has supported through the Community Innovation Practitioner role. This often-invisible work happens behind the scenes but is a vital part of making long-term change happen.

Looking Ahead

Scotland's devolved status gives it a rare lever most places don't have: the power to legislate radical, cross-sector economic policy – like Community Wealth Building – and align it directly with culture, land and local authorities within a single tier of government. This research shows creative communities are ready to make that lever work in practice not just in principle. Recognised as community anchors rather than just grant recipients, they can turn devolution's policy ambitions into place-based, cross-sector benefits. Dundee has the potential to demonstrate what this looks like – and we're committed to building on the partnerships this work has started.



Tay Bridge, Dundee

Further Information:

For more information on AHRC Creative Communities visit www.creativecommunities.uk

Contact the CIP

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Creative Communities is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council UK (Grant Agreement No AH/X001555/1) and hosted at Northumbria University, Newcastle.