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IMPACT STATEMENT ON BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL'S ENGAGEMENT WITH 'SOCIAL DISTANCING AND REIMAGINING CITY LIFE'

Working with Stuart Andrews and Patrick Duggan on the 'Social Distancing and Re-imagining City Life' project has been immensely rewarding and has informed the way in which we, in Bristol, have understood the role of the arts and performance in building the resilience of our communities generally, and managing the impact of Covid on our communities, in particular.

Andrews' and Duggan's research made us reflect on how we were communicating social distancing measures in Bristol; it offered us ways to think beyond the enforcement 'you must or...' perspective, into something much more nuanced and accessible, 'from and for' the community. Their research offered us means to harness, refer to and amplify spontaneous artistic responses to lockdowns and social isolation as part of the 'We Are Bristol' campaign to promote public safety through the pandemic. The sense of this has been captured in Duggan and Andrews' report 'Performance as a City Pandemic Response: Invitations to Innovate' under the 5 response challenges they identify: reaching communities, re-working city spaces for safe public access, key public health messaging, managing perceptions and alleviating isolation.

The research findings from Social Distancing and Re-imagining City Life, have provided the framework, language and evidence to understand why and how cultural activity and events already taking place in Bristol support the growth of resilient communities. This was something we instinctively knew existed and had been implicit in events such as Pride and the St Pauls Carnival, although often buried under wider headings such as 'community development'.

In being in on-going conversation through the project, the research has provided additional rationale for continuing to support these city events. Andrews' and Duggan's research has revealed methods for understanding and using the content of these events, their performance structures, and the understandings of place and community they reveal, to increase risk awareness and encourage resilient actions and behaviours. This allows us to make the case for these cultural events in terms of the resilience 'dividend' they can and do offer, and has been a theme in useful conversations we have had with the organisers of key city events. As a result, the research will have ongoing social and

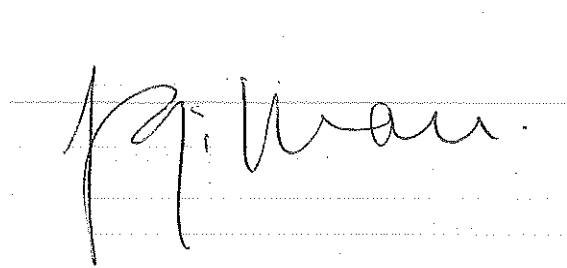


cultural benefits for Bristol and its c. 465,000 residents, as we continue to embed new ways of thinking about resilience in the city and the centrality of cultural practices to that.

Bristol City Council's Corporate Strategy identifies 'resilience' as one of its building blocks. As we move from a pandemic to cost of living crisis and we increasingly understand emergencies as wider than 'no notice, immediate impact events', to the culmination of chronic social, environmental, economic and health stresses affecting the population as a whole, the sense of this is obvious.

In that context, the research offers valuable new 'access routes' into communities to talk about risk and resilience. Routes that leave behind the 'dry', top down, traditional emergency planning approach and allow a more democratic conversation, driven by the communities and articulated in/through cultural, performative and artistic networks, organisations and the content of their outputs. Far more effective than a 'Community Resilience Plan'!

Having led local authority emergency planning in the culture-rich city of Bristol for over 10 years, conversations and collaboration with Duggan and Andrews has provided an opportunity to 'join the dots' and gain a better understanding of the relationship between culture and resilience and the leverage this understanding creates when we engage with our communities. As Duggan and Andrews argue, the strategic value of this is not nationally appreciated: it needs to be, and it certainly is now in Bristol. At a time when trust in traditional forms of news and information is low, this is an avenue that must be explored further.



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