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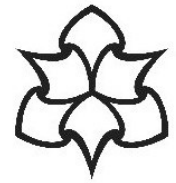
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# **Festival Evaluation: Workshop preliminary findings**

**Dr Steve Millington**

**Dr Louise Platt**





## 1.0 Aims of the project

This project aimed to deliver a one-day workshop on Festival Evaluation for place-based community festivals. Small-scale community and arts festivals are significant mechanisms for social and urban renewal, particularly within an age of austerity. There is a perception, however, that festival organisers lack the capacity to capture the impact of their interventions. By bringing together academics, festival organisers, funding bodies, and policy practitioners, the workshop aimed to explore how festival organisers, place managers and the university can work together for mutual benefit, knowledge exchange, evaluation and impact. In addition, the event aimed to explore the potential for establishing cross-faculty links between festival researchers, and the positioning of the university to external stakeholders with the view to building sustainable partnerships.

## 2.0 Workshop structure and delivery

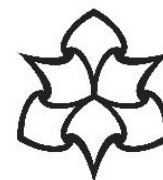
The workshop took place on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2017 involving 35 participants<sup>1</sup>, which included:

- small scale community festival organisers from Greater Manchester
- Intermediaries (i.e. support organisation, funding bodies and local authorities)
- MMU Academics involved in research on festivals
- MMU staff involved in organising festivals

The morning session explored the challenges to festival organisation, with participants placed in their main constituency groups, whereas the afternoon the session explored solutions, with participants working in mixed groups. In between these two sessions, there was an additional session showcasing the range of festival based activity at MMU.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for a full list of the participants



Finally, invited keynote speakers provided framing for the two main discussion sessions:

- [Oliver Mantell](#): Audience Agency – why do evaluation?
- [Dr. Cara Courage](#): University of Virginia - using metrics to understand placemaking
- [Professors Cathy Parker and Dominic Medway](#): The Institute of Place Management – working with places

The final group discussion explored the potential for establishing a network for supporting research and festival evaluation. Facilitators from MMU Enterprise and the Institute of Place Management led each group discussion. Participants were encouraged to share their individual ideas through post-its, whereas facilitators provided summaries of each group discussion on A1 sheets. All these materials were retained and their contents form the basis of this report. The remainder of this report provides a summary of the main outcomes and discussion points. Participants were also asked to complete an evaluation, which demonstrates that the workshop was positively received (see Appendix 2).

The findings have been disseminated to all participants for feedback, and two follow up meetings have taken place with the British Arts Festivals Association and the New Mills Community Festival Committee to establish priorities for action.

### 3.0 Challenges to Festival Evaluation

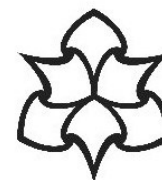


Table 1: Key challenges to doing effective evaluation

Key challenge	Detail
<b>Lack of time and resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typically operate in small teams with limited resources</li> <li>• The stresses of organising festivals, means that post-event evaluation is limited. Groups are simply exhausted, happy the event is over or already engaged in planning next year's festival</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of awareness of research practicalities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assumption qualitative research more time consuming</li> <li>• Evaluation can disrupt the experience (ruining the party)</li> <li>• Is evaluation always necessary?</li> <li>• What is the starting vision? (baseline) Who are we evaluating for?</li> <li>• How do you capture visitor information for free, un-ticketed festivals?</li> </ul>

Table 2: Challenges from the perspective of festival organisers

Key challenge	Detail
<b>Lack of reflexivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accentuating the positive, whilst not engaging with negative impacts</li> <li>• Ethics of carrying on regardless</li> <li>• Poor at managing negative feedback e.g. taking feedback personally</li> </ul>
<b>Embedded knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited Leadership turnover can be a barrier to innovation and change</li> <li>• What happens when long term organisers leave and take with them insider knowledge</li> </ul>
<b>Justification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building a business case and getting buy-in within local communities would be easier if economic impact can be demonstrated... but how?</li> </ul>

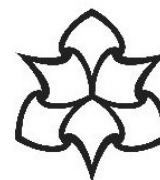


Table 3: Challenges from the perspective of intermediaries

Key challenge	Detail
<b>Competing agendas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balancing the needs of multiple stakeholders</li> <li>• Evaluation is <i>agenda driven</i> i.e. to show specific and positive outcomes</li> <li>• Different stakeholders can affect the shape of the event and what the outcomes will be like</li> <li>• Second-guessing how these agendas change each year, constantly changing landscape of institutions</li> </ul>

## 4.0 Solutions

Table 4: practical tools to support festival organisers

<b>Solutions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of standard models e.g. evaluation toolkits</li> <li>• Support for designing standard surveys</li> <li>• Best practice guide</li> <li>• Dissemination and networking events - speed-dating</li> <li>• Use of social media to build forums</li> <li>• Manchester Met 'festivals page' on the website</li> <li>• Student film projects about festivals</li> <li>• A facilitating app</li> </ul>

Table 5: training gaps

<b>Training</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audience evaluation – defining who are festivals for?</li> <li>• Budgeting for evaluation</li> <li>• Short term evaluation v longitudinal studies</li> <li>• Understanding the factors affecting festival experience</li> <li>• Access to knowledge regarding evaluation approaches and methodologies</li> <li>• How to capture qualitative views e.g. civic pride</li> <li>• Disseminating data</li> <li>• How often should evaluation take place?</li> <li>• Audience as co-creators and using Social Media as a source of data in festival evaluation</li> </ul>

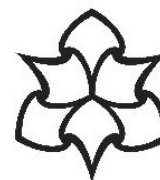


Table 6: What MMU could easily offer?

Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Designing and running focus groups</li><li>• Questionnaire surveys and analysing quantitative data (simple statistical techniques)</li><li>• Balance between creative methods and evaluation rigour</li><li>• Sampling</li><li>• Project planning - understanding of the time / logistics required to do the research</li><li>• Analysing qualitative feedback data</li></ul>

Table 7: the potential for more structured programmes or short courses

Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Credit bearing courses, but what format?</li><li>• Distance learning materials</li><li>• Intensive delivery e.g. CPD days</li><li>• MOOCs</li><li>• Viability in terms of cost, time, university constraints</li></ul>

## 5.0. The potential for a network

Table 8: what form of network would work?

Network form and governance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Networks already exist, but how well do they represent small place-based festivals?</li><li>• What form of collective or network would be of value to smaller festival organisers and committees, which would have mutual benefit for the university?</li><li>• Community of practice - needs to be nurtured, emerges through conversation, peer review – what is the mutual learning?</li><li>• Need to bring in the experience of other organisations</li></ul>

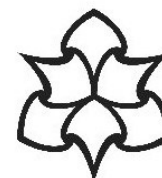


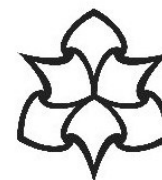
Table 9: what is the role of Manchester Metropolitan University

University role within a network	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A membership organisation based on the Institute of Place Management model (a new professional body).</li> <li>• Lobbying or representative organisation – at a regional and/or national scale</li> <li>• Problem of match and scales – how can university represent multiple small organisers – engagement more practical at an intermediary level working with professional bodies, regional and national stakeholders</li> <li>• How can we align with university ‘business’? Timetabling of student project, research applications and delivery</li> <li>• What is the potential for engagement with what is already happening in Manchester Metropolitan University</li> </ul>

Table 10: network models

Network types and governance	
<b>Festival Priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can a network deliver the needs of small-scale place-based festivals?</li> </ul>
<b>Community of practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify what this looks like in partnership</li> <li>• Develop formal or informal network/links with existing networks</li> </ul>
<b>Funding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What potential for research bids from research councils (i.e. AHRC)</li> <li>• Potential for collaborations on bids (i.e. ACE)</li> <li>• Place based opportunities (i.e. BIDs)</li> </ul>





## 6.0. Dissemination

### Twitter analysis on #ManMetFests during the course of the event

impressions	engagements	engagement rate	retweets
<a href="#">10858</a>	<a href="#">285</a>	0.024238	<a href="#">55</a>

#### Follow up meetings:

- British Arts Festivals Association (BAFA), London, 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2017

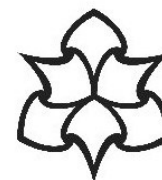
Feedback from this membership organisation has been positive and we have been invited to present at their conference in November 2017.

*“Place-based festivals of all sizes make up the core membership of BAFA and evaluation is an important and recognised process for all of them [...] For the smaller festivals, lack of time (above all, since many are run by volunteers with other jobs), budget and skill-gaps are a common obstacles that stand in the way of developing a deeper level of knowledge and understanding of their festival, and the cultural landscape within which it operates and **BAFA welcomes this initiative from Manchester Met.** [...] the ‘shared experience’ ranks very highly with our members as a way of learning and understanding what works for others out of which the smaller festivals in particular can interpret what might work for them. Toolkits, online resources and forums all add to this, but the case study approach is most effective, bringing as it does, a level of reality to the theory.”*  
(Kim Hart, BAFA).

- New Mills Community Festival, New Mills, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2017.
- Copies of the report disseminated to all participants and circulated to the wider community of place-based practitioners through the Institute of Place Management blog.
- The project funded enabled us to bid for £500 to host a workshop for festivals as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science. This will take place on 8<sup>th</sup> November and was fully subscribed after one week of going on sale suggesting a demand.

## 7.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The project was motivated by a concern that community and small-scale festival providers struggle to evaluate what they do. Often no evaluation takes place. In a context where value-for-money is a key priority, festival organisers are unable to test



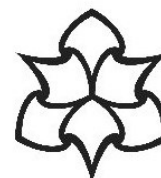
the impact of their events, to see what works and what does not. Consequently, programming of festival content is subject to risk aversion, constructing a barrier to innovation, and questioning the sustainability of festivals, as they are unable to build new audiences or introduce content that might produce greater impact. **The workshop findings largely support this assertion.**

**The longer-term objectives of the project include:**

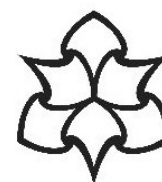
1. Developing new external partnership agreements
2. Enhancing external profile of Manchester Metropolitan University research
3. Embedding impact of Manchester Metropolitan University research through the establishment of new pathways to impact and appropriate mechanisms for delivery
4. Assessing the potential for developing a REF impact case study regarding place management policy and festivals research

**Table 11: Recommendations**

Addressing longer term objectives	
<b>1</b>	<p>There is a clearly a gap in terms of how small place-based community festivals are represented and supported within the existing national and regional institutional infrastructure. The structure and governance of a potential network, however, remains unclear. There are several models, which could be explored.</p> <p><b>Manchester Met should engage with a wider range of external stakeholders to mutually explore the potential of developing of a partnership that will provide a supporting framework for small place-based community festivals.</b></p> <p><b>Manchester Met should explore the development of a programme of supporting workshops, CPD and online support materials, together with the development of possible programme on festivals that will bring together theory and practice</b></p>
<b>2</b>	<p>The strong attendance and social media generated by the workshop, has certainly helped reposition MMU as an institution that has recognised research excellence on festivals, together with competencies in festival organisation itself.</p> <p><b>Feedback from the workshop, suggests Manchester Met should establish an online presence to make this expertise and capacity more visible.</b></p>



3	<p>There is clearly potential for Manchester Met researchers and students to engage further with local festivals in way that would be mutually beneficial. For example, knowledge exchange, dissemination of existing research, festivals as potential research sites for both post and undergraduate students.</p> <p><b>An audit of local festivals together with a web profile would assist the development of these links. In addition, the business case for development of this activity should be explored through Manchester Met Research &amp; Enterprise.</b></p>
4	<p>The workshop established the breadth and quality of festival research at Manchester Met. At the moment, this is distributed across all Faculties.</p> <p><b>Manchester Met research leaders should acknowledge this existing capacity and strength and begin to collate outputs and impacts concerning festival research.</b></p> <p><b>Manchester Met should organise an internal inter-disciplinary networking event to consolidate this research</b></p> <p><b>Institute of Place Management should explore the potential of creating a Special Interest Group for place-based community festivals.</b></p>



## Appendix 1: Participants List

Name		Organisation
Lucy	Armstrong	British Arts Festival Association
Jenna	Ashton	ManMet
Lisa	Bach	ManMet / Manchester Children's Book Festival
Antonio	Benitez	Museum of Science and Industry – Manchester Science Festival
Jon	Binnie	ManMet
Frances	Blythe	The Audience Agency
Laura	Broome	Quays Culture/Flare Festival
Angela	Chappell	Arts Council England
George	Chatzinakos	ManMet PhD
Dr Cara	Courage	University of Virginia
Isaac	Cunningham	ManMet / X-Trax
Helen	Darby	ManMet
Jess	Edwards	ManMet
Lisa	Gold	Manchester Children's Book Festival
Jamie	Halliwell	ManMet PhD
Steve	Henderson	Manchester Animation Festival
Carmen	Herrero	ManMet
Samuel	Illingworth	ManMet
Ramsey	Janini	Z -Arts – Big Imaginations
Christian	Klesse	ManMet
Rebecca	Lam	Manchester Children's Book Festival
Neil	Mackenzie	ManMet / Flare Festival
Oliver	Mantell	Audience Agency
Dominic	Medway	ManMet /Institute of Place Management
Phil	Murphy	Levenshulme Festival
Mark	Norman	Sheffield Hallam University
Susan	O'Shea	ManMet
Cathy	Parker	ManMet /Institute of Place Management
Emma	Pruce	Manchester Children's Book Festival
Catherine	Ralph	Walk the Plank
Dr Roxy	Robinson	From the Fields
Kaye	Tew	ManMet / Childrens Book Festival
Carrienne	Wallace	ManMet
Aileen	Walters	Wrexham Town Centre Forum
Caroline	Wellock	From the Fields

## Appendix 2: Workshop evaluation feedback (23 responses)

<b>Section A : About Manchester Met Festival Research</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree/nor disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
1. After today, I know more about Manchester Met Festival Research	0	2	2	7	12
2. I understand more about the potential of with working with MMU	0	1	3	8	10
3. I know more about the challenges and salutations to evaluating festivals	0	0	5	10	8
4. The workshop identified ways of working together	0	0	3	13	7
<b>Section B : About the speakers and content</b>					
1. The content was relevant to me	0	0	4	11	8
2. The speakers were well prepared	0	0		7	16
3. The material presented was understandable	0	1	2	9	11
4. Adequate time was provided for questions and discussion	0	0	2	11	10
<b>Section C : Overall</b>					
1. The workshop will help me in my practice	0	0	2	15	6
2. I met useful contacts	0	0	1	10	12
3. The workshop will lead to more collaboration in the town	0	0	7	11	4
4. Overall, I enjoyed the workshop	0	0	1	7	15
5. Overall, the workshop was worthwhile	0	0	1	9	13