

## Y21 and Leeds 2023: European Capital of Culture Cultural Engagement Workshop

The Y21 Leeds 2023 workshop was conceived in partnership between Leeds Beckett University and Leeds City Council to consider the ways in which networked reflective learning opportunities could enhance the bidding. The day-long workshop united a range of individuals from the arts and cultural organisations and enabled them to engage with representatives from the bid team as well as from other European cities that have developed previous successful and innovative projects which contributed to the culture of their location beyond the duration of their European Capital of Culture (ECOC) bid.



The day began with an introduction from Dr Katy Shaw, Lead of the Y21 Research Cluster and Head of English at Leeds Beckett University. This was followed by a context-setting session with chief cultural advisor to the Leeds 2023 Bid team, Andrew Dixon. Andrew used his presentation to explain how and why Leeds needs to carve out a unique role and character for itself for 2023 in the face of competition from other bidding cities such as Cardiff, Bristol and Milton Keynes. He reflected on the need to excite the judging panel, to challenge them and to make them consider the position of Leeds in Europe - three areas that became a key focus of questions throughout the day. The funds required to secure and

operate a ECoC bid were also outlined, along with the potential for partnership working with private and third sector organisations.



The key questions of 'Why Leeds?' was initially approached by thinking about the unique composition of the city. Home to 767,000 people, the biggest population in terms of age in Leeds lies in the 20-34 years category. Capturing this voice was therefore presented as crucial to the appeal and success of any bid. Andrew also outlined the richness of diversity in Leeds and the ways in which this could enhance and inform a bid. Leeds has a non-UK European populations of 39,000 and also has a wide range of inhabitants from outside Europe. This is a real strength and Andrew ended by reflecting on ways in which diversity could be reflected by the bid and become a key component of telling the 'story' of the city.



Prof Franco Bianchini from the Leeds Beckett Y21 team followed Andrew by offering an in-depth discussion on the capacity of the European Capital of Culture as a tool for cultural engagement. Prof Bianchini has participated in the competition process for Cork in 2005, helped in cultural programming various Capitals of Culture and also researches the process as part of his academic work. He is currently working on the Hull 2017 programme which is due to roll out next year. Bianchini argued that the Capital of Culture foregrounds three notions of citizenship - civic identity, empowerment and consumership – but suggested that problems often arise when the latter of these three dominates a bid, attracting only rich tourists from outside of the city into the capital. Instead, he argued that any successful bid should aim to address all three criteria in order to achieve balance.

Bianchini proposed that Leeds is currently a city in transformation and as such is in need of ECoC to generate a programme of events that will bring people together to celebrate the city as a shared territory and to create opportunities to target particular disadvantaged social groups to help them produce their own voice. His presentation concluded by asking the audience to consider the narrative that Leeds wants offer the judging team – one of economic restructure, heritage and culture, diversity and cultural heritage or a combination of past, present and future? The primacy of politics means that a legacy strategy is key to any bid, and the presentation concluded with thoughts on how and why Leeds should avoid a conflict between cultural engagement and the clarity of the artistic vision proposed by a city-wide cultural bid.

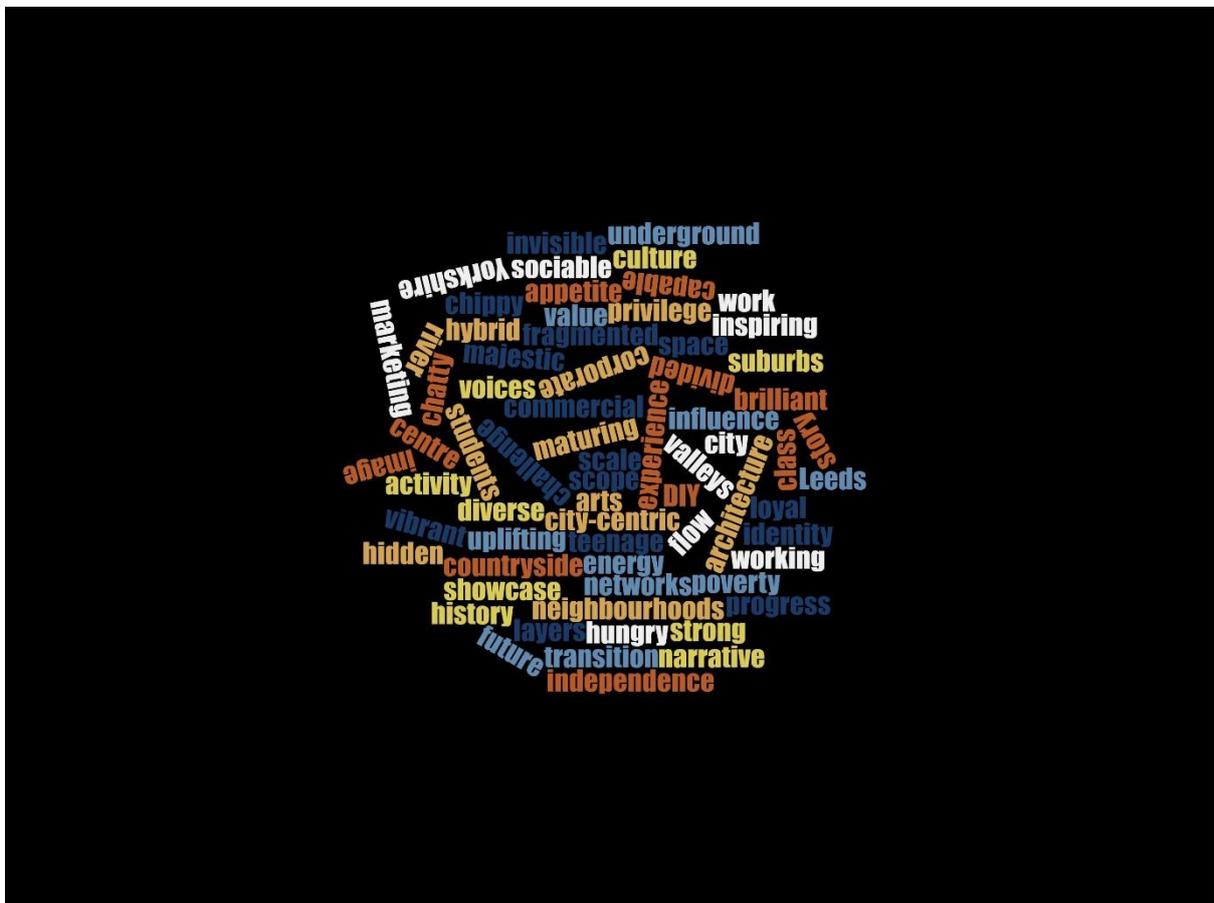


Leeds City Council bid team member Karen Murgatroyd followed Franco's theoretical considerations with a practical case study by Thierry Lesueur who spoke about Lille's 2004 ECoC year and the afterlife of the strategy through a new organisation called Lille3000, a body established to oversee a legacy of cultural events after the capital of culture year.

Thierry considered how the new organisation monopolised on the ECoC programme to ensure an afterlife for impact by working together with partners across their region and offered this as a key device of success for any future bids.

He urged the council and bid team not to view the years following ECoC as a book of memories but the beginning of a new model by which culture can serve an area and its inhabitants. Suggesting that successful programming is aimed at the people rather than users of 'high art', his talk suggested that any city must harness a huge number of volunteers to host events across the ECoC year and make efforts to keep in touch with community members across the duration of the programme. His closing advice was to make the most of the resources, sites and talent already in Leeds, but also to push boundaries to 'invent rather than maintain' existing frameworks, to 'shake up the selection committee' and 'be bold and enjoy the experience' of bidding.

Andrew Dixon drew together these thoughts by leading an interactive workshop designed to consider the character of Leeds and what participants would want any potential bid to achieve. Focussing on capturing the city in just three words, participants generated a language map of Leeds that presented some of the potential, as well as some of the tensions, inherent to telling a single story about a diverse place.



Discussions proposed a bid that captured the vitality of Leeds communities and developed the established status of the city as Child Friendly. The overall assertion that any bid capture the diversity of Leeds rather than imposing a blanket narrative on the city site was coupled with a call for a more connection city/city-centre as part of any strategy formation.



In the final keynote of the day, Mechthild Eickhoff presented a case study from Dortmund U as a way of finding new space for art in a city, as well as the capacity of cultural education for children as a way of capturing legacy. Engaging children as part of the creative process – not simply as end users or eventual audiences – the project profiled the work of children as well as encouraging engagement from adult audiences through the direct participation of their offspring. The presentation ended by considering the potential partnerships between ECoC bid teams and local universities to work together in measuring impact and assessing the long term benefits of any bid.



Leeds Beckett University lecturer Michelle Lanham led the closing workshop of the day considering potential subjects for a cultural strategy. A member of the Leeds 2023 cultural strategy sub-group, Michelle facilitated group work with participants to generate sources of pride in the city, but also to consider Andrew's initial question regarding the position of Leeds in Europe. Asking 'Why should Europe care about Leeds?', Michelle's session encouraged an approach to creating a story about Leeds that is accessible to people of different cultures and languages and draws upon the city's trading heritage with Europe to underline innate connections and historical relationships between Leeds and the continent across architecture, art and culture.

The workshop day created new ideas and reflections that will go on to inform the formation of a cultural strategy as part of the Leeds 2023 bid. The overall message of every presentation offered as part of the event was to 'think big'. Overall, the event proposed that the bidding process should be beneficial to the city and its inhabitants regardless of the eventual result. In uniting community, council, academia and European partners, the Y21 Leeds 2023 workshop provided a unique space to consider what makes Leeds so special and why the city should be the choice for ECoC in 2023.