



Arts and  
Humanities  
Research Council

The background of the cover is a night-time photograph of a city skyline. A large, vibrant display of golden-yellow fireworks is exploding in the sky, filling most of the upper half of the frame. In the lower right, a prominent clock tower with a glowing clock face is visible, along with other city buildings and a Ferris wheel in the distance. A large, curved yellow graphic element is overlaid on the bottom left and bottom right corners of the image.

**Locally Unlocking  
Culture through  
Inclusive Access (LUCIA)  
– Workshop Report**





# Contents

Foreword .....	3
2024 Workshops and Key Messages .....	4
Thematic .....	5
Operational.....	7
What next? .....	8
Appendix A.....	9



# Foreword

by Dr Jaideep Gupte, Director of Research, Strategy and Innovation, Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)

Culture is a powerful driver of urban renewal and innovation. Urban communities are demanding ‘a new kind of leadership for culture’ that is community driven, collaborative, and more representative.<sup>1</sup> We recognise that barriers exist to a collective way forward, and a toxic combination of low growth and high inequality means that the least well off are being left behind.<sup>2</sup> It’s clear also that access to culture in our communities is not equal across the UK and creating cross-sector partnerships are challenging, particularly within the private sector.<sup>3</sup> In the context of post-pandemic recovery, a cost-of-living crisis and acute pressures on local arts funding, connecting together in inclusive and purposeful ways is therefore a necessity. As the Local Government Association (LGA) have highlighted in their Cornerstones of Culture report, meaningful collaboration is key in building a ‘shared understanding of culture and place’ to ensure access to culture is truly for all.<sup>4</sup>

The Locally Unlocking Culture through Inclusive Access (LUCIA) programme represents an opportunity to radically disrupt and break down these barriers. This network-orientated funding will empower communities to take the lead on addressing equitable and inclusive access to cultural spaces and thereby contribute to local jobs and growth. An increased focus on the urban (cities, towns, urban agglomerations, and urban-rural relationship) provides a broader starting point on questions around the culture that communities value and how people access a variety of cultural spaces. The networks will create and nurture sustainable and more gradual partnerships that respect cultural identities and facilitate creative, collective expression and conversations across community practice, research and policy. Importantly, the work of the networks will inspire and encourage positive change right across the UK, in showcasing flagship new policies and schemes, enhancing cultural capacities, and promoting recovery and renewal across a whole range of cities and towns.

There is already an appetite for this type of approach. Discussions with stakeholders noted that ‘many communities are very open and want to promote culture within their area - there is a hunger for culture and LUCIA can ensure ‘outreach’ is central to funding processes in this space’. We hope this UKRI investment represents a forward look, providing meaningful pathways to forge an equal-opportunities economy with devolved powers around cultural leadership to local communities, in order that we can unlock the potential of towns and cities. We believe there is potential for LUCIA to contribute to developing people-centred approaches to culture, urban and regional development and embedding this into organisational/policy cultures and practice.

The AHRC are well placed to take this programme forward, having recently focused energy and resources on investments which compliment this area of study: our previous Connected Communities programme (2010-2019),<sup>5</sup> and ongoing Place programme<sup>6</sup> and Creative Communities programme.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Intergenerational Justice and Civic Discourse are our framings of social cohesion and resilience. We’re looking to emphasise both of these important societal needs, using Arts and Humanities research methods to challenge current perceptions and to explore exciting and innovative possibilities in this research space.

The AHRC have been diligently consulting key stakeholders working in this research space, and have hosted numerous stakeholder engagement activities, including two workshops, and we’re delighted to present the findings from these discussions below. We’re continuing on this journey and are really excited about the impact that this opportunity will present to UK communities.

1 [Cultural Cities Enquiry Report \(2019\)](#), p.12-13; [Cultural Cities Recovery Report \(2020\)](#), pp.6-7; Local Government Association (LGA), [Cornerstones of Culture: Commission on Culture and Local Government Summary Report \(2022\)](#), pp.20-23.

2 The Economy 2030 Inquiry, [Ending Stagnation: A New Economic Strategy for Britain \(2023\)](#), p.4.

3 Key Cities, [Culture and Place in Britain \(2023\)](#), p.51, p.171.

4 LGA, [Cornerstones of Culture](#), p.13.

5 Keri Facer and Bryony Enright, [Creating Living Knowledge: The Connected Communities Programme, community-university relationships and the participatory turn in the production of knowledge \(2016\)](#), p.8.

6 Rebecca Madgin and Elizabeth Robson, [Developing a People-Centred, Place-Led Approach: The Value of the Arts and Humanities \(2023\)](#), p.26.

7 [AHRC Creative Communities Deep Dive Report, By All, For All: The Power of Partnership \(2023\)](#), p.5.



## 2024 Workshops and Key Messages

In March and April, the Cities portfolio team at the AHRC hosted two workshops and a series of 1-1 discussions with individuals who brought a vast range of expertise and experience to help further scope, co-design and build the LUCIA programme. Please see Appendix A for workshop preparation activities.

### **The workshop aims were:**

- To explore the interconnected landscape on cultural access, listening to our community on the key challenges and opportunities in this interdisciplinary research space.
- To develop common values and thematic pillars around which the LUCIA programme can develop.
- To build collective awareness of the types of sustainable, equitable partnerships that will be created and/or extended through the programme and beyond.

The workshops enabled diverse voices to come together and discuss thematic priorities within this research area, with each workshop/discussion building upon the outputs of the prior discussions. At the first workshop practitioners with a rich and extensive knowledge of working on cultural engagement with communities considered what communities most pressingly need in this research space. Thematic priorities were explored and expanded upon, and a second workshop invited academics working in these research areas to build on this thinking driven by community voices, to form thematic research pillars. The final 1-1 discussions were held with delegates who hold local, regional and UK policy-making expertise, to input into the thematic areas of research, and challenge/finetune these to ensure that the proposed research will be effective in changing the cultural and policy landscape in this space. Throughout these connected conversations, the Cities portfolio team have been inspired by the enthusiasm, and challenged by new ideas, from our cross-sector community.

Several key thematic and operational priorities for the LUCIA programme emerged from these discussions, including:

## Thematic

- The language of “culture” needs to be defined as broadly as possible – Culture is everywhere. It is increasingly self-led and self-organised. Our definitions of culture intrinsically point to our individual and collective identities, and the meanings we attach to living with each other in a community. Within and among our communities, there are diverse meanings attached to what culture is but the terminology itself can also entrench divisions and exclusion. A community-led approach that recognises the complexity of different experiences of inequality is required to ensure all elements of cultural practice are recognised, valued, and given equal priority. There is immense value in defining culture as porous and pluralistic, and there needs to be a turn towards the value to the individual/collective rather than assuming or attributing cultural importance.
- Breaking down barriers around cultural places and spaces – Where we perceive culture takes place is rapidly and constantly changing. Unequal access to the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) sector is a significant challenge, with cost, disability access, generational and demographic exclusion (leading to feelings of “I don’t belong in this space”) all highlighted as major barriers to equitable engagement and inclusion related to these established spaces. New spaces for cultural expression, particularly in the digital world, present fresh accessibility challenges but also exciting opportunities for different generations to access the culture that speaks to them. We need to think creatively about expanding notions of where culture happens, using digital platforms for empowerment rather than consumption, and recognising the democratisation of both pre-existing, institutional and emergent cultural spaces.
- Ownership of cultural spaces – In some areas, there has been a weaponisation of culture, with the creation of disputed cultural space. Cultural education and knowledge exchange, alongside skills development, must be driven by and for communities, and in partnership with a wider cultural sector to provide both opportunities and pathways for local communities to tell their stories. Collaboration and co-creation that is locally owned and championed, and which supports the social capital of communities is critical in ensuring we avoid sanitised cultural practice and instead learn from and with communities.
- Elevating marginalised voices and encouraging agency – There has been a marginalisation of cultures and diverse communities, and a notable lack of access for people from diverse socio-economic and minority ethnic groups. In urban environments in particular, there is the risk of hyper-marginalisation where access to culture is highly differentiated for transitory communities. This leads to anxiety that people do not have control over the issues that matter to them, and the notion that in the past, marginalised community engagement has been a tick-box exercise. Power dynamics need to shift around who holds access to knowledge at a local level and dialogues need to be reflective of the diversity of communities within a community. We need to acknowledge and listen to the voices of disparate/divided groups to prevent the hyper-marginalisation of minority communities and empower community-led agency at the core of network initiatives.







- Transporting culture? – Good transport links play a pivotal role in connecting communities and cultural assets together. Barriers around transport cost, access and proximity can entrench significant cultural disparities between communities in both urban and rural contexts. We need to balance how we champion existent cultural expression in local areas, while enabling wider cultural access to communities, and exploring alternative routes to reach a more diverse audience in the spaces in which they live, work and play.
- Utilising multiuse cultural spaces – ‘Coming together’ places such as libraries and community centres are increasingly vital in the context of the closure of public spaces in the aftermath of the pandemic and well-documented cuts to arts and culture funding at a local and institutional level. The cost-of-living crisis has led to the vulnerability and closure of certain cultural spaces for different generations, and individuals are having to prioritise their limited funding towards food/accommodation/utility bills. Pre-existing public spaces are crucial and offer opportunities for further cultural engagement across communities. The pandemic had a significantly negative impact on access to community spaces. We need meaningful cross-sector interaction with policy makers, built environment designers, and architects engaging directly with communities.
- Intergenerational exchange – Cultural assets can be mobilised to combat a retreat of younger generations, who feel that they don’t have cultural autonomy in our urban and rural communities. This includes the protection of urban and rural heritage and intergenerational infrastructure, with questions around how we can safeguard services outside of statutory protection to provide an equitable legacy for future generations. To ensure a balanced perspective, we must interpret the relevant history with fairness, acknowledging its complexities and multiple viewpoints. Simultaneously, we should embrace innovative and inclusive ideas to shape a sustainable future that benefits all. Intergenerational discussion around themes such as the climate crisis and cultural legacy is crucial in improving community wellness and we should therefore encourage further action in this research space.
- Tourism and community green spaces – Tourism can be a key component in community cohesion and can unlock local potential for economic growth. The relationship between tourism and cultural communities needs to be acknowledged in conjunction with a recognition of the importance of public green space as locations for experiencing culture, and alongside its contribution to jobs and the local economy.





## Operational

- Building/Rebuilding healthy cultural exchange with communities – The empowerment of communities must involve valuing people’s time and creativity. Network timescales need to build in time to listen and to explore an open-ended remit. There needs to be remuneration for everyone at the table, embedding in experts through experience and community members as genuinely equitable researchers working in ways that may be different to the expectations of the research community involved.
- Collaboration on policy to enact meaningful change – Community cultural priorities are often hyper-local in scope but vulnerable to political cycles and shifts in focus at a local and regional government level. This has been exacerbated in the context of wider pressures and budgetary cuts for local and regional authorities across the UK. Connections to local and regional policy planning, in terms of local development and place plans at an early stage is already an important way to counteract this vulnerability, embedding research through co-production with communities and ensuring culture is part of the long-term conversation at a foundational, grass roots level. Devolution has enabled localisation, and productivity for communities, and has also created opportunities for community cultural exchange vital in combatting diminishing ‘institutional thickness’. More is therefore possible in terms of cross-sector co-ordination between community groups, researchers and policymakers. Mechanisms to accelerate opportunities for greater collaboration and more equitable access are recommended to encourage civic partnerships which are truly grass roots and able to pinpoint local needs across urban agglomerations.
- Funding needs to be scalable and sustainable – For outcomes to be effective, networks need to have the scope to focus their research on long-term ambitions. Funding plans need to build in viable and regenerative exit strategies for network partners to ensure effective and sustainable relationships can be maintained and potentially extended in future.





## What next?

The AHRC has committed funding to support up to five locally led, cross-sector pilot networks (community practitioners; academic researchers; and local and regional policy stakeholders) for 12 months, with each network funded up to £100,000 (as a full economic cost). The funding opportunity will go live in September 2024 and the AHRC will host a webinar in October to address any application queries that may arise. The opportunity will close in April 2025, and it is anticipated that following an assessment panel - which will include both expertise by experience and academic panel members - the successful pilot projects will go live in April 2026. These pilots will represent a diverse set of ideas, place-based approaches and partnerships, to break down barriers to access, and be a powerful driver of inclusive growth across the UK.



# Appendix A

## LUCIA pre-workshop scoping

AHRC's Cities portfolio team have been carefully building the foundations of the LUCIA programme since early 2023. It has been shaped with conscious recognition of the current funding landscape and the lessons learnt from exciting funding opportunities, past, present and further afield. As Arts Council England highlighted in their review of their Cultural Compacts initiative, recipients of Compacts investments 'are engaging a wider range of partners and developing ambitious programmes,' but 'there is still much progress to be made with the twin challenges of diversity and cross-sector engagement'.<sup>8</sup> The LUCIA programme will therefore provide increased funding, with equitability and sustainability at its heart, offering networks a year to foster robust partnerships and build effective, durable relationships with emphasis on responsible 'exit strategies'.

The LUCIA programme will require networks to engage with local communities in bold and ambitious ways, encouraging hyper-localised, grassroots approaches to issues of cultural access. In this sense, we have embraced the findings of the Key Cities Culture and Place in Britain report which found that 'culture-led regeneration schemes are better conceived in the local culture sector...schemes should carefully consider likely outcomes in relation to community needs and impacts'.<sup>9</sup> This is an approach that has also been acknowledged in a global context, as evidenced in the recent joint report from the World Cities Cultures Forum and King's College London which emphasised the turn to the 'local' in terms of cultural practice and policy responses to the pandemic. This shift has led to a greater diversity of innovative cultural partnerships, but stronger connections to communities are required to ensure the proliferation of equitable, inclusive and resilient communities.<sup>10</sup>

Prior to the scheduled workshops, the AHRC held several discussions with a range of key stakeholders to gauge appetite, and to finetune and tweak the proposed workshop discussion areas and the programme funding mechanisms, before taking these to the larger workshops. Primarily the team met with Prof. Rebecca Madgin and Prof. Katy Shaw, and colleagues across the AHRC to map whether and where LUCIA fits within ongoing initiatives in the Place/Creative Communities/Cities research space, to ensure continued complementarity with ongoing programmes. The Cities portfolio team also met with a selection of key external stakeholders including: colleagues at Arts Council England; the team at the Centre for Cultural Value; Kasper de Graaf – programme director of the Key Cities APPG; colleagues within the Chief Scientific Adviser's Office at DLUHC; and Mayor Marvin Rees in his capacity as Mayor of Bristol and previous chair of Core Cities UK. These preliminary discussions proved pivotal in shaping the success of the workshops, and in giving the team the tools and language to confidently engage workshop delegates in discussion.

8 Arts Council England, [Review of the Cultural Compacts Initiative \(2020\)](#), p.13.

9 Key Cities, [Culture and Place in Britain](#), p.33.

10 [King's College London and World Cities Culture Forum Joint Report, Creative recovery? The role of cultural policy in shaping post-COVID urban futures \(2023\)](#), p.9, p.31.





Arts and  
Humanities  
Research Council

