

CULTURE CUMBRIA

A review of the current position and future potential

James Rebanks, Rebanks Consulting Ltd

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
A few words on partnerships.....	5
Point 1: Being honest about past failures provides a good basis for reform... ..	7
Point 2: There is no cultural voice, and that’s a problem for you and Cumbria	8
Point 3: If Culture Cumbria can’t become effective it shouldn’t exist.....	9
Point 4: Nobody wants more of the same	9
Point 5: Everybody wants something better	10
Point 6: People want three functions from Culture Cumbria	11
Function 1. Leadership and advocacy.....	11
Function 2. Intelligence.....	11
Function 3. Doing stuff (That only a collective or partnership can do).....	11
Point 7: Two alternatives, and one of them is not fit-for-purpose	12
The Cultural Dissident Model	12
The Pragmatic Model	12
Point 8: Transforming it into an effective (and pragmatic) machine	13
Action 1 – Develop and agree a cultural and creative manifesto for Cumbria.....	13
Action 2 – Select and mandate the leadership	14
Action 3 – Charge specific champions or cells with developing initiatives	14
Action 4 – Start to create a new organization	15
Action 5 – Secure investment or it becomes impossible	16
Action 6 – Start to develop the intelligence function	17
Action 7 – Coalesce around the subject or theme of ‘landscape’	18
Action 8 – Start to coordinate the sector through a ‘proposition’ for 2013.....	19
Point 9 - Structure and governance.....	20

Chairperson	20
Chief Executive.....	20
Board membership and structure.....	21
<i>Geographic cluster champions</i>	21
<i>Thematic champions</i>	21
<i>Practitioner champion/s.</i>	22
<i>Better in the tent</i>	22
<i>Key stakeholder representation</i>	23
<i>Observers</i>	23
Working cells and delivery champions	23
Point 10 - Implications of this focus... Being committed enough to do this	25
There needs to be a difference between strategy and tactics.....	25
Talk is cheap, which is good because no one wants to pay for it.....	25
New name, new brand, new ways of working.....	26
Point 11 - Tactical delivery	27
Tactical opportunity 1 - Local Authority Chief Executive Group	27
Tactical opportunity 2 - Regional Growth Fund/Local Economic Partnership	28
Conclusion	29
A simple calculation - Is this worth the effort it will take? If it isn't, lets go home.	29
Endnotes	30

Introduction

This report seeks to do something really challenging in a short time with limited resource. We believe that this is only possible by doing it in a very direct, simple and honest way, drawing simple conclusions and suggesting actions that are as clear as possible. Where we encountered a negative issue we have tried to be forthright and direct about what it is and how it might be resolved. However, the authors do not have a monopoly on common sense or the vision for the future, and fully accept that this document may simply provide one path to the future. The future of Culture Cumbria will be, and should be, decided by its members.

We have tried to speak to as many stakeholders as possible to ensure that their knowledge, experience and insights inform this document about the future of Culture Cumbria. Given the timescale and resource it has not been possible to speak to everyone who might have been able to provide input, but we envisage that the recommendations of this report if they are implemented will require input and support from the widest possible stakeholder group, and will be subject to revision and development, with ample opportunities for comment and input. The conclusions drawn from the evidence are the author's own. This document provides an external view on the issues faced by Culture Cumbria and is not the policy or view of the Culture Cumbria's board or its members.

James Rebanks, Rebanks Consulting Ltd, December 5 2010.

A few words on partnerships...

”Partnership is the suppression of mutual loathing in the pursuit of public fundingⁱ”

Culture Cumbria is a partnership, and it has the classic strengths and weaknesses of a partnership. For much of its existence it was exactly what the quote above suggests, a coming together of individuals and organizations that (more or less) set aside their sense of competition for limited resources in the pursuit of a bigger goal that was in the interests of the sector.

The problem, we would suggest, with Culture Cumbria was that it didn't move much beyond partnership in pursuit of public funding, and when that ultimately proved to only deliver modest amounts of investment, the partnership was left without much by way of a vision or purpose. Today, almost all stakeholders believe that it is necessary to have clearer and deeper collective vision and purpose, and that whilst this would undoubtedly assist in arguments about investment from the public purse, this should not be the primary factor in the development of that vision.

On the following page we summarize the factors affecting partnerships of this kind:

<i>Successful partnership – key factors</i>	<i>Failed partnership – key factors</i>
<i>Agreement that a partnership is necessary</i>	<i>A history of conflict among key interests</i>
<i>Respect and trust between different interests</i>	<i>One partner manipulates or dominates</i>
<i>The leadership of a respected individual or individuals</i>	<i>Lack of clear purpose</i>
<i>Commitment of key interests developed through a clear and open process</i>	<i>Unrealistic goals</i>
<i>The development of a shared vision of what might be achieved</i>	<i>Differences of philosophy and ways of working</i>
<i>Time to build the partnership</i>	<i>Lack of communication</i>
<i>Shared mandates or agendas</i>	<i>Unequal and unacceptable balance of power and control</i>
<i>The development of compatible ways of working, and flexibility</i>	<i>Key interests missing from the partnership</i>
<i>Good communication, perhaps aided by a facilitator</i>	<i>Hidden agendas</i>
<i>Collaborative decision-making, with a commitment to achieving consensus</i>	<i>Financial and time commitments outweigh the potential benefits</i>
<i>Effective organizational management</i>	

This section benefitted greatly from the work of David Wilcox, summarizing a number of major studies. See www.partnerships.org.uk

Point 1: Being honest about past failures provides a good basis for reform...

From the list of key factors of successful partnerships (above) it might be suggested that Culture Cumbria has had 'Agreement that a partnership is necessary' but has struggled in one way or another with almost all of the other factors. One of the non-arts stakeholders summed it up as follows,

“This sector cannot co-ordinate itself in Cumbria, its like trying to herd cats”

The existence of Culture Cumbria, and its success in securing investment in marketing cultural tourism, goes part way to proving this attitude wrong, but this skepticism will remain until the organization can be seen to say and do things effectively. Perhaps the greatest failing has been a lack of clear purpose beyond short-term tactical battles for public funding. Other key challenges have been differences of philosophy, different approaches to partnership working, and key interests missing from the partnership (or becoming disengaged for various reasons). Another issue has been people judging that the return on investment of time in Culture Cumbria was poor, and therefore organizational commitment has been, for understandable reasons, limited.

Point 2: There is no cultural voice, and that's a problem for you and Cumbria

The brutal truth is that currently decisions are being made about the future of the Cumbrian economy and the people making those decisions often appear to think Culture Cumbria so unimportant that it doesn't warrant a phone call or a meeting. This is, we believe, the key issue for Culture Cumbria: Both for reasons of pure self-interest, in that these decisions will have a major impact on the cultural and creative sectors, but also because somehow the people making these decisions are either ignorant of the potential power of culture and creativity in the economic development of other places, or they think this is not relevant to Cumbria. This is a little alarming for the future of Cumbria given that according to a recent DCMS report creativity will be **'the engine of economic growth for towns, cities and regions'** in the next decade. Cumbria needs a 'competitive identity' and it is hard to see how that can be created without investing in the cultural and creative sectors. But if key decision makers don't understand this, then there is a job of work to be done.

Point 3: If Culture Cumbria can't become effective it shouldn't exist

All stakeholders involved in Culture Cumbria are busy doing their 'day job'; they have limited time to commit to this organization. This has been true throughout Culture Cumbria's existence but will get worse in the coming months as spending cuts hit home and organizations get even 'leaner and meaner'. **We do not believe in the existence of Culture Cumbria for its own sake - if it cannot reform itself into an effective organization then we recommend that it should be terminated.**

Point 4: Nobody wants more of the same

The brief for this research asked a simple question of whether Culture Cumbria should even exist in the future. And this report is going to give a very simple answer,

No (or at least, not in its historic form).

Culture Cumbria has not delivered on many of the expectations placed upon it by stakeholders. The organization is carrying a lot of negative baggage and associations from the historic approach. It is hard to see how it can continue in its historic form with much credibility or with much effectivenessⁱⁱ. What has not worked in the past is extremely unlikely to work now given the reductions in funding for the arts and cultural sector. Most stakeholders believe that Culture Cumbria has either been pursuing the wrong strategy, or sort of the right strategy for a previous age, which didn't work out, and which is now no longer appropriate.

Point 5: Everybody wants something better

Many stakeholders are prepared to engage in another attempt to make this work, but only if that attempt is credible. For the simple reason that if Culture Cumbria does not step up to the plate and represent the sector, there is no other collective alternative.

It should be noted that in agreeing on past shortcomings, it is possible to lose sight of something else that almost all stakeholders agree upon; namely, that the cultural and creative sectors need a powerful and effective voice, and effective advocacy within Cumbria. It is worth putting on record that every single stakeholder interviewed as part of this review agreed that cultural advocacy was necessary to ensure Cumbria embraced culture and creativity more effectively than it does at present, or has in the past.

The shared commitment (to more effective advocacy for culture and creativity) between stakeholders outweighs the differences and inevitable tensions between stakeholders. That is why most of the stakeholders are still in a room together trying to make this work. So the collective answer to the question, Who needs Culture Cumbria? Is,

“We don’t need Culture Cumbria as it has existed. But we do need an organization to effectively champion culture and creativity in Cumbria.”

This is, for us, clear evidence that there is agreement that a partnership is necessary. The question becomes, what kind of partnership, and for what exactly?

Point 6: People want three functions from Culture Cumbria

Function 1. Leadership and advocacy

There is a powerful demand from stakeholders for a revitalized Culture Cumbria to provide **a powerful, intelligent and engaged voice for the sector**. The ‘demand’ is for something relatively simple, a champion for the sector that can push itself into the rooms where decisions are made, and present **a powerful alternative vision**, or **‘proposition’, for the future of Cumbria** that has a greater focus on high quality, innovative and coordinated culture and creativity. The cultural sector in Cumbria arguably requires effective leadership more now than it ever has.

Function 2. Intelligence

Effective leadership and advocacy rests upon the strength of the arguments made, the evidence provided, and the unity of the sector behind that voice. Stakeholders want Culture Cumbria to **provide the evidence base, and intelligence, for the sector’s contribution to social, cultural and economic development**. At present there is no coordinated ‘cultural vision’ or ‘proposition’.

Function 3. Doing stuff (That only a collective or partnership can do)

Whether Culture Cumbria exists in 2 years time will, frankly, be determined by whether it can make a difference that is worth the effort that is invested. Different views exist about what Culture Cumbria should actually do, but there are a significant number of stakeholders who believe that the sectors resources and talents need greater **co-ordination**, and perhaps even **curating** at times to ensure a bigger impact and profile. Many stakeholders believe that Culture Cumbria needs to have an impact on shaping **arts development** in Cumbria, including providing **professional development** opportunities for its members. And whilst fundraising is a tactic not a strategy, stakeholders see opportunities for Culture Cumbria to co-ordinate **fundraising** for the sector for additional projects. Many stakeholders also believe that the sector can offer significant value through **fusion** with other sectors, and by influencing other initiatives.

Point 7: Two alternatives, and one of them is not fit-for-purpose

Discussions with stakeholders reveal that there are two potential futures for Culture Cumbria:

The Cultural Dissident Model

This model involves Culture Cumbria retreating to the hills, ceasing to compromise with funders or local authorities, and fighting a highly principled and independent intellectual campaign against the 'powers that be'. This would be a) deeply satisfying because participants could say what they liked to whoever they liked, b) would have the benefit of simplicity in that people could stick to simple stances of principle, and c) would be an almost complete waste of time in the short-term because few would listen, let alone resource this process. We think this would inevitably reduce Culture Cumbria to little more than a conversation around the dinner table about the state of the arts. There is a need in Cumbria for independent radical and challenging thought about the past, present and futureⁱⁱⁱ, but this should not be the core rationale for Culture Cumbria.

The Pragmatic Model

This model involves a revitalized and restructured Culture Cumbria re-engaging on new terms with the compromised and often depressing realities of current policy decisions to achieve the best possible outcome for the sector and Cumbria. This pragmatic approach does not stop Culture Cumbria working to radically change the debate in the medium to long-term, but it does require a degree of political pragmatism and engagement with what is, rather than, what should be, the state of play. The trouble with this model is that it is more or less what stakeholders are trying to do at present. Therefore to achieve any kind of significant impact the clarity and power of the message needs to be radically improved, and Culture Cumbria needs restructuring and reorganizing to be a more effective voice (with a new and more powerful mandate from the cultural and creative sector).

Only the second of these models has any chance of delivering on the three functions outlined above.

Point 8: Transforming it into an effective (and pragmatic) machine

Action 1 – Develop and agree a cultural and creative manifesto for Cumbria

Perhaps the key issue in Cumbria that needs addressing by Culture Cumbria is to elucidate and evidence the contribution that culture and creativity can play in the economic and social development of Cumbria. Most of the stakeholders interviewed as part of this commission are unclear what the message, or ‘proposition’ actually is, and without clarity on this it is hard to see what Culture Cumbria is actually championing.

We recommend that the board of Culture Cumbria task a small working group to draft a manifesto that sets out what Culture Cumbria will try to achieve and the messages it will try to champion. This might be none the worse for fitting on one A4 sheet of paper. It should be agreed and signed up to as the manifesto of Culture Cumbria, and delivering it should be the strategic goal of the organization. This restating of collective commitment and vision has value in its own right, but is doubly valuable in that it makes the ‘script’ clear. Stakeholders should identify those areas where they share a common agenda^{iv}. It is critical that the majority of major cultural venues support this^v.

Action 2 – Select and mandate the leadership

The board should select a chairperson with the appropriate skills to champion the sector and work towards the goals of the cultural manifesto. This person should, with the new mandate from the revitalized organization, lobby for a seat at the top table in Cumbria and be the voice of the sector on the regional, national and international stage. This person should communicate that they represent a significant constituency (see below) of organizations and individuals who make a significant contribution to the Cumbrian economy, society, and environment. **The members of Culture Cumbria need to commit to backing this person to do the job.** This person needs to be a ‘big hitter’; someone who has influence and impact beyond that of current members.

The board of Culture Cumbria should also select a chief executive to represent the board and the members and give this person the mandate to act and speak on behalf of the sector in pursuit of the cultural and creative manifesto. The priority for the leadership should be to align themselves with key decision makers, opinion formers and private sector businesses to do a job of persuasion about the potential of the cultural and creative sectors to shape the future of Cumbria. The leadership should start to identify and develop external champions to build the strength of the organization.

Action 3 – Charge specific champions or cells with developing initiatives

The Board of Culture Cumbria should charge individuals or working groups (cells) with developing those elements of the Culture Cumbria programme that are most important and relevant to them. This is explained in more detail below.

Action 4 – Start to create a new organization^{vi}

Culture Cumbria isn't perceived to be properly representative of 'culture' by either internal or external stakeholders. It has two simple choices 1) call itself Arts Cumbria and be what it says on the label, or 2) widen the membership and involvement to be genuinely representative of culture and creativity in Cumbria. The author of this report would go further and would **widen the membership and involvement to make it representative of the 'cultural' and 'creative^{vii}' sectors.** This is for one simple reason, the collective power and economic importance of the cultural and creative sectors is much greater and would be taken more seriously than simply the 'arts'. The weighting of this representation is a matter of debate and different people would legitimately reach different conclusions.

It should also be recognized that there is a risk that a wider stakeholder group might make agreement on communication and the 'proposition' more difficult. We think **this can only work if widening the stakeholder buy-in is done in parallel with the creation of an organization that has an executive that is mandated to make decisions and say things.** Membership of Culture Cumbria should be considered as vote of support for the cultural manifesto, selection to the board of trustees being made a champion of that manifesto. **Governance of Culture Cumbria needs to be reformed to reflect the new focus** (see below).

Action 5 – Secure investment or it becomes impossible

Given the reality that Culture Cumbria has no financial resources of any significance, beyond the good will and initiative of members, next steps have to be realistic, or be resourced. A short-term priority for the leadership of Culture Cumbria should be to secure some modest investment to develop the leadership, and intelligence function that is required. **The priority should be to describe the development needs of the next 2-3 years and submit a bid for support to the Arts Council in January 2011.** There is a possibility that Eden Arts^{viii} and other stakeholders might be able to develop this. **The other way to move forward is to ask partners for more support, including Cumbria Tourism, using already funded officer time.** Many of the suggestions for Culture Cumbria in this paper will become possible by making the case afresh and securing resources for development. So initially tasks and fundraising will need to be resourced from current board members. But, ultimately, to be effective, this has to be a resourced organization.

Action 6 – Start to develop the intelligence function

Given limited resources for collating new evidence, the leadership of Culture Cumbria needs to use the evidence that already exists, and that evidence that they can collate from stakeholders from other sources. The author of this paper believes that the cultural and creative sector's potential to shape future perceptions of Cumbria is critical to economic, social and cultural development. The cultural and creative contribution is about more than cultural tourism, it should be about 'place making'; these sectors can and should be considered as generators of a powerful sense of place and deliverers of the creative future identity. **Work is required to document how the cultural and creative sectors can, through doing what they do best, deliver the priorities and objectives of other stakeholder organizations.** That this is still necessary might be a matter of regret but anyone who has read recent economic documents emerging from Cumbria will be aware that the cultural and creative involvement is marginal. There is a real need to invest in analysis of the evidence base and the development of interventions and projects that can deliver significant change for Cumbria.

Action 7 – Coalesce around the subject or theme of ‘landscape’

Culture Cumbria needs to be more creative and look beyond the short term and funding challenges. The author of this report is not a ‘creative’ in the sense that most members are. It is therefore inappropriate for this document to stray into creative development ideas. But to an objective outsider it appears fairly obvious that there is a common thematic focus that could be exploited. That idea is perhaps captured in the name of a recent Lakes Alive project called ‘Adventures in Landscape’, and that of an emerging Eden Arts project provisionally called ‘The Big Land’.

Is there not an opportunity to coordinate the disparate talents within Cumbria around a landscape-theme and put on a show at some point in the future that would reclaim the reputation this landscape once had of being the place that shaped the world’s attitudes to landscape?

This might well involve a professional curator bringing out and showcasing the best of Cumbria’s cultural assets, but it would be grounded in the organizations, programmes, and venues that already exist, and of course in the landscape of Cumbria. Many stakeholders are champions of elements of this already. It might also be possible to develop an international conference linked to this, commission high quality work in the landscape, and hold an awards event for seminal work. Much of this is impossible now, or perhaps will be this side of the Olympics, but it might be a focus for 2013.

Action 8 - Start to coordinate the sector through a 'proposition' for 2013

Culture Cumbria has very limited resources to do anything at present. But the commitment of partners can be utilized more effectively in terms of achieving impact. And, in the short to medium-term, Culture Cumbria should be willing to **be flexible with partner organizations who can develop initiatives in partnership with Culture Cumbria. In other words, Culture Cumbria should set the strategy, but other organizations or smaller partnerships can often do the tactical delivery.** For example, many of the partner organizations have projects that are in development that could be bigger, bolder, better and frankly better-funded if they could be done through partnership and would develop this in the Culture Cumbria structure if they could retain some control.

We would suggest that the Culture Cumbria board gathers information from stakeholder organizations about 1) what they are developing for 2013, and 2) what they might be able to deliver in 2013 with additional investment and through collaboration. This should be done to develop a proposition or programme for 2013 that can be used as a proposition for external stakeholders and funders. It should be around a core rationale or theme of experiencing landscape through creative adventures. The idea being to develop a proposition for 2013 that has multiple delivery partners, multiple projects, and a wide social and geographical reach, with the ability collectively to have a major impact at a regional, national and international level. The submissions from partners may form the raw material from which a Landscape Festival or Expo can be curated and fundraised for in the next 18 months. In terms of getting this to happen, it matters more that this is done, and done well, than it matters what the initial specific creative focus of this initiative is. **We therefore suggest that a member of the Board is tasked with developing an initial proposition that captures the potential and talents of the potentially participating organizations.**

Point 9 - Structure and governance

We favor a model for Culture Cumbria that is more like a Chamber of Commerce than what exists at present. Over time this may necessitate a different relationship with members, perhaps involving membership fees, but that is not feasible at present. In the short sections that follow we suggest a structure that we believe would be fit-for-purpose in delivering the ambitions of stakeholders.

Chairperson

Culture Cumbria needs a chairperson who is a 'big hitter' - Someone, who by virtue of their professional standing or achievements has sufficient political influence to impact at the top table of Cumbrian decision-making. This person does not necessarily have to be a cultural figure, or to be based in Cumbria, but they do have to be committed to the cultural and creative manifesto and be willing to commit to making a difference in Cumbria (and, critically, to raising the profile of Cumbrian culture and creativity outside Cumbria). There are advantages to this person being a private sector figure, preferably of regional or national standing. They should be recruited in the coming months on the strength of the cultural and creative manifesto and the future plans.

Chief Executive

The chief executive of Culture Cumbria should in future be elected on the basis of their cultural and creative experience and their capacity and willingness to implement the functions and actions agreed by the board (see above). Ultimately this post needs to be resourced, as no one can work at a project like this effectively without being resourced. However, in the initial stages it might be beneficial and sensible for the current chairpersons to lead on the next steps. We would suggest that if resource can be secured that the selection of the Chief Executive is competitive and open. This figure is pivotal to whether Culture Cumbria works or not, and the key issue will be mandating that person to represent and act on behalf of the sector. Stakeholders must provide this mandate and empower this person or Culture Cumbria will be undermined and relatively weak.

Board membership and structure

The board composition is a matter of real importance to the future success of Culture Cumbria. We think it should change significantly from the present model. It needs to include representatives from the wider cultural and creative sector and be seen as more than just a ‘lobbying group for the arts^{ix}’. There are a finite number of board seats, and if a wider mandate and constituency is required this means changes. We do not think individuals should be elected unless they represent a wider constituency, whether that is geographic or thematic is a matter of debate. There is no easy solution to the membership of the board; we would suggest that the following model might provide a starting point for discussions:

Geographic cluster champions

Many stakeholders have highlighted the logistical difficulties of engagement across Cumbria’s challenging geography. One solution is for there to be a division of Cumbria along geographic lines into a series of clusters that mean something to the individuals and organizations on the ground, with each electing a representative to a seat on the Culture Cumbria Board^x. Practically this might be achieved by current board members and participants being given different terms of reference. They would be on the board of Culture Cumbria to represent their cluster, and would become the focal point for that cluster engaging with Culture Cumbria.

From a crudely political and practical perspective there is merit in these cluster champions being the larger venues and delivery organizations. We would suggest that there be a geographic cluster champion for Eden, West Cumbria, Lake District National Park, Barrow and Carlisle (though in practice these might easily be reduced).

Thematic champions

The Board at present represents very strongly ‘the Arts’ (and would probably continue to through the champions described above), and needs balancing with the ‘creative industries’ (for reasons explained above). As an exercise in positive discrimination there is value in balancing the board

more by engaging with and recruiting with some new private sector ‘creative commercial’ thematic champions^{xi}. There might, for example, be a ‘publishing’ champion, representing significant Cumbrian creative businesses (e.g. a large newspaper group). There might also be an ‘architecture’ champion, and a ‘design’ champion (e.g. a significant creative design company). There are not enough seats for every one of DCMS’s creative industry sub-sectors to be represented, but a compromise can be found that widens the stakeholder group. It would be the responsibility of the creative industries themselves to develop over time whatever networks they feel appropriate to elect their representative. There should continue to be a cultural heritage representative, to represent that sector and encourage a more creative approach to Cumbria’s heritage.

Practitioner champion/s.

At present there are Culture Cumbria board members who see themselves as representing the smaller individual and independent practitioners in Cumbria. This appears to result in high quality board members with a passion for the issues (and valuable independence from funders). We would suggest that in the future model there is representation of this kind, with perhaps one or two seats for a candidate/s of this kind, who might be elected by either the Culture Cumbria grass roots membership or a revitalized Cumbria Network.

Better in the tent...

As a general principle, the future model should ideally ensure that key players/organizations in the cultural sector are committed to the organization. This can perhaps pragmatically be achieved by ensuring they have a loud voice in the manifesto and that they are represented as cluster champions.

Key stakeholder representation

Influence and communication is a two-way-process, and Culture Cumbria may have to be seen to listen as well as talk. One way of showing this would be to have representation on the Culture Cumbria board from **Cumbria County Council** (particularly necessary if CCC is to have enough faith in the organization to let it have real influence on delivery decisions). There should also perhaps be **a representative on the board of the 6 District Authorities**, though we would suggest that is at senior management level, rather than officer level. Given the investment agreed for cultural tourism it is probably sensible to have a board member from **Cumbria Tourism**. If Culture Cumbria can take the steps required to become effective then it might also be beneficial to offer a board seat or observer seat to the **Arts Council**. And finally, should Culture Cumbria decide that it can best pursue its strategic objectives by working with other organizations through initiatives like the **Local Economic Plan (LEP)** then it may be necessary to offer board membership on Culture Cumbria in return for influence and investment. These decisions will be best made in the light of the strategy and tactics agreed in the coming months.

Observers

It might be considered sensible to have additional observers at board meetings, or to invite non-voting specialist advisors to attend, depending upon the issues considered.

Working cells and delivery champions

Culture Cumbria is unlikely to be resourced to do all of the things that are required to achieve the aims and objectives of the creative and cultural manifesto. So it has to let other individuals and organizations do much of the delivery and much of the development work. That this will sometimes involve organizations doing this partly out of self-interest should be accepted as the acceptable price of change. Where organizations or individuals wish to work in smaller groups to develop collective projects or initiatives that can deliver on the manifesto they should be supported and championed by Culture Cumbria to do so, with the caveat that they report back to the Board periodically and get

agreement for the approach. We would suggest that the board is not an appropriate working mechanism for some of the development work, and that it should task individuals or cells with the following:

Task 1 - Writing the cultural and creative manifesto

Task 2 - Engaging with ACE, CCC and the LEP on short term development and policy issues

Task 3 - Submitting a funding submission to Arts Council for developmental support

Task 4 - Re-creating Culture Cumbria as an organization with new terms of reference

Task 5 - Recruiting members and champions from the creative industries

Task 6 - Developing the basic proposition for 2013 around the theme of experiencing landscape

Task 7 - Identifying likely candidates for the role of Chairperson

Clearly, there will be legitimate differences of opinion about many elements, but we would suggest that individuals or smaller working groups, or cells, do the work initially, before reporting back to the Board for decision-making and implementation. Any one of these tasks could have required an individual consultancy brief of perhaps £10k min. three years ago, but we suggest that the current reality of Culture Cumbria is about getting things done, quick, relatively simply, and by volunteers (and this necessitates a less bureaucratic approach). Being part of a working group or cell does not require individuals or organizations to be board members of Culture Cumbria and represents a practical way of engagement with the wider sector.

Point 10 - Implications of this focus... Being committed enough to do this

The context is changing rapidly and tactical guidance in this document may be outdated a week after it is written (so we have refrained from focusing on the details of this week's issues). The critical issue for Culture Cumbria is to agree values and principles that are enduring and develop a machine intelligent and flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances with its delivery tactics. The strategy will be captured in the cultural manifesto, the ability to act needs to be enshrined in the governance model. Day-to-day tactics may well be informed and strengthened by consultation, but not at the cost of speed and clarity.

There needs to be a difference between strategy and tactics

We do not need to labor this point unduly, but we think that Culture Cumbria has historically confused a tactic (fundraising) with a strategy (what that funding should be for), and has found itself slightly confused about what its strategy is when that tactic has failed or stalled. The Cultural and Creative Manifesto for Cumbria should be the vision and core strategy (it might be developed with new partners in the design and publishing sector), and the board should enable the executive to pursue the tactics necessary to deliver it. Things that do not advance the strategy should be dismissed or pursued by other means.

Talk is cheap, which is good because no one wants to pay for it

For some stakeholders Culture Cumbria draws some of its legitimacy and strength from its membership. Whilst this is true, the brutal truth is that whilst all cultural voices in Cumbria are equal, some are more equal than others. Culture Cumbria needs to make up its mind whether it is a forum for democratic debate, or an effective and professional advocacy and 'doing' organization. These two things are not mutually exclusive, but we believe that the forum element of Culture Cumbria should be separated out as a separate activity. Clearly, the executive of Culture Cumbria needs to be tuned-in to the grass-roots concerns of the sector but it really needs a mandate from that

sector to speak powerfully on its behalf, without feeling that it has to open every subject out to discussion. The solution to us appears relatively simple. Web 2 media have made networking and forum discussions an extremely low cost activity: A number of forums and networks exist that cover all or part of Cumbria. Here we will just name two of them: **Love Culture** is an online forum established in 2010 by Folly to facilitate discussions, sharing of views, debates, information sharing. **The Cumbria Network** was established to provide a network that supports visual artists in Cumbria through information sharing and networking activities. Culture Cumbria's **Ning** site also enables constituents to communicate with the board and leadership in real time. And there are others, but the point is simple: The leadership of Culture Cumbria should be mandated to speak on behalf of the sector, and they should be empowered to do this, communicating with the members is not the purpose of the organization.

New name, new brand, new ways of working

The public face of Culture Cumbria is a problem. The brand logo and web presence send the wrong message, and the name has significant negative baggage. This report has tried to focus on substance, but if Culture Cumbria can attract resources and continuing support around a new purpose, manifesto and strategy then it needs to think carefully about issues of presentation and style. Frankly no one will listen to a cultural organization that looks so shoddy. It also needs to (as it has started to) use new technologies, to ensure that it lessens the 'cost' of being engaged to potential supporters.

Point 11 - Tactical delivery

As we have argued above, Culture Cumbria needs to be driven by a clear strategy not by short-term tactics. Tactical implementation of the cultural and creative manifesto will change constantly (at present the policy context appears to change every hour or two). It is therefore unwise for this document to dwell too long on immediate opportunities for Culture Cumbria to influence and direct change. In this section we will simply highlight two of those opportunities as a stimulus to the current board agreeing a mandate to the Chief Executive:

Tactical opportunity 1 - Local Authority Chief Executive Group

It is not unreasonable to suppose that the chief executives of the 6 local authorities are probably looking at their arts development budgets as part of discussions about savings and efficiencies. One school of thought might be that arts development services (and the leisure and sport services in which they are positioned) might be coordinated across local authority boundaries to achieve cuts of 25%+. It is also possible that the local authorities might look at the option of outsourcing these services if it can provide a cost saving. This perhaps offers an opportunity to a reconstituted Culture Cumbria. There are probably three options: 1) It is beyond Culture Cumbria at present to be a **delivery contractor** for such services, it simply does not have the track record or administrative capacity to manage large public contracts, 2) Culture Cumbria could simply claim a seat in the room where these decisions take place and **lobby** for an effective solution, but this is unlikely to be accepted as appropriate as other lobbying bodies are excluded from comparable discussions, the last option is that Culture Cumbria can position itself as an honest **broker** supporting the changes and providing a service between client and delivery contractor, much as the Cumbria's Strategic Waste Partnership - **Resource Cumbria** - which provides a similar function for waste management in Cumbria. **It is for the Culture Cumbria Board to decide whether it wants to influence these decisions and which approach it favors.**

Tactical opportunity 2 – Regional Growth Fund/Local Economic Partnership

Cumbria was recently successful in getting approval for one of 24 Local Economic Partnerships, opening up the possibility of submissions to the national Regional Growth Fund (RGF). This involves developing bids to a £1.4 billion fund for regional development. It is understood by the author that bids will be for a minimum of £1 million, necessitating that an organization like Culture Cumbria would need to work in partnership to get any chance of investment in the cultural and creative sectors. Partly as a result of the rapid application process, the current documentation for the Cumbrian bid suggests that the cultural and creative input has been minimal. The sectors mentioned by name are “specialized manufacturing, energy and nuclear, hospitality and tourism, agriculture and land-based, food and drink and other (including the third sector)”. If this is a tactical opportunity for strategic gain then the CEO of Culture Cumbria needs to be mandated to pursue it, and the CEO needs to marshal the resources of the board to change the existing focus. **Culture Cumbria needs to identify what bids are emerging in Cumbria and would need to engage with that process with an output-based proposition.**

These tactical opportunities (and there are no doubt others of importance) are in one sense not dissimilar to funding opportunities pursued by Culture Cumbria in the past, and therefore there are legitimate questions about the wisdom of pursuing them. But, to be brutally frank, if Culture Cumbria believes that investment in the sector is one of its key objectives then they may be the game that has to be played. These tactical opportunities might be the subject of a working group or cell of Culture Cumbria, whilst others pursue more creative opportunities.

Conclusion

A simple calculation - Is this worth the effort it will take? If it isn't, lets go home.

If the prospective vision in this document does not present a future Culture Cumbria that stakeholders value enough to create, then it may be that Culture Cumbria can be dismantled or simply become a forum that meets periodically.

Each stakeholder organization needs to look at this future and ask whether it, or another that it might stimulate into life, is worth the candle. Not everyone will agree, and frankly we don't think everyone needs to as long as a strong enough collective do. And this will take time, but that's OK too. If the destination is worth the journey people won't mind getting there slowly, it is the investment of time into something that is going nowhere that stakeholders are sick of. Nothing in this document is easy or possible without hard work and investment of time and effort. And these things have never been in shorter supply, so it might be decided that the plan is impossible, and that's OK too, it at least has the merit of being honest and saving time in the future.

The key question is whether partners are willing and able to pay the price of achieving the plan. There is no magic solution, only hard work, pragmatism and a number of compromises. But there are, within the broad church that is Culture Cumbria, considerable creative talents and a surprising residue of commitment to collective action and advocacy. The author of this report would suggest that creative differences (which are entirely natural and healthy for such a collective) be shelved or kept in-check for the greater good that can be achieved over time by fighting for, and developing the sector. What we have suggested is like a game of snakes and ladders, in which Culture Cumbria might take many steps upwards only to slide back to square one if it can't take the necessary steps. But this is ultimately about more than what the sector needs; it is about what Cumbria needs.

The end.

Endnotes

Thank you to everyone who took the time to speak to us on this subject. This work has tried to accurately reflect the views of stakeholders and their aspirations for the future.

ⁱ Thanks to Steve Conor, Creative Concern, Manchester, for reminding me of this great quote, through his ‘Curating the Future’ keynote presentation.

ⁱⁱ Stakeholders accept that the organization is in a process of metamorphosis and are giving it the benefit of the doubt, but this is time limited.

ⁱⁱⁱ We heartily support the need for radical and independent voices of this kind, outside of Culture Cumbria.

^{iv} The new organization has to be about focusing on things that individual partners cannot achieve in isolation – much of the delivery in Cumbria is, and should remain, the preserve of the delivery organizations.

^v For one simple pragmatic reason – Culture Cumbria either speaks for the sector, including the larger venues and delivery organizations, or it will be bypassed in favor of direct contact with those organizations ‘outside the tent’.

^{vi} Frankly, we would rename the organization.

^{vii} In case anyone is unclear, the ‘Creative Industries’ are “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.” The Creative Industries UK sub categories are as follows: Advertising; Architecture; Arts and antique markets; Design; Designer Fashion; Film, Video and Photography; Software, computer games and e-publishing; Music and the visual and performing arts; Publishing and Television and radio. The author of this report believes the evidence shows that these sectors are a large part of the economic future, that no dynamic region can progress without significant growth of CIs, and that they have an importance which transcends their own economic contribution through creating a ‘buzz’ around dynamic places and through shaping the identity and brand of places and shaping places where people want to live, work and visit.

^{viii} Eden Arts, an existing arts development agency, have expressed a willingness to take on the task.

^{ix} These words were used to describe Culture Cumbria last week by an important external stakeholder; and whilst not necessarily fair, they capture a perception.

^x How the different clusters choose to organize themselves is, I would argue, not Culture Cumbria’s problem.

^{xi} The author discussed this with a number of private sector businesses and encountered a willingness to have a ‘voice’ through a structure like that proposed.