



# CULTURE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH EAST ENGLAND: THE NEXT STAGE

reflections from debate at a regional summit of cultural partners



## Position Paper from the Culture North East Board 17 October 2007

### We heard that .....

- The sub-national review and the plans for an Integrated Regional Strategy, in a post CSR world, presented real challenges and opportunities for the cultural sector, such that:
  - We need to agree a new set of shared priorities and principles for the region;
  - There is an opportunity to develop consensus on key and appropriately scaled interventions that address the diverse challenges of the region;
  - A principal challenge for the North East is to instil overarching principles of sustainability, equality and social justice into the SIRS;
  - We need to instil a greater connection, and meaningful engagement, between local communities and governance in the region;
  - In order to maximise regional development and growth opportunities it is essential that we engage and support communities understand the importance of places;
  - We need to enable the risk-taking and strategic leadership that has enabled the region to survive and thrive in the past.

### We described how .....

- There are real opportunities to use culture intelligently to address the fundamental problem of 'poverty of aspiration';
- Technological advances are democratising the means of cultural production and consumption, potentially making some cultural infrastructure irrelevant and eroding the logic of cultural and geographical hierarchies.
- We need to make space for the quirky, edgy or risky. That which is often perceived as at the 'margins' of our culture is the cornerstone of our regional authenticity.

### We feel challenged by ....

- The potentially stifling climate of accountability in which the publicly-funded cultural sector resides. The need to base decisions on hard evidence can often be at odds with creative risk-taking which is integral to quality cultural production and management;
- the instrumentalist approach to utilising culture for non-cultural outcomes, to not recognise culture as having its own value, creating tensions of cultural and artistic integrity;
- the speed, diversity and scale of contemporary cultural production and consumption. These changes significantly alter the climate in which traditional cultural agencies function, making it more difficult to plan for the future;

- the socio-economic and changing cultural climate, in the context of a rapidly shifting funding environment, challenging the historical role and structures of the sector.

### **We are encouraged by ....**

- The fact that the cultural offer of the region has become such an established and well recognised regional asset, and that we have a proven legacy of cultural success;
- The sense of a burgeoning creative consciousness in the region presenting further opportunities for cultural production;
- The maturity of our soft cultural infrastructure enabling creativity to flourish and become commercially viable;
- The sense that we have experienced a significant shift in political will towards the cultural sector.

### **We agreed that ....**

- We need to revive faith in risk-taking and innovative leadership as underlining principles of our regional cultural identity and sense of belonging;
- We need to better advocate for work driven by a creative imperative that is authentic and of the highest quality. This is also most likely to have a powerful socio-economic impact;
- We need to identify what is truly authentic and distinctive in our cultural offer and seek to capitalise on its advantage;
- The cultural sector has to be relevant to the people of the region;
- We need to continue to evaluate and capture the impact of culture on people's lives;
- We need to develop new and more innovative partnerships and collaborative ways of working;
- We need to have faith in our existing creative communities and networks and the strength of our cultural heritage as a foundation for our creative sustainability.
- We should seek to nurture young regional talent and support young people to take creative risks, to innovate, and to take ownership of their creative development.

### **TO CONCLUDE .....**

**Culture works best when it is strong, authentic and excellent, feeding into other agendas on its own terms with a strength of conviction gained from its solidity of purpose.**

**We need to consolidate this understanding to ensure the best possible outcome for the cultural sector in the emerging politico-cultural climate for the cultural health of the region.**

**The cultural sector will strive to be:**

- 1. Authentic**
- 2. Excellent**
- 3. Confident**

*Culture North East  
October 2007*