

Policy Brief

Responding to and modelling the impact of COVID-19 for Sheffield's cultural ecology: A case study of impact and recovery

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KEY INFO

Research question: Investigating the Impact of Covid-19 on arts and culture in South Yorkshire and the interrelatedness of venues, audiences and freelance workers.

Policy area or themes:

Places and Communities
Creative Industries

Methods: Online surveys, qualitative interviews, economic modelling, geographical comparative analysis.

Geographical area: South Yorkshire

Research stage: Completed

Summary of the research.

The project gathered immediate and relevant research data about the impact of Covid on venues, audiences and freelancers that directly influenced the economic recovery of the sector locally and regionally and generated data to lobby for central government support.

The project comprised 4 studies: online surveys (136) with venues and arts organisations, audiences, freelance workers and qualitative interviews (14) with stakeholders and decision makers.

The project team comprised academics at the University of Sheffield with experience of doing collaborative research with arts organisations and local partners.

This study documented the impact of Covid on arts organisations: activities during lockdown, income, staffing, audience/visitor/participant numbers, and receipt of emergency funding. The findings have policy implications for further business recovery planning and any future restrictions introduced as a result of Covid or other causes.

Policy recommendations.

Financial support and processes.

- **Quick and responsive financial support.** Funding by Sheffield City Council was perceived to be easier to access than the Cultural Recovery Fund. However, recipients experienced issues with irregular payment schedules, administrative confusion leading to incorrect grant calculations, and concern that funding was not being allocated quickly enough.
- **Skills to apply for funding.** Training and the provision of support to complete funding applications at a local level. Some organisations did not receive funding due to lack of skills in applying rather than lack of need.

- **Collaborative funding.** Organisations overwhelmingly wanted a more joined-up approach at a local and national level, with opportunities to collaborate, compare notes and publicise events and activities together.
- **Covid restrictions.** Clearer guidance on Covid safety regulations and forewarning when rules were set to change for better planning. Recognition that opening with capacity restrictions often made opening unfeasible financially.
- **Physical spaces.** Change in local governance of arts and culture to make licensing easier to navigate and to be able to make use of more spaces in the city.

Key findings

- Between March and September 2020, 40 participating organisations in the survey experienced:
 - **96%** loss of audiences with 1.6 million fewer people engaged.
 - **88%** decrease in ticket sales and entry fees (average of £6,478).
 - **92%** reduction (average of £96,169) decrease in auxiliary spend e.g. from on-site shops, refreshments and merchandise with a total loss of £3,846,767.
 - **106%** (631.9) fewer FTE staff employed than in the previous year, an average of 15.8 fewer FTE staff (44%), although there is a great deal of variation between small or voluntary-led organisations and large organisations employing over 100 staff in the previous year.
- Reopening venues during Covid required: the implementation of Covid safety measures (e.g. sanitisation, ventilation, social distancing and use of PPE) and a fundamental shift in modes of working and additional resources: holding multiple performances on the same day, removing intervals, timed entry to museums and galleries and using outdoor space.
- Other barriers to organisations operating at full capacity or producing a full programme of events were audiences' willingness to attend and staff safety.

Further information

The report from the project is available here: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/city-region/enhancing-cultural-vibrancy/covid-research-0>

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