



culture 21
UCLG Committee

PEER-LEARNING
MALMÖ
SWANSEA

OCTOBER 2019



ACTIVITY

Peer-learning.

DATE

3-5 October 2019

PLACE

Swansea, Wales, UK

PEOPLE INVOLVED

PILOT CITY TEAM, SWANSEA CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL

Rebecca Francis, Business Development, Grand Theatre & Swansea Arts and Culture Economy

Jo Furber, Literature Officer, Dylan Thomas Centre

Tracey McNulty, Head of Cultural Services

Christopher Mellor, Strategy Manager, Arts, Culture and Creative Economy

Kate Wood, Cultural Strategy and Partnerships Officer

Dan McCabe, Learning and Participation Officer, Glynn Vivian Gallery

David Jones, Sport and Health Manager

OTHER PARTICIPATING CITIES

Magnus Metz, Development Strategist on Urban Sustainability, Department of Culture, Malmö

Fiona Winders, Development Coordinator, Cultural and Community Centres, Malmö

PILOT CITIES EXPERTS

Clymene Christoforou, Executive Director and Board Member, D6 Culture
Expert, Agenda 21 for culture

Phil Wood, Principal Advisor, Intercultural Cities, Council of Europe
Expert, Agenda 21 for culture

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Jordi Baltà, Advisor, Culture in Sustainable Cities,
UCLG Committee on Culture

PEER
LEARNING



CONTEXT

The **Pilot Cities Europe programme** is an initiative of the Committee on Culture of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and Culture Action Europe, which aims to foster peer-learning and capacity-building on culture and local sustainable development among European cities. Alongside self-assessment, policy innovation and participatory governance activities implemented in each city, peer-learning activities enabling bilateral and multilateral exchanges are organised on a regular basis.

In this context, a peer-learning visit to Swansea took place on 3-5 October 2019. Entitled Pledging Diversity, in line with Swansea's focus on diversity and intercultural dialogue, the visit paid particular attention to the following issues:

- | Introducing **Swansea's recent history and challenges and key issues** from the perspective of cultural policy, including its relation with social inclusion and urban development.
- | Work undertaken in the context of Swansea's **work programme as a Pilot City**, including the elaboration of a 'Diversity Pledge' for the City's Cultural Services.
- | **Audience development and participatory activities**, including project presentations and visits to several relevant arts venues, projects and events across Swansea.

The visit was held on the occasion of a number of arts events taking place in Swansea, which participants in the visit were also able to attend, including the **Swansea Fringe** festival (3-6 October) and the **BBC National Orchestra of Wales (BBC NOW) concert** at Brangwyn Hall on 5 October.

Participants in the visit included representatives from **Malmö**, a Leading City of the Agenda 21 for culture, as well as Phil Wood, the expert who has worked with Swansea in the context of Pilot Cities; Clymene Christoforou, an expert of the Agenda 21 for culture; and Jordi Baltà on behalf of UCLG.

This report summarises the activities conducted and highlights some of the lessons learned and comments made by participants following the visit. For further information, please visit **Swansea's page as a Pilot City**, which includes, among others, its **City Profile**, **self-assessment Radar**, and **work programme**.



MAIN THEMES ADDRESSED

This section describes the activities conducted in the course of the visit. It has been arranged in thematic, rather than chronological order, so as to facilitate the understanding of key themes.

BACKGROUND TO SWANSEA AND ITS PARTICIPATION IN PILOT CITIES

In the morning of 4 October, Tracey McNulty, Head of Cultural Services; and Chris Mellor, Strategy Manager, Arts, Culture and Creative Economy, Swansea Council, presented the context of cultural development in Swansea and the background to its participation in the Pilot Cities programme.

Tracey highlighted that **Swansea decided to become a Pilot City in the context of its development of a cultural strategy**, with a particular interest in integrating culture across other local strategies, exchanging with and learning from other cities and fostering an intercultural approach. The aim is also to make work in these areas sustainable, long-lasting – as the Diversity Pledge aims to do in the field of diversity and interculturalism. She also stressed that, in a context of austerity, local authorities need to be more confident about what they do, and need the evidence to support their work.

Meanwhile, Chris referred to **several aspects of the context in which Swansea's work as a Pilot City has unfolded**, including the focus of Swansea's failed bid to be the UK City of Culture in 2021 to engage the third sector and reach new audiences; **Wales' Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015**, which requires thinking long-term and considering poverty, resilience and the older generations, among others; the Swansea Council's close working relationship with the BBC, through events such as the 'Biggest Weekend' and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales concerts, which serve to reach new audiences; and a context of reduced budgets, which raises the need to 'work smarter'.

He also identified **some challenges affecting public cultural venues** in Swansea, including their concentration in the city centre's Castle ward; the 'silo' mentality often prevailing in public services; the low availability of outreach programmes; and a limited use of the potential of volunteering to foster cultural engagement.

Facing these challenges, the **journey towards more diversity** initiated by the Council has so far involved increased dialogue and interaction with neighbours, more collaboration among public services, some risk-taking in programming (as in the involvement of communities in the Cultural Hub – see further below for details) and the building of networks with other organisations.

MAIN THEMES ADDRESSED

DEVELOPING THE DIVERSITY PLEDGE

In the context of its participation in the Pilot Cities programme, Swansea decided to elaborate a 'Pledge for Diversity in Cultural Services', which sets a commitment to delivering Cultural Services which acknowledge and embrace the diversity of the City. A draft of the Pledge was presented to participants, and Chris Mellor invited them to comment and propose amendments.

Phil Wood, the expert who has facilitated the elaboration of the Pledge, introduced the process, explaining that the Swansea way of doing things involves recognising its doubts and weaknesses. Being part of networks, as a way to learn, is a response to this. He recalled that the **self-assessment workshop** conducted in 2016 had identified a lack of diversity among arts audiences, and pilot measures were designed to address this gap. In this context, **the Pledge sought to provide consistency, and a specific vehicle, to work around diversity within the Council.** Several values existing in Swansea and in Welsh legislation underpin this approach, including the recognition of diversity as a source of pride and enrichment, and the understanding of cultural participation as a right rather than a privilege. Out of this emerges the belief that equality and diversity should be at the heart of Cultural Services' work, and an approach based on cross-sectional cooperation addressing different dimensions of diversity.

The Pledge comprises **four sections**, as follows:

- »»» Telling, Listening and Sharing – focusing on relationships, communications and participation
- »»» Ideas into Action – focusing on plans, projects and programmes
- »»» Making the Most of Us – focusing on audiences, ticketing, welcoming and access
- »»» Behind the Scenes – focusing on organisational culture, governance, recruitment and representation

Each section includes a set of questions, aspirations, targets, barriers to overcome and monitoring mechanisms, as well as some evidence of projects already undertaken. The implementation of the Pledge should assume that in order to change audiences it is necessary to change the way the organisation communicates, and that in the long term, **as more people find their way into the organisation, the latter will also be transformed.** Ultimately, integrating diversity is not only about offering new products, but about helping people see the world through other people's eyes.

Following the drafting, the Pledge is currently being consulted with some external stakeholders and should be adopted in the coming months. Once it comes into effect, it should involve the setting-up of a **Pledge Panel** made up of independent people, who



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understand and experience the diverse needs of diverse users and will be engaged in reviewing progress. Once a year, a **Pledge Convention** should bring together several groups to discuss progress and emerging needs.

Discussing the Pledge, Phil Wood and Chris Mellor stressed that its elaboration had provided a unique opportunity for staff from different services to meet and discuss diversity – an issue that all saw as relevant. This has served to raise awareness about the need for a joined-up approach and helped to bring coherence to existing work.

PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES ON DIVERSITY AND AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

In the course of the visit, several presentations served to introduce recent and ongoing initiatives on diversity and audience development in Swansea.

With support from the Swansea Council and following a call for proposals, artist **Rabab Ghazoul** was chosen to lead a **participatory process in the area of Sandfields and St Helen's Road**, a neighbourhood with significant ethnic diversity and which has often expressed its dissatisfaction with Council services. A film presenting the area and voices of its inhabitants, entitled 'Intersection', was produced between 2017 and 2018 and later **screened in a public event**, which provided an opportunity to generate a discussion on the area's cultural vibrancy, its existing needs and potential. Kate Wood presented the project and some excerpts from the film.

Karen MacKinnon, Curator, and Dan McCabe, Learning and Participation Officer, introduced the **Glynn Vivian Art Gallery (GVAG)**, a venue owned by the Council, which builds on the original bequest of Richard Glynn Vivian (1835-1910). Karen reflected on the social division made evident by Brexit, and the need for arts organisations not to impose an idea of culture, but embedding their work in a broader conversation and addressing systemic aspects. This requires better working together with other arts organisations, and enabling communities to 'own' arts venues, through long-term engagement with them. Dan presented GVAG's **learning programmes** and other **schemes involving community engagement**.

Aiming to reach groups that would not normally visit arts venues, and following a survey of existing arts learning provision, the Gallery has developed projects for young people out of education and employment, adults with learning disabilities, and adults aged 55 and over, which have led to stable collaborations and increased, more active engagement in the Gallery's activities. A visit to GVAG was also conducted on 5 October, with particular attention to how the Gallery is rethinking the presentation of its collections and its temporary exhibitions to showcase and foster a reflection on diversity, gender and colonialism.



MAIN THEMES ADDRESSED

The **Dylan Thomas Centre (DTC)**, also managed by Swansea Council, presents the life and work of author Dylan Thomas, as well as conducting activities about him and literature more broadly. In the late 1990s, the Centre started conducting **work with refugees and asylum-seekers**, an experience which was recently included in UCLG's database of good practices on culture and sustainable development. This process is also linked to **Swansea's status as a City of Sanctuary**. As explained by Literature Officer Jo Furber, over the years the DTC has developed better, more family-friendly facilities for its **learning activities** and has become more dynamic and proactive towards groups that would not engage otherwise.

Creative writing workshops enable refugees, asylum-seekers and other participants to have a safe space to deal with their stories. This is also made easier thanks to the involvement of Eric Ngalle Charles, a writer and refugee himself. Jo also explained the Centre's current aim to develop an intercultural approach to the Dylan Thomas' collection. The peer-learning group visited DTC on 5 October, an opportunity to discuss the Centre's **Young Writers Squad** programme as well as the Council's support for literature and creative writing in a context in which few local authorities continue to do so at this scale, and in which schools have also reduced attention to creative writing.

A set of activities connected to the implementation in Swansea of the Welsh Government's **Fusion Programme**, an initiative that seeks to foster increased engagement in culture and heritage for underrepresented groups, were presented during the visit. Amina Abu-Shahba, coordinator of the Fusion programme in Swansea, talked in a pre-recorded video about the importance of progressively generating relationships with people who will later engage in other activities. A good example of this is Fusion's ongoing collaboration with the **Swansea Music Hub**, which has involved consultations with young people to understand reasons for low attendance of arts events and has introduced them to training and employment opportunities in the creative industries.

A good example of this work is the **'50 Years of Music' exhibition** at Swansea Museum. Involving music fans in the curatorial team, and drawing on the collections and reminiscences of many local musicians and members of the community, the project has led to stronger connections with public institutions.

On the other hand, participants visited the **GRAFT garden project** led by artist Owen Griffiths at the National Waterfront Museum, a permaculture garden with seed rotation, created thanks to the active, sustained engagement of many volunteers and which produces edible food for the museum's own events. The project was established as part of **Now the Hero/Nawr yr Arwr**, an immersive theatrical experience supported and part-funded by Swansea Council and presented as part of 14-18 NOW, the UK's cultural



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programme commemorating the centenary of the First World War. Both this and other projects conducted by Owen Griffiths have involved consultation with communities, as a way to identify needs and foster relationships.

The Swansea Council's Cultural Services is working in partnership with **Race Council Cymru** to set up Wales' first **BAME Digital and Cultural Hub** at the Arts Wing of the Grand Theatre. During the peer-learning visit, the initiative was presented by Uzo Iwobi (Race Council Cymru) and Patience Bentu (Nigerians in Wales Association), along with Rebecca Francis from the Council. In the context of the aim to diversify audiences in traditional venues, in 2017 a decision was taken to involve over 30 civil society organisations representing a wide range of Swansea's ethnic and diversity groups. Thanks to additional funding, office space will be made available for all groups, who will also be involved in programming activities together, rather than separately as was the case in the past.

The project should be seen as a partnership between the local government and civil society, rather than a gift, and requires a new management approach by the communities involved – among other things, activities that had been offered for free in the past will now be ticketed. There is also learning to be done by staff at the Grand Theatre, including in terms of collaboration with third-sector organisation. To this end, mutual training is being provided. Overall, the process is already serving to make diversity more visible in the city and should also lead to rethinking what it means to be Welsh.

Arron Bevan John, a trustee of **Swansea Pride**, presented this initiative, which has been revived in recent years thanks both to community engagement and to the Council's support, making it an open, highly accessible event – the latest edition drew approximately 7500 participants. This builds on Swansea's LGBT+ history, as well as its long-standing commitment to diversity, which has meant that, in contrast with other cities, there has been no backlash against recent awareness-raising and educational activities about sexual and gender diversity. With a view to organising a more regular programme of activities throughout the year, Swansea Pride has now become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and is developing the LGBT History Swansea project, and planning a takeover of GVAG during the LGBT History Month in February 2020.

Meanwhile, David Jones, Sport Development Manager at Swansea Council, and other members of the **Sports Development team**, presented the **Council's work to foster more diverse and equal access and participation in sports provision**. Support from **Sport Wales' research programmes** has enabled to identify gaps in access, including among girls and women, Black and Minority Ethnic groups (BAME), and people with disabilities, and new initiatives have been designed to address this. Since most of the sports provision existing in Swansea is provided by private and non-profit organisations, efforts are also



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underway to facilitate change in others, through training activities among others. A BME Sports Forum also exists, bringing together diverse communities to discuss issues of common interest and foster participation. The presentation was illustrated with a testimonial of a Sudanese refugee who has received support from the programme and is currently training to be a football coach.

Other activities conducted during the visit included a presentation of the **Swansea Fringe** festival by its coordinator, Joe Bayliss, who stressed the aim to broaden and diversify audiences, by combining different artforms and presenting events in a wide range of venues across Swansea. Participants in the visit could attend several events included in the festival programme. On the other hand, Lindsay Sleeman, from the Council's Special Events team, guided participants through the building of Swansea Guildhall and the history of the **Brangwyn panels**, a series of large-scale paintings done by artist Frank Brangwyn in the 1920s-30s which were later installed in the Guildhall's Brangwyn Hall. Finally, participants attended the **BBC National Orchestra of Wales (BBC NOW) concert** at Brangwyn Hall, with an innovative setting and approach, designed to attract less frequent audiences to a classical music concert.

REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The final session of the visit involved a reflection on some of the themes addressed, and other ideas that had emerged during the activities. Among the main issues raised were the following:

- »»» The legacy of historic buildings and the stories they tell – and the need to introduce contemporary, critical reflections on their meaning.
- »»» The importance of working beyond buildings, and being closer to communities, with activities that take place outside traditional venues and are constructed jointly.
- »»» The need to move from small-scale, ad-hoc projects to more structurally embracing and integrating diversity.
- »»» The important role played within cultural life by other actors in the city, including the universities and civil society organisations.
- »»» The importance of fostering collaboration among independent artists and professionals and related civil society organisations – in a way similar to what the Music Hub has accomplished for Swansea’s music sector, and what the Digital and Culture Hub could offer for community organisations gathered at the Grand Theatre.
- »»» The possibility for learning visits to also involve critical voices, who may challenge some of the assumptions about audiences, venues and arts activities.

Some further reflections were sent by participants in the days following the visit. Excerpts are presented hereafter.

CLYMENE CHRISTOFOROU EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD MEMBER, D6 CULTURE EXPERT, AGENDA 21 FOR CULTURE

“Elegant town houses, neo classical public spaces and an extraordinarily grandiose Guildhall belie Swansea’s former wealth, built on copper and as a port. Heavily bombed during the Second World War its centre was rapidly rebuilt, but followed by a decline in heavy industry. With new urban developments it has a vibrant town centre, animated during our visit by the Swansea Fringe, a 3-day festival of music, comedy and spoken word.”

Diversity Pledge

The Diversity Pledge is the result of the Pilot City Measures identified through the Pilot Cities’ process. The Diversity Pledge is an ambition to address diversity across the cultural functions of the city. It is a pledge, which is driven by the Swansea City Council. It identifies “People with Protected Characteristics” (PPCs) to include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation as

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well as Welsh Speakers and those living in economic disadvantage ” (from the Diversity Pledge)

During our visit we had presentations from a range of projects illustrating the work being done to support diverse groups in the city centre. We heard from Uzo Iwobi, from the Race Council Cymru about the cultural hub, a recent recipient of lottery funding to refurbish a wing of the Grand Theatre to house at least 15 ethnically diverse groups. This ambitious project will result in a multicultural centre with offices alongside a performance space and kitchen. It is the first of its kind in Wales, and possibly the UK.

We heard about the work being done with the Dylan Thomas Centre to support refugees and asylum seekers as writers, and about award winning poet, dramatist and novelist Eric Ngalle Charles from Cameroon who produced a short film alongside delivering workshops. We were told about the well-established Swansea Asylum Seekers support group set up by asylum seekers fleeing Chile and the Pinochet regime, which to this day provides support to newly arrived communities in Swansea. We heard that the city was an early adopter of the City of Sanctuary title.

At the Brangwyn Hall we saw the huge paintings by Frank Brangwyn commissioned to commemorate the First World War in 1925, but unwanted by the House of Lords as deemed too colourful, too whimsical. Bought by the city for the building of a new Guildhall in the 1930's they remain a contested heritage. From the prism of Empire they depict an idealized and sexualized view of those colonized, then called upon to save Britain during the Great War. We heard of the inevitable discomfort of the process of decolonizing the city's collections.

At the Glynn Vivian Gallery we heard about the art collector Glynn Vivian who travelled the world and gifted his collection to the city. (A broad ranging collection of paintings and artefacts). These were displayed alongside a curated exhibition of 'Swansea Stories' of paintings from the archive and a solo exhibition of work by Francis Richards, highlighting the familiar tale of a women artists overshadowed by an artist husband.

Whose Voice? Part One: Gender/Diversity

In our 19th Century cities we celebrate the sons who bring fame and fortune, from the industrialists like the Vivians, to Dylan Thomas. Our city narratives are bound to these men in our buildings, pathways and collective identity. Yet there is always another narrative, that of the women, the 50% whose stories are less told, whose impact less celebrated. At the Swansea Museum an exhibition of Swansea's contemporary music scene from the 50's onwards told a particularly male story of musicians, producers and club owners. At the Dylan Thomas Centre we celebrate his standing amongst men. Yet how do we bring to the fore, the lives of Caitlin

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Thomas, writer in her own right, or his sister Nancy who sailed across the world. How do we bring out those stories less told? And how we tell these stories without relegating the subject to 'other'? These are questions that serve across the diversity spectrum. When our framework is historically white and heterosexually male, how do we start again?

Whose Voice? Part Two: The municipality and its place in the wider cultural sector

The presentations were framed within the context of the local authority with no voices of artists. When the community did present (Cultural Hub and Sport) the local authority officers framed the conversation as gatekeepers to the content. The Pledge presents itself as a tool, in the first instance, for the local authority to widen and improve its approach to diversity. Whilst there was a desire to see it adopted by the wider cultural sector, outside of the Cultural Hub the city did not seem to have cultural or art specific networks or forums for discussion (and adoption of the Pledge). There is no cross sector city-wide cultural platform to share concerns and challenges. No platform where the municipality is one of many cultural voices. This weakness was highlighted in the feedback on Swansea's bid to be UK City of Culture.

Whose Voice? Part Three: The relationship between the municipality and the Universities

Swansea is a city of circa 250k people with 2 universities encompassing the art school. Yet the relationship between the city and the universities is strained, reduced to transactional need for spaces and resources. As UK local authorities lose funding, the universities' position become stronger. More needs to be done to find the hook in to the universities, through joint research or collaborative doctorates. To build programme from content which is mutually beneficial.

It was a rich few days, encompassing the evening concert at Brangwyn Hall - a brave attempt to attract new audiences for classical music by adopting the 'music in the park' approach to an indoor venue. With no or little seating, audience members brought cushions or rugs and children could move freely as the spotlight directed you to different classical performances around the room. In one evening such divergent thinking radically addressed some of the barriers to access to classical music for families and children.

Diversity comes in many shapes, and not all events can target the range of PPCs identified in the Pledge. But across the city the spectrum of diversity is on the agenda. There is work to be done, but there are many examples of good practice that Swansea should be rightly proud of."



REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

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DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIST ON URBAN SUSTAINABILITY
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, CITY OF MALMÖ

FIONA WINDERS

DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR
CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY CENTRES, CITY OF MALMÖ

The Swansea City Council had put together an intensive programme around the theme of pledging diversity in the municipality's cultural offer. The Diversity Pledge document shows a thorough-going internal process within the Culture Department with the aim of committing all sections to work with diversifying the range of audiences that can be reached by Swansea's cultural offer. In common with other cities across Europe, Swansea is aware that only a minority percentage of the population from a relatively small sections of the city take part in the institutionalised cultural life of Swansea.

We became aware during our visit that Swansea Culture Department is facing a very difficult financial situation, with cuts of between 10-44% in budgets last year across the different sections of work. We were extremely impressed by the engagement and commitment of the staff and volunteers we met, who in the face of the financial difficulties and a complex pattern of funding arrangements, nevertheless strive for diversity and inclusion of different groups in the community, including young people, members of ethnic associations and people with mental health issues, as well as "friends" groups with particular interests. We understand the extra challenges posed by the fact that the Culture Department does not enjoy active partnerships with either of the universities in the city, although it would like to. And that the independent cultural sector is not organised in a form that the Council can engage in dialogue with, to work on planning and development issues.

We thought that the Department's orientation towards the ethnically-mixed St Helen's Road area was impressive, recognising as it does the development of a new cultural and commercial node in Swansea, with rich traditions and an engaged community. We noted positive focus on more recently arrived residents of the city, including refugees, as well as more established migrant groups, in line with Swansea's commitment to culture as a human right for everyone. We were impressed by Swansea's creative writing programmes for refugees and young people. In our discussions, we touched on how some of the city's cultural institutions might benefit from a gender- and/or migrant-focussed perspective on existing collections such as those at Glynn Vivian and the Dylan Thomas Centre. In Malmo, we are newly experimenting with these ways of approaching exhibitions and collections at our contemporary and historical art venues.

CONTACT

For additional information about this activity and report, please contact:

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