



Performance as City Pandemic Response: 'Invitations to Innovate'

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Interim Report, September 2021

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Interim Report from *Social Distancing and Reimagining City Life: Performative strategies and practices for response and recovery in and beyond lockdown*.

This research has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of the UK Research and Innovation's Covid-19 Rapid Response call.

Cover image: *Rainbow's End*, by Zoe Allen and Allan Dixon, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, August 2021. Image by S. Andrews.

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Suggested citation: Andrews, S. and Duggan, P. (2021), *Performance as City Pandemic Response: Invitations to Innovate*, September 2021. (Newcastle, UK: Performing City Resilience). Available at: <https://performingcityresilience.com/publications/>.

Key audience: This report is intended for colleagues in city emergency and resilience management who are working on pandemic strategy and response. It may also be useful to those engaged in related areas, such as arts and performance professionals, and city planners. Drawing on academic research and analysis, it is intended as a document for professionals whose work in some way addresses the pandemic. In setting out an approach to pandemic preparedness and response, this document offers a broad reading of the ways in which artistic and everyday 'performances' of cities can speak to emergency and resilience planning.

This is an interim report, a working document inviting conversation about the ideas included here. It is intended to contribute to current practices and advance preparations for future pandemic response, not critique current or recent practice.

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Executive Summary

To engage effectively with pandemic measures, we need to find and sustain new ways of living—and thriving—in altered conditions. As nation states and cities impose measures to control the virus, so they ask people in affected areas to find new ways of engaging with those places, and to be sensitive to any changes in restrictions. This emphasis on control seeks to limit viral transmission, but it offers limited guidance on effective means of living in a city in the context of pandemic measures. There is a pressing need to identify new ways of living and working in cities in the context of pandemic restrictions, both now and for the future. At the same time, emergency planning professionals are calling for new and novel approaches to preparedness and response planning in light of the pandemic.

This interim report emerges from an eighteen-month project to explore intersections between arts and emergency and resilience strategy and practice in UK cities. As such it is directly focused on developing new and novel approaches to sustain, and reimagine, city life in the context of a pandemic and related restrictions.¹

Covid-19 has underlined the vital role arts practitioners play in identifying and responding to local and city challenges both creatively and at speed. Throughout the pandemic, artists, arts organisations and networks have been responding imaginatively to restrictions, rethinking familiar places and practices, and creating entirely new modes of engagement with local and city communities. In some contexts, this work comprises informal invitations and guidance, in others it involves sustained local leadership to directly address local needs that have not been met. Elsewhere, artistic programming has provided flexible, responsive means through which people can recognise and understand different experiences of Covid-19, and thereby live with greater knowledge and understanding. The arts are rarely credited as offering a strategic contribution, and yet, internationally, there are established examples where the arts have been directly engaged in precisely this work as pandemic response. What is missing is a means of connecting such crisis-focused strategic arts responses to city emergency and resilience planning measures.

The pandemic reveals, starkly, the lack of channels of communication between academics and professionals in the arts and in emergency and resilience management. There is very little work that brokers connections between these stakeholders in given cities. Beyond the arts, there is limited public or professional understanding of the ways arts practices and performance research methods make sense of the ‘everyday’ (social) and ‘aesthetic’ performances in and of cities. This report is part of a wider ongoing project, [Performing City](#)

¹ This project is supported by funding received through the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of UK Research and Innovation’s rapid response to Covid-19 fund – set up to support projects which contribute to our understanding of, and response to, the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts.

Resilience, that directly addresses the contribution of arts practice and research to city resilience strategy and practice. By researching ‘performances’ of a city, we can reveal the ways in which arts and culture can inform recommendations for city management.

To understand how the arts comprise pandemic response, we need to resist conventional and often simplistic definitions of arts practice. There have been long-running debates on the value of the arts, notably in terms of their ‘intrinsic’ or ‘instrumental’ value. Our argument is more fundamental and more urgent: we need clear definitions of what arts practices are now, what they do (especially in a city in crisis) and how this relates to emergency and resilience strategy. Too often arts practices have been poorly defined, poorly valued, and assumed to be a luxury, rather than an active critical force in the management and practise of a city.

Cities face very particular challenges in a pandemic. The UN observes that, with their population size and ‘global and local interconnectivity [...] urban areas have become the epicentre of the pandemic’.² Arts practitioners living and working in cities are particularly able to address the acute challenges faced by urban areas, recognise impacts on familiar community and/or city practices, and develop responses that reimagine those practices in the context of the pandemic and associated restrictions, whether these are imposed formally or adopted as local good practice. In attending to the performance of the city through the crisis of a pandemic, arts practitioners are well placed to envision and enact steps to the future city, specifically by addressing identified agendas, notably the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

In the pandemic, arts practitioners internationally have demonstrated compelling, imaginative and rapid responses to changed and changing conditions. In response, it is vital to create mechanisms to build arts thinking and practice into strategic city processes of pandemic mitigation, preparedness and response. The work of securing a city now or in future pandemics will benefit significantly from attending to a breadth of perspectives. Specifically, Covid-19 has revealed a vital opportunity to build dialogue between practitioners engaged with strategy and practice in the arts and those in emergency and resilience planning. Similarly, and as we address elsewhere, engagement with emergency and resilience practitioners can be of significant value to arts practitioners, enabling them to understand the ways in which their work contributes to the life, and the resilience, of a city.³

While this interim report speaks to city emergency and resilience staff working on pandemic planning, it necessarily points to wider opportunities to engage with

² United Nations, 2020. *Policy Brief: COVID-19 in an Urban World*. July 2020. Available at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid_urban_world_july_2020.pdf

³ See: Andrews, S. and Duggan, P., 2021. ‘Towards Strategy as Performance in Hazard Mitigation: Reflections on Performing City Resilience in New Orleans’ in *Research in Drama Education*, 26.1.

performance thinking in emergency and resilience work more broadly. As an interim report, this is a ‘living document’ intended to invite and stimulate discussion, collaboration and innovation. As such, the work here will inevitably develop as our research progresses. Many of the findings speak to the value of building local connections with people and place, and developing locally distinctive plans. Such work will take time to instigate, and involve a significant shift in focus by arts and emergency/resilience professionals alike. Yet, a renewed understanding of and engagement with arts practitioners creates new kinds of relationships in a city and offers significant opportunities to grow sophisticated local approaches to ideas and practices of mitigation, preparedness and response.

This report offers a series of ‘invitations to innovate’ in emergency and resilience planning to address pandemics. Based on our research on arts and resilience strategy and practice in Bristol, Glasgow and Newcastle, we focus these ‘invitations’ on five intersecting pandemic response challenges:

1. Reach communities in and across a city,
2. Re-work city spaces for safe public access,
3. Engage local populations with key public health messages,
4. Manage perceptions of life during Covid and of vaccination,
5. Connect people to alleviate isolation.

In addressing each challenge, we:

1. Reveal critical recent research that recognises the need for responses to the challenge,
2. Identify case study arts projects to demonstrate ways that arts practice can speak to the challenge,
3. Offer invitations for ways that emergency and resilience professionals might engage with local arts practitioners to address the challenge in their city. We frame these invitations in terms of advance preparedness and immediate response.

This work is intended as a starting point, to stimulate conversation and action to facilitate connections between arts and emergency and resilience practices. While, ordinarily, we might recommend slow, iterative collaboration on emerging projects, the context of the pandemic means we are keen to highlight actions that can be taken in the immediate moment to address pressing challenges. We recommend fair engagement, compensating arts practitioners and organisations for their time, knowledge, skills and expertise. We also recommend building a mutually-beneficial collaboration, where arts and EP practitioners can each reflect on and enhance their practices.

For more information on models of bringing arts and emergency and resilience practitioners into productive conversation, please contact us (see Contact Information, below).

Contents

<i>Executive Summary</i>	4
<i>Contents</i>	7
<i>Performance as Pandemic Response</i>	8
Project Background.....	8
Performance, Arts Practice and Emergency Planning.....	9
Towards Innovation and Novel Thinking	12
<i>‘Invitations to Innovate’ in Emergency and Resilience Planning</i>	14
1. Reach Communities in and Across a City	15
2. Re-Work City Spaces for Safe Public Access.....	17
3. Engage Local Populations with Key Public Health Messages	19
4. Manage Perceptions of Life During a Pandemic and of Vaccination	21
5. Connect People to Alleviate Isolation	24
<i>Conclusion: An invitation to get involved</i>	26
Beginning City Conversations	27
Contacting Artists and Companies.....	28
<i>Key Ideas for Further Discussion</i>	29
<i>Contact Information</i>	30
<i>References</i>	30



View across the Tyne River, towards Newcastle, from BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art.

Performance as Pandemic Response

Project Background

Covid-19 has transformed the ways in which we live and work in cities. As a result, there is an urgent need to understand how to practise, make sense of and sustain city life in the context of pandemic prevention measures, particularly physical distancing. At the same time, emergency preparedness and resilience planning work in cities has gone from being on ‘the periphery’ of public consciousness to ‘to being right in the centre’ of daily experience.⁴

Building on our work with New Orleans’ Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness,⁵ in December 2020, we began work on an 18-month UKRI Covid-19 Rapid Response project: ‘Sustaining Social Distancing and Reimagining City Life: Performative strategies and practices for response and recovery in and beyond lockdown’. In consultation with emergency preparedness and resilience planning colleagues in Bristol, Glasgow and Newcastle city councils, the study seeks to broker new thinking, strategy and practice between arts, emergency planning and resilience strategists. We are developing new understandings of the ways cities can take account of arts thinking and practice, particularly performance, in pandemic preparation and response.

In our work to date, we have become acutely aware that a new professional and public understanding of the arts and city arts practices is needed. There is a very real disconnect between understandings of arts practice by arts practitioners and researchers, and by those outside this field. It can be complex and time-consuming to ‘read’ arts practices in a city as critical reflections on - and responses to - its pressing challenges. Yet, such work often reveals active, local, situated understandings of a city or a community in that city. Indeed, even the form and operation of arts venues in a city can be instructive in revealing how arts practitioners understand and contribute to the life of a city.⁶ Too often, the value, importance, and socio-cultural impact of arts practices are overlooked or absent in resilience theory and practice internationally; ‘performance thinking’ is not routinely incorporated in strategic planning, thinking and research.

This interim report draws on the analytical work of the first phase of the research. This has included: interviews with resilience and emergency planning professionals, artists, arts

⁴ Gillman, J., 2021. Interview with authors. 27 April, online.

⁵ See: Performing City Resilience, *n.d.* ‘New Orleans’. Available at: <https://performingcityresilience.com/new-orleans/> and Performing City Resilience, *n.d.* ‘PCR Impact Statements from New Orleans’. Available at: <https://performingcityresilience.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/PCR-Impact-Statements-from-New-Orleans-1.pdf>.

⁶ See Andrews, S. and Duggan, P., (2019), ‘Situation Rooms: Performing City Resilience in New Orleans’, *Liminalities: A journal of performance studies*, 15.1.

organisation leaders and arts producers in the UK; analysis of social and aesthetic performances; and analysis of observations during field research in our case study cities.⁷



A mural in Glasgow 'wears' a face covering. June 2021.

Performance, Arts Practice and Emergency Planning

Many artists in cities are engaged in addressing those cities, their communities, and challenges. They are, therefore, ideally placed to help understand and respond to the current pandemic and face future crises. *Performance* offers a vital mode of making and researching arts practice in a city in order to understand how practitioners conceive of and respond to critical challenges. It can reveal innovative ways of practising places, even during strict population controls, and be used to investigate both artistic and everyday practice, and points where these intersect. When understood as 'strategic interventions' in cities, such practices can be useful to the development of pandemic-focused, emergency planning policy and strategy.

Very early in the UK's Covid-19 pandemic experience, it became clear that 'social distancing' was going to be in place for a long period of time, would be re-deployed for further 'waves' of the virus and, crucially, would have profound and lasting impacts on people's perceptions

⁷ Our research is equally interested in social and aesthetic performances:

Social performance: everyday innovations that have emerged since lockdown, unfold in a discrete timeframe, and for an intended audience. Examples include: formalised performances, e.g. clapping for NHS/key workers; and incidental performances, e.g., in the UK, a flautist teaching a pupil through closed window, a dancer performing for neighbours while taking out bins, Captain Tom Moore walking for the NHS.

Aesthetic performance: artistic practices created since lockdown that respond to Covid-19 (rather than, for example, filmed versions of pre-existing work). Examples include: GIFT Festival 2020/2021; BBC Culture in Quarantine; Forced Entertainment's #EndMeetingForAll.

of themselves, others and the places they live and work.⁸ The all-pervasive nature of reporting on the pandemic meant that daily experience was ‘claustrophobic’ physically and emotionally; living was ‘likened to “a prison”’; the pandemic became inescapable in and beyond people’s homes: ‘It’s all over the news, it’s all over your phone, it’s all over the TV, it’s basically everywhere you turn’:

The inability to go to work, or for some the significant restructuring of work patterns, including balancing home working with home schooling, combined with worry over the virus itself, meant that many participants felt “overwhelmed” or “scared”... According to participants, “the biggest problem we’ve got is we don’t know when it’s going to end” and the sense of “‘powerlessness’ this had fostered”.⁹

The ‘stay at home’ order and wider implementation of social distancing nationally resulted in widespread ‘emotional and psychological losses’ that were ‘particularly acute for those living in more urban, densely populated cities’.¹⁰ In that context, sustaining social distancing long-term, or reimposing it after periods of its easing, is likely to prove complex in terms of enforcement and potentially psychologically detrimental to those experiencing it. At the same time, emergency planners are seeking new approaches to preparing for new waves of Covid-19 or the emergence of new pandemics in the future.

One new approach is to take account of the strategic work artists and arts organisations are doing in cities and to consider their practices as strategic interventions in place, space and community. The importance of accessing cultural production during the pandemic is clear. Indeed, cultural policy scholar M. Sharon Jeannotte has recently argued that there is significant global evidence that ‘cultural activities during the pandemic were highly valued, widely supported, and pursued resolutely despite the many obstacles placed in the way of both creators and consumers’.¹¹ Jeannotte’s analysis focuses principally on the ways in which people turned to the *consumption* of cultural production as a means of escape and entertainment, alongside exploration of the ‘creative [ways cultural producers used] digital platforms, particularly social media, to try to recapture and connect with audiences and patrons’.¹²

Jeannotte goes on to argue that the pandemic has revealed the need for ‘culture, arts, heritage and media’ to be more socially and politically valued as we emerge from the

⁸ See Williams, S.N., Armitage, C.J., Tampe T., Dienes, K., 2020. ‘Public perceptions and experiences of social distancing and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic: a UK-based focus group study.’ *BMJ Open*, 10.7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3 – 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹¹ Jeannotte, M.S., 2021. ‘When the gigs are gone: Valuing arts, culture and media in the COVID-19 pandemic’, *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 3.1, p. 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

pandemic, to be ‘assigned a more prominent role in the “new normal”’.¹³ Of course, such ‘valuing’ may take many forms but as yet it has not been taken seriously as a strategic practice in relation to emergency planning. Our work seeks, in part, to address this gap in thinking and practice. This report (and accompanying article in *Crisis Response Journal*¹⁴) is intended to invite new ways of thinking about pandemic response and recovery processes. In a society in which the value of the arts is being increasingly undermined, there is an opportunity to give both creative practice and academic performance research a crucial role within our ongoing responses to Covid-19.

In his recent essay, ‘Exercising for Mass Vaccination’, for *Alert: Journal of the Institute of Civil Protection and Emergency Management*, Alexander L. Thompson highlighted the importance of ‘Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response (EPRR) expertise’ to the planning and implementation of the UK’s vaccine roll-out in 2021. In particular, Thompson highlights the ‘design and provision of scenario-based workshops and exercises’ in this planning:

The former to investigate [workshops] and develop contingencies and mitigations for each programme area or work-stream, and the latter [exercises] to offer a safe environment within which to test processes in real-time.¹⁵

Such practices were vital to developing safe and efficient working methods for the ‘end-to-end processes for administering Covid-19 vaccine’ to circa 1000 people per day in each UK vaccine centre.¹⁶ More broadly, these exercises are ‘fundamental’ to emergency preparedness internationally. The liveness of the exercises – their ‘real-time’ experience – is critical to their success, demanding participants think on their feet as they respond to the ‘cast members[’]... unique script[s]’. This work puts performance practices at the core of EP business. This is not mere poetic mapping but rather raises an important synergy between the areas of practice at the core of our research. Scripting, casting, rehearsal and reflection are established and powerful processes in understanding complex systems, developing highly skilled ‘actors’ in the delivery of efficient, safe and effective programmes of work. Our work takes this synergy between the disciplines further to argue that performance can be useful to emergency planning *thinking* and to city pandemic strategy.

¹³ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁴ Andrews, S. and Duggan, P. (2021). ‘Performance can be vital to emergency preparedness.’ *Crisis Response Journal*, 16.3.

¹⁵ Thompson, A. L., 2021. Exercising for Mass Vaccination. *Alert: Journal of the Institute of Civil Protection and Emergency Management*. Spring 2021, p.23.

¹⁶ Ibid.



Graffiti in Glasgow expressing some frustration at the Covid-19 pandemic. June 2021.

Towards Innovation and Novel Thinking

There is ample evidence that performance thinking and practice comprise powerful ways to understand what it means to live with and through crisis, and that performance can and should be taken seriously in the context of city resilience and emergency preparedness strategy.¹⁷ Meanwhile, colleagues within emergency planning are seeking innovative approaches. For instance, James Gillman (Interim Head of Service, Connected City; Bristol City Council) has argued for the need to place a city's cultural offer at the centre of its resilience planning.¹⁸ Moreover, Gillman identifies the potential for performance to offer modes of conceptualising, representing and expressing the experience of risk (especially the pandemic) that can help cities process crises and plan for new ones.¹⁹

Similarly, Head of Resilience at Newcastle City Council, Helen Hinds has argued persuasively for the need to 'expand' the disciplines 'in the room' when developing emergency strategy.²⁰ For Hinds this responds to a need to develop 'entirely new ways of thinking about the current crisis' and future methods of emergency preparedness.²¹ This call for innovative expansion of thinking in emergency planning is echoed in international professional and academic literature too. For example, in *Crisis Response Journal*, Lagadec, Hough and Langlois have argued that Covid-19 has revealed that:

in a systemic, hypercomplex and mutating context, no one should expect to be the central and unique focus point – the distribution of expertise, questions, perspectives, dynamics and operations *has to be rapid and wide*. The goal is not to find 'the' overarching and magical solution, but to navigate creatively within black

¹⁷ See, for example: Duggan, P. and Peschel, L., eds., 2016. *Performing (for) Survival: Theatre, Crisis, Extremity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Andrews and Duggan, 2019 & 2021.

¹⁸ Gillman, J., 2020. Letter of support. AHRC/UKRI Covid-19 Rapid Response grant application.

¹⁹ Interview with authors, 27 April 2021.

²⁰ Meeting with authors, 18 August 2021, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

²¹ Hinds, H., 2020. Letter of support. AHRC/UKRI Covid-19 Rapid Response grant application.

holes amid huge disorder, where traditional maps have been lost, sensemaking is difficult and the horizons are shrouded or invisible... the way forward should be a collective endeavour, *anchored upon intelligence, creativity and trust*.²²

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented a global context in which there are ‘no previously-learned answers that can be applied.’²³ In conversation with our key stakeholders, we would nuance this a little. SARS, MERS, Ebola and flu have all taught lessons. Rather, then, we might argue that the Covid-19 pandemic saw an inability on the part of some policy makers to transfer those lessons from one context to another: the maps were indeed lost. The situation, therefore, requires creativity, complex problem solving and critical thinking across disciplinary boundaries that are not necessarily (or not normally) part of the Emergency Preparedness landscape. Indeed, we might even go so far as to say that ‘[a]ddressing the consequences of global destabilisation *creatively* is a matter of national survival.’²⁴ In our work, we are particularly interested to think through the consequences of such ‘creative’ approaches in the context of developing strategic approaches to sustaining social distancing, and the implications of this for how we understand, live and work in a place.

As artists respond to Covid-19, they discover ways of practising life and work in our changed cities. Indeed, artists are exceptionally well placed to help reveal, articulate and encounter the ‘questions [that] have been overlooked, [that] are unseen.’²⁵ Relatedly, performance analysis provides an innovative methodology to understand the creative ways those living and working in cities are reimagining and making sense of daily practices through pandemic measures, notably including mask-wearing and social distancing.

Educationalist Laura J. Hetrick has argued that the arts are ‘a way of coping with discomfort, trauma, uncertainty, and a lack of wellness in life’ and so must be taken seriously as a cornerstone of strategic responses to and planning for pandemics.²⁶ Moreover, the arts provide mechanisms by which communities and individuals can think through the complexities of a given situation or context. Performance, we suggest and demonstrate below, can be a process of pandemic response.

This is in part because aesthetic performance has the capacity both to envision and embody new worlds and to think through the world as it is experienced in the present moment, often at the same time. Performance practitioners are thus always already engaged in thinking through the contexts from which their work emerges. This is true at the level of

²² Hough, E, Lagadec, P, Langlois, M., 2020. ‘Leadership in Terra Incognita: Vision and action’, *Crisis Response Journal*, 15.4, p. 16. Our emphasis.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16. Our emphasis.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.17.

²⁶ Hetrick, L.J., 2020. ‘Embracing Uncertainty Through Embracing the Arts’. *Visual Arts Research* 46.2, p. vi.

individual pieces of practice and at the level of curation or artistic programming. In the ‘Invitations’ section below, we explore the ways in which performance and artistic practice attend to thinking through the social, political and emotional consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic in ways that might be helpful to emergency planning going forward. In modelling these practices as strategic interventions into understandings of place and community, we offer a means through which a city’s cultural assets can offer ‘additional and different sets of visions and capacities’ in emergency planning and strategy.²⁷

In the below, rather than strictly ‘recommending’ ways forward, we offer invitations to emergency planning professionals and arts strategists in cities, to think in nuanced ways about what constitutes strategic emergency planning. The intention in this interim report is to *invite* conversation, debate and interdisciplinary development of thinking and practice.



Colourful huts, erected outside Bristol Old Vic Theatre, enable outdoor socialising within social distancing parameters. July 2021.

‘Invitations to Innovate’ in Emergency and Resilience Planning

At this mid-point in our research on social distancing and reimagining city life in UK cities, we are releasing a set of ‘invitations’ for emergency planning and resilience professionals. In so doing, we seek to begin a conversation in the UK and beyond on the ways that ‘performance’ might offer new methods and new ways of thinking about emergency and resilience planning. As such, we aim to meet the established call for new emergency preparedness and resilience planning methodologies and practices, particularly for pandemic planning and response.

²⁷ Hough, et al., 2020, p. 15.

This a working document, a sharing of emerging thinking. Unlike much academic publishing, these are ideas in progress: we will build on this work in the second phase of the research, where we will explore interdisciplinary implementation of ideas. Our purpose here is to freely share this information as quickly as possible with as wide an audience as possible, to help inform continuing responses to Covid-19, reflections on pandemic response in the UK and to bring new voices, practices and perspectives to pandemic planning.²⁸

These are open invitations: you are welcome to work, re-work and reimagine each invitation as you and arts colleagues think is useful. The invitations below address phases of pandemic preparedness and response, although they may also be used in and beyond pandemic planning. They do not address pandemic mitigation.

We frame these invitations in relation to specific challenges that may be important in pandemic planning and response: reaching communities, re-designing places, engaging people with public health messaging, managing perceptions of Covid-19 and vaccinations, connecting people to alleviate isolation and loneliness.

Understanding emergency planning through performance, and taking seriously the work a city's artists, cultural organisations and arts leaders do as strategic engagements in city thinking, offer opportunities to:

1. Reach Communities in and across a City

Many arts practitioners and organisations will already be familiar with people and places in a city, they will already understand local concerns, particularly those that are difficult to address or to resolve. Some will have facilitated arts projects in which individuals and groups express issues, challenges and concerns. Local knowledge, local connections and the trust of local people are not easily or quickly won. Nevertheless, as psychologist Nisha Gupta has convincingly argued, while 'social distancing' is vital to stop the spread of the virus, connecting people and communities within and beyond local contexts during a pandemic is equally vital to combat isolation and maintain wellbeing.²⁹ Reflecting on the capacity for arts practices (particularly, in their argument, music) to offer a 'bonding power' to individuals and communities kept apart by the pandemic, Gupta comments that:

Physical distancing can certainly be experienced as a psychological distancing without intentional efforts to offset the isolation... frequent virtual check-ins with one another—particularly those that are most vulnerable to COVID-19, such as

²⁸ Further project publications will report on this work more fully in 2022.

²⁹ Gupta, N., 2020. 'Singing Away the Social Distancing Blues: Art Therapy in a Time of Coronavirus', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 60.5, pp. 594 - 595.

our beloved elders— [is essential] to preserve our sense of intimate community bonding in this time of self-quarantining...³⁰

By building meaningful relationships with community arts groups, emergency and resilience planners can develop a critical means of understanding how to broker knowledge with key stakeholder groups in the context of a crisis. This may help the process of disseminating key information, although this offers a rather mechanistic approach. It would be stronger to offer means of engaging communities in processes of identifying processes of local response to crisis.



A neon sign on outside of Slung Low's venue, Holbeck, revealed during their 2020 Christmas show, offers a rallying call to local communities during the pandemic. Photo by Simon K Allen

Early in the UK's first lockdown, Slung Low (Holbeck in Leeds, UK) curated a public exhibition of pictures made by local residents. Cable-tied to lampposts for people to explore during the one permitted act of daily exercise in public, the exhibition offered entertainment, distraction and joy in a Covid-secure way. It was a small contribution to making physical-distancing more sustainable. Later, the company became a non-means-tested food distribution centre, building a 'volunteer army' to support the diverse and often at-risk communities of Holbeck.³¹ In June 2020, Slung Low produced a one-off theatre performance for families, staged in their carpark. Actors performed from the back of a flatbed truck for audiences in family bubbles in individual tents, who listened through headphones. The performance offered the community something 'to look forward to, a

³⁰ Ibid., p. 595.

³¹ Alan Lane (Slung Low's Artistic Director), interview with authors, 13 April 2021.

change of activity, a moment of respite'.³² This was performance as a mechanism for sustaining life in lockdown.

In the current pandemic, councils have identified specific difficulties gaining access to 'hard to reach' communities.³³ Engaging with existing arts organisations allows emergency and resilience professionals to begin conversations on ways of working and means of communicating. Richer and more nuanced connections are more likely with a history of connection, but the context of pandemic response still allows for new conversations to begin.

To engage arts practitioners with this challenge:

Preparedness: *Develop sustained connections with arts groups as part of community engagement practice, to build trust and enable people to contribute to the planning of actions for their local area in a crisis.*

Response: *Meet with arts groups to plan and develop modes of engagement that echo the groups' existing practice(s) and invite groups to advise on community engagement strategy.*

2. Re-Work City Spaces for Safe Public Access

Requirements for physical distance pose critical challenges for the management of public space. Where population measures (including requirements for mask-wearing and physical distancing) rely, in large part, on individuals self-managing their use of space, creative measures can help stimulate engagement with and commitment to those measures.

Artists have long engaged playfully with spaces, particularly in cities. In Exeter, the artist-researchers group, Wrights and Sites published 'mis-guides'; first *An Exeter Mis-Guide* (2003) and, later, *A Mis-Guide to Anywhere* (2006). These books offered short instructions on activities for anyone to conduct in a city, suggesting a means of defamiliarizing the everyday and thereby helping reveal new understandings of place, and practices of that place.

³² Alan Lane, cited in Morton, J., 2020. 'Slung Low Stage a Treat for Local Families', *South Leeds Life*, 29 June.

³³ This assertion and other very similar ones were expressed to us at committee meetings we attended in March, April and May 2021. These included cross-council meetings with representatives from across key pandemic response areas of a council (e.g.: public health, resilience, social services, education), and multi-council meetings with resilience and emergency planning representatives from multiple cities.

Such performative approaches have been a critical feature of arts practice, especially in cities. As performance scholar Sharanya reflects, performative walking practices can (and must) take account of the ‘urban politics’ in which they take place, both historic and, for emergency planners, contemporary – such as lockdowns and associated restrictions on movement. Embodied analysis of city practices reveals ‘the performance (text)’ of the city, those things which ‘cannot be assimilated into [formalised] text’.³⁴ Performance can reveal how places *work* in the context of their urban politics, as experienced by people in those places; experiences which elude clear articulation in written texts such as, in this context, policy guidance.

As city councils seek to manage public spaces, so they ask the public to defamiliarize their experience of a place, to attend to it in new ways. While this can be informational and appear restrictive, so too it might invite alternate, perhaps playful, understandings of place, and of the city, as it is understood from that place. In the context of reflecting on Covid-19 and looking to future pandemic planning, if we begin by asking how artists might understand restrictions on a place, we might better understand the creative possibilities from those restrictions.

How people perform in a place – formally and informally – pertains precisely to emergency planning and resilience concerns, including physical distancing protocols and encouraging populations to engage with pandemic control measures in effective and sustainable ways. As they respond to Covid-19, arts practitioners discover new ways of living, working in and reimagining our changed cities. This need not be complicated – simple yet creative performative interventions in public spaces can be extremely effective. For example, when meeting with Core Cities’ Emergency Planning Group, it was observed that painted hearts in Bristol’s green spaces had generated excited selfie-taking, social media friendly engagement which heightened the effectiveness of this physical distancing measure. By contrast, simple circles in other cities’ green spaces had been less effective. Performative, creative approaches to reimagining city life afford opportunities for new ways of thinking about developing emergency responses and creating engaging modes of practising them.

To engage arts practitioners with this challenge:

Preparedness: Invite artists to develop a culture of creative marking of places at times of transition. From the design of pedestrian one-way systems or signage on hoardings around building sites, reveal creative means by which a city is in close conversation with residents and visitors.

³⁴ Sharanya, 2017. ‘A Manifesto to Decolonise Walking’. *Performance Research*, 22.3, pp. 86 - 88.

Response: *Engage artists to intervene in public places in material ways. These interventions should offer playful transformations of those places and that draw people's attention to the place, to their position within this and the position(s) of others. Such work might involve transforming existing elements (painting or adding chalk designs to buildings, roads or pavements, inviting others to transform the space in playful, if temporary, ways). It may involve introducing elements that bring new perspectives and new ways of navigating the space (new walkways or seating that allow people to be part of the same space, physically distanced).*

3. Engage Local Populations with Key Public Health Messages

Covid-19 has demonstrated the need for clear messaging of prescribed behaviours in public spaces during a pandemic. Yet, in emergency planning and resilience contexts, we have been acutely aware of a perception that 'signs don't work'. In our own research, this was evident in observing a busy UK city centre street where signs addressing pedestrians and calling for social distancing (often modelled on road signs) seemed to be being ignored, and perhaps not seen by those on the street. As Helene-Mari van der Westhuizen et al. observe of mask-wearing,

During the covid-19 pandemic, wearing face coverings is being rapidly introduced as a public health intervention in countries with no cultural tradition of doing so. For successful uptake, such interventions need to be grounded in the social and cultural practices and realities of affected communities, and campaigns should not only inform, but also work to shape new sociocultural norms.³⁵

We need more properly to understand signs as cultural artifacts, as a critical part of the place in which they are situated, speaking to people who use that place. We thus we need to develop messaging that directly addresses those people, encouraging and enabling them to incorporate restrictions into their daily experiences and modes of being in the city.

In Bristol, Rising Arts Agency, a youth-led creative agency committed to 'radical social, political and cultural change',³⁶ produced a series of billboards in the city that reflected on the role of artists and people of colour in the city. The work used spaces that might more usually be associated with corporate messaging, to speak to people on streets in Bristol about the practices of that city, and those who were involved in those practices. In being developed and driven through creative practice, the signs offered arresting engagements with the city that stand out from more municipal street furniture and signage. Such work points to the potential of signs, and existing advertising spaces, as opportunities to rethink

³⁵ van der Westhuizen H, Kotze K, Tonkin-Crine S, Gobat N, Greenhalgh T., 2020. 'Face coverings for covid-19: from medical intervention to social practice', *BMJ* 2020; 370 :m3021 (Published 19 August 2020).

³⁶ See Rising Arts Agency, *n.d.* 'I want to know more'. Available at: <https://rising.org.uk/know-more/>

the present, to find new meaning in challenging contexts. It demonstrates the ways that signs can both reveal critical messages and also step beyond those messages, to speak to people in and from a city about that city.

Outside BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, an art gallery on the bank of the River Tyne in Gateshead, we observed a mask-wearing child walking the paths of swirling shapes that have been painted onto the flagstones.³⁷ In and among these shapes, words from public messaging have been included in painted circles: 'Hands, Face', 'Save'. The work is playful, it both fragments familiar public health messaging but also invites new readings of the familiar words, and places these in relation with other messages about climate and the fate of the bees. Thus 'Save' invites reflection on who might need saving, and who might do the saving.³⁸ As BALTIC's website states, the piece 'asks us to playfully explore our own lockdown journeys, negotiate conflicting information and consider to what extent we should follow the rules and which we might break along the way.'³⁹



Rising Arts Agency, billboard posters, Bristol. July 2021.

Such practice reminds us that while recognising the importance of public health messages, signs do not need to take conventional forms. Indeed, for signs that are very familiar and poorly taken up, alternate, playful, inviting reworkings can engage people with requirements in new ways.

³⁷ Allen, Z. and Dixon, A., *n.d. Rainbow's End*, (BALTIC, Gateshead). See BALTIC, *n.d. 'Play on the Square: Free drop in'*. Available at: <https://baltic.art/whats-on/play-on-the-square>

³⁸ The installation was commissioned by BALTIC Young Programmers, 'a diverse group of 13-15 year olds' from Gateshead who wanted to create a 'playfully disruptive' work that 'would reflect some of their experiences over the past year and celebrate young people as makers, producers and leaders.' (BALTIC, *n.d. 'Play on the Square: Free drop in'*. Available at: <https://baltic.art/whats-on/play-on-the-square>)

³⁹ *Ibid.*

To engage arts practitioners with this challenge:

Preparedness: *Work with artists in cities to reflect on the ways that signs can become critical constituent parts of the fabric of a city. Look for ways of avoiding written signs. Identify valuable places for playful, engaging signs in a city, in which – during a pandemic – a city can appear to speak to and with itself about urgent concerns.*

Response: *Consider the life-cycle of messaging in sustained pandemic conditions, and the ways in which initial signs or messages might be productively and/or playfully re-worked later in the pandemic. Recognise that familiarity with instructions may not lead to continued action or adherence; collaborate with arts practitioners to begin city projects that might retain public interest and commitment.*



Rainbow's End (Allen and Dixon), BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. August 2021.

4. Manage Perceptions of Life During a Pandemic and of Vaccination

Perception management seems critical to pandemic planning, response and 'recovery'. Cultural theorists Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier, Lisa Kalkowski, and James McKenzie argue that the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed a complex social relation between the need for 'productive' fear (to maintain engagement with public health protocols and prevention

measures) and what they term ‘horror fatigue’.⁴⁰ The latter is caused through exposure to ‘the continuous anticipation and imaginary staging of counterfeit horrors... [which make people want] to blank out the real horrors... of the virus’.⁴¹ As a consequence, they argue (citing Duggan), people are

foregoing the “knowledge-generating potential of affective experience” (Duggan 2017: 41)... Covid-19 seems to produce complex – if not downright contradictory – emotional states.⁴²

This relates to the political management of pandemic response, perceptions of risk in public spaces and vaccine take up. As such, *perception* is critical to pandemic preparedness and response, and performance offers a means through which we might return embodied experiences to public perception of pandemic management. For example, in New Orleans, vaccine centres are turning the process of getting ‘jabbed’ into a social and cultural experience that is *of the city*: those attending encounter live brass bands and are offered free, local food favourites.⁴³ Elsewhere, the cultural history and infrastructure of the city is deployed to encourage vaccination as celebration: in the #SleevesUpNOLA campaign, Mardi Gras Indians and other culture bearers dance in masks to represent vaccination as being part of the city’s culture and identity.⁴⁴ New Orleans is deploying social, cultural and aesthetic performances *as* pandemic response.



Screen grab of New Orleans’ #SleevesUpNOLA campaign. 4 May 2021

⁴⁰ Brusberg-Kiermeier, S., Kalkowski, L., and McKenzie, J., 2021. ‘Fear and Anxiety in Contemporary British Cultures: An Introduction’, *Journal for the Study of British Cultures*, 28.2, n.p., forthcoming.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ See, for example, Poche, K. and Ravits S., 2021. ‘Free beignets and brass bands are rewards for getting vaccinated in New Orleans this week’ in *Gambit* (25 May): https://www.nola.com/gambit/news/the_latest/article_55f65e62-bd84-11eb-b18b-738785aaa3e1.html.

⁴⁴ See, for example: The City of New Orleans (@CityOfNOLA), 2021. ‘The #COVIDVaccine is our shot to get back to the #NOLA we love. #SleevesUpNOLA <http://ready.nola.gov/vaccine>’ (4 May). Available at: <https://twitter.com/CityOfNOLA/status/1389586966468038661?s=20> and City of New Orleans n.d. ‘COVID-19 Vaccines’. Available at: <https://ready.nola.gov/incident/coronavirus/vaccine/>

In Tower Hamlets (London), a similar approach can be seen with the ‘summer vaccine festival’ where live music and free food offerings encouraged demystification of vaccine ‘horror’ stories in a welcoming, celebratory, child friendly and, crucially, walk-up environment.⁴⁵ Such approaches to perception management deploy artistic and cultural practices and infrastructure as central and fundamental tenets of pandemic emergency planning strategy, without instrumentalising that deployment. The practices that artists and arts organisations are already engaged in can be strategically useful to city emergency planning processes. Given that the closure of venues has significantly impacted on the arts, creating alternate sites and opportunities for performance can also provide artists with vital funds and with chances to reach established and new audiences.

To engage arts practitioners with this challenge:

Preparedness: *In conversation with arts organisations, artists and residents, identify key artistic and cultural practices in the city or region and the practitioners or organisations who deliver these. Engage key stakeholders from these groups in the development of emergency planning strategy (through conversation, workshops, walking tours or informal interviews etc) to embed their understandings of place, community and celebratory cultural practice.*

Response: *Deploy cultural practitioners at key sites to ‘celebrate’ processes and practices of pandemic response or recovery. Knowing the local contexts of the city is key; responses need to engage the distinctiveness of the city in managing perceptions of risk, social activity and/or vaccination uptake. Practices could include: discrete festivals; regular ‘music, food and vaccine’ events at a local bar or café; pop-up and walk-in events with performances; or other informal practices appropriate to the local community.*

Differing approaches to Covid-19 signage at The Hidden Gardens, Glasgow. June 2021.



⁴⁵ See Rawlinson, K., 2021. ‘Music, fast food and mud at London’s summer vaccine festival’ (30 July). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/30/music-fast-food-and-mud-at-londons-summer-vaccine-festival>

5. Connect People to Alleviate Isolation

Internationally, ‘lockdown’ measures offered limited opportunities for individuals to gather and connect with others. In the UK, the ‘stay at home’ order and wider implementation of social distancing measures resulted in widespread ‘emotional and psychological losses’ that were identified as being ‘particularly acute for those living in more urban, densely populated cities’.⁴⁶ Jenny M. Groarke et al, identify that, in the UK, ‘[r]ates of loneliness during the initial phase of lockdown were high’ and that rising ‘rates of loneliness... may increase prevalence of mood disorders, self-harm, and suicide, and exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions’.⁴⁷ Elsewhere, Joanne Ingram et al. find that ‘even relatively short-term social isolation—specifically reduced social contact with those outside the household—has a negative impact on cognitive abilities/executive functions’. They suggest that ‘if lockdown conditions continue to be used in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, strategies to alleviate cognitive decline during prolonged restrictive conditions should be considered’.⁴⁸



Curious Monkey, a Newcastle-based performance company, reimagines Newcastle Quayside with Curious Caravan. Producing a space for stories and experiences to be shared, a place to gather. August 2021.

⁴⁶ Williams et al., p. 4.

⁴⁷ Groarke J. M., Berry E., Graham-Wisener L., McKenna-Plumley P. E., McGlinchey E., Armour C., 2020. ‘Loneliness in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic: Cross-sectional results from the COVID-19 Psychological Wellbeing Study’. *PLoS ONE*, 15.9:e0239698, p.1

⁴⁸ Ingram, J., Hand, C.J., Maciejewski, G., 2021. ‘Social isolation during COVID-19 lockdown impairs cognitive function’, *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 35, p. 945.

The UK order to ‘stay at home’ (March 2020) included allowances for work, medical care, one daily excursion framed as ‘exercise’, or shopping for ‘essentials’.⁴⁹ These restrictions significantly reduced the breadth of practices of a city, while asking individuals to engage in singular, limited practices. While perhaps this offered useful clarity, it also resisted the potential to engage in practices that might be productively less rigid and therefore more sustaining.

In response to pandemic restrictions, artists and arts organisations developed ways of initiating, maintaining and re-imagining connections between people and the places in which they live. Sometimes, this work has involved replaying or adapting past projects; in other cases, the pandemic and associated restrictions led artists to develop entirely new projects and practices. In Glasgow, the Learning Team at the Citizens’ Theatre runs activities with local communities in the Gorbals area of the city. Where the pandemic limited community group activities, particularly those for women, the Team established a new project, *Through My Window*.⁵⁰ Team members invited women in the area to perform through open doors and windows at a particular time and date, connecting them to others through a local community event, while remaining secure at home. As *Through My Window* demonstrates, arts practitioners, particularly those who regularly work in specific places and with particular communities or audiences, bring performative skills together with their local knowledge, and experience of attending to and intervening with such spaces in ways that are transformative. Such practitioners may be well situated to pivot to address emerging challenges, at times with groups who may be particularly vulnerable in a pandemic.

Where some artworks have taken place outside, others exist online, using the internet to enhance life in specific cities, or areas of cities. In Bristol, the performance and festival producers, Mayk hosted a live ‘house party’ on Spotify.⁵¹ Mayk invited people in the city to connect in a collective digital space, from their own domestic contexts. On one level, the work comprised a playlist, played by people across the city (and perhaps beyond) to create a shared, collective performance in the city. Yet, Mayk augmented this playlist by running a live social media feed. The work reimagined a disco in simple, playful ways, enabling those ‘at’ the party to join in as they chose. The work invited people to perform their home as a disco for a night in the city, ‘You can play it as loud or soft as you want. You can hide in the other room if you want. Dress up or down.’⁵² The event was durational, allowing people to drift in and out, in concentrated or distracted ways over time. It allowed for individual responses and renegotiations of the event, as participants could ‘attend’ with friends in

⁴⁹ See Gov.UK, 2020. ‘Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 23 March 2020’ (23 March). Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-address-to-the-nation-on-coronavirus-23-march-2020>

⁵⁰ See Citizens Theatre, *n.d.* ‘Through My Window’. Available at: <https://www.citz.co.uk/projects/info/through-my-window>

⁵¹ See MAYK, *n.d.* ‘This is not a party’. Available at: <https://www.mayk.org.uk/this-is-not-a-party>

⁵² *Ibid.*

other places in and beyond the city, and curate their experiences through public or private chat messaging.

To engage arts practitioners with this challenge:

Preparedness: *Become familiar with artists, producers and organisations who demonstrate innovative practices of audience development, who work outside familiar venues, who perform work in unexpected venues or multiple forms.*

Response: *Contact artists who are making work in the pandemic that responds to the conditions of daily life. Meet to discuss the ways that people might be connected in creative, engaging and playful ways despite restrictions. Contact practitioners with close links to communities to discover how they are continuing to work in changed circumstances. Consider partnering with arts practitioners as a means of engaging effectively with specific communities.*

Conclusion: an invitation to get involved

Before we began work on this project, we ran a strategy development workshop with senior colleagues from departments across a city. We asked how the arts in that city helped them do their job. There was a rather awkward silence. Then we asked them how the arts were important to their personal, individual understanding of the city. They spoke, compellingly, of the rich arts and culture of the city, citing both specific arts events and everyday performances on city streets. Our work on pandemic planning involves bringing together these two questions, asking how the second can inform the first. It is too easy to value the arts in a city and not allow it to inform the daily practice of managing emergency and resilience preparedness and response. Whether in enhancing long-term planning, or emergency response, our research to date points to the critical, tangible contribution of the arts to emergency and resilience response.



'Kids Only', a creative, playful intervention into Kelvin Way, Glasgow, which was pedestrianised to offer more space during the pandemic. June 2021.

In this interim report, we have begun to identify some ways in which the arts offer means of addressing critical challenges in a pandemic, and indeed in crises more broadly. Our invitations are broad: suggestions rather than 'recommendations', they will benefit from nuancing at local levels. The value of this work is situated locally, developed in conversation with arts and resilience stakeholders: it is borne of familiarity with interconnecting working practices, in innovations that may take directions entirely unanticipated by this report.

In the remaining nine months of the project, we invite emergency and resilience planners, and arts professionals, to contact us; we'll talk with you about your city, the challenges facing your city in the context of Covid-19 and the ways our research might be useful in that context.

In 2022, we will be running workshops for arts and resilience professionals, to share project findings and invite participants to reflect on these in the context of their cities and professional contexts. These activities will address ways of reading and responding to arts practice in the pandemic as means of thinking in new ways about pandemic preparedness and response. They will look towards engaging, and paying, artists to run specific projects in a city to address specific pandemic challenges, and so enrich understandings of the arts as pandemic preparedness and response. If you are interested in participating in one of these free workshops (virtually or in person), please contact us (see Contact Information, below).

Beginning City Conversations

Alongside our invitation to get involved in the current project, and our focused invitations above, we offer a broader invitation, a starting point through which to engage with arts practice in the city in which you work in resilience and emergency planning:

Where you are reading and responding to arts practice, we invite you to:

- focus on work made in, or in response to the city or a place in that city.
- take account of arts practice that changes your understanding of that place.
- identify artists who are responding to Covid-19 in ways that transform your sense of the pandemic.
- use these findings to help inform your selection of future arts practices for collaborative work on pandemic response.

Where you are working with artists, we invite you to engage in the following:

Preparedness:

- *Identify and develop connections with a range of artists who work responsively with the place in which you work. Try to include artists who work in different*

ways, in different forms, who respond in innovative and transformative ways to the city in which you work, or an area of that city. Find the work that transforms your experience of the city. In a crisis, when transformative thinking may be essential, these are the artists you will need.

Response:

- *Set as open a brief as you are able. Invite artists simply to ‘make work’, or if that feels too open, to ‘make work in response to specific and current conditions’. You might set a specific pandemic challenge, but be as open as possible, look for artists to engage with rather than ‘fix’ a challenge.*
- *Value processes of making as much as a ‘final’ performance. Asking an artist to do work reflecting on the city in pandemic conditions may be as instructive as any final event, and significantly faster. This may inform your sense of what arts practice might be valuable. Commission artists to run workshops with you and your team.*
- *Engage in conversation with artists and organisations and pay them for this work. During our work on this project, we paid artists a flat rate of £100 (GBP) for a conversation of approximately an hour.*

These invitations are emerging, limited, and intended to stimulate activity rather than make the process appear daunting. Alongside these invitations, we offer a word of caution. It is easy to become mechanistic about the ways in which one might work with artists in the context of identifiable and pressing challenges. It may be tempting to want to limit, control and focus the work of artists to address particular urgent needs (and at times there is space for this work). However, this approach involves asking artists to limit their thinking, to restrict the ways in which they, as people living in a place, bound up in the conditions and challenges of that place, attend to that place. We would caution against limitations on arts practice that restrict its potential to transform.

Contacting Artists and Companies

Artists will be facing their own personal and professional challenges during a pandemic, and these may be augmented by other separate or associated concerns. They may or may not have time or capacity to help, but they may well know other artists or organisations to contact. Ensure you engage with artists from key communities in the city and be aware of the risks of maintaining particular power relations and established exclusionary practices when choosing artists to work with. Artists will not necessarily expect emergency planners to get in touch, so if you are interested in engaging artists, it may be useful to send this report as a way of framing discussion. Pay artists for their time. We recognise this may be a challenge, so we suggest you focus on conversations to begin with, then think about workshops, then look to larger projects.

Key Ideas for Further Discussion

This report sets out our thinking and initial findings in some detail; the list below summarises some of our wider, live findings. These echo the above and extend points in some areas. We are continuing to explore and refine these but share them here as part of our invitation to join us in conversation, and to develop future actions and innovations. We hope they offer interesting discussion points:

- Arts venues offer strategic engagements with communities that can be beneficial to sustaining social distancing and communicating its importance at city level; emergency planning processes, policy and practice can account for this in pandemic planning and physical distancing strategy.
- Through the pandemic, individual artists, organisations and networks have reimagined their role and practices in ways that can may be usefully disseminated nationally as a list of arts workers with experience of engaging in early crisis response.
- Arts organisations are often engaged in both individual interventions and sustained programming practices. They can address pressing challenges and attend to longform issues.
- Artists, arts organisations and culture leaders know their audiences and communities in nuanced, complex and trusted ways. This affords connections and relationships not always available to municipal structures.
- Locally situated arts practices reveal new ways of understanding and reimagining city life during and 'post-' pandemic; this work can be advantageous in sustaining social distancing, communicating with 'hard to reach' communities and enlivening city spaces in safe, engaging ways.
- 'Signs don't work' but performative interventions in city spaces can. Artists can make strategic, local interventions into city spaces that enable communities to practice social distancing in more sustainable and sustained ways.
- In engaging the public, playful approaches to safely practising a city can provide compelling means of addressing risks in creative, embodied ways.
- Local arts networks provide efficient and facilitated means of engaging with arts workers in a city, including individual artists and organisations of all scales. This

allows for swift reflection and action in response to crisis situations, making such networks rich bodies of practitioners/organisations who are directly engaged in addressing city challenges before, during and after an emergency or crisis.

- Crucially, city council emergency planning policy/strategy does not (generally) join up with cultural strategies, missing an opportunity for more nuanced understandings of places in emergency contexts. At the same time, emergency planners are open to and actively seeking out opportunities for interdisciplinary modes of working and strategy development.

Contact Information

More information about our research can be found at <https://performingcityresilience.com>

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We can also be contacted via: <https://performingcityresilience.com/contact/>

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