

# **That's all very well in practice, but what about the theory? The Case of Glasgow Life, Scotland**

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## **Introduction**

Pressure on UK local authority managed or funded cultural services has become a given at least since the Thatcherite rejection in the 1980s of the post-war consensus. While there was significant investment under New Labour, this was tied to economic and social policy in ways that reflected a continuation of underlying neoliberal principles (Hesmondhalgh et al, 2015a, b). Heightened by the global financial crisis of 2008, the current regime of austerity has created a continuous battle to retain and manage diminishing cultural services and grants to independent cultural organisations. In response, the cultural sector has over the past few decades become more aligned with wider economic and social development agendas (Gray, 2007; 2017, Throsby, 2010) and consequently has had to adapt organisational structures and approaches in order to reposition arts and culture. Kent Council's recent transfer of culture into the economic development department, and the construction of narratives of its operations as "delivering economic growth, skills development and community wellbeing" (Witton, 2015) is a familiar move, replicated across the UK and internationally (Knell and Taylor, 2011; Grodach and Seman, 2013; Overmans and Noordegraf, 2014).

In this context the experience of Glasgow City Council's organisational change in how it supported arts, culture and sport is viewed as one of success, particularly in helping the city redefine its image enhancing its economic wellbeing and developing its cultural infrastructure. This case study focuses on Culture and Sport Glasgow (CSG) – branded now as Glasgow Life – which is the result of a series of major organisational shifts over the past 30 years and is widely seen as effective in supporting the wider strategy of urban

redevelopment undertaken since the 1980s. Glasgow Life has avoided the need for large-scale closures of services such as libraries and museums and has been able to maintain or increase capital investment in new and refurbished facilities, despite the City being under financial pressures similar to those experienced by most UK local authorities.

This case study explores how such success has been achieved and asks whether in adapting to the fiscal and political environment council services have faced, the Glasgow Life experience offers wider learning and insights – both to large scale civic services and to the cultural sector in general.

### **Analytical framework**

In considering the specific case of Glasgow Life we draw upon ideas of adaptive strategy making (Chaffee, 1985) and emergent and intended strategic thinking (Mintzberg, 1994). These envisage adaptive behaviour being supported through strategic planning towards intended outcomes, alongside enabling autonomous initiatives and participatory decision-making to facilitate experimentation and the generation of new ideas (Anderson and Nielsen, 2009). In so doing we underline the extent to which Glasgow Life's own decision making and strategic direction is poorly insulated from external factors, so that it is forced to adapt to changes to its operating environment. However, this framing also recognises that the leadership in Glasgow Life has chosen to support intended dispersed initiatives alongside central coordination. Indeed, arguably one reason for the success attributed to Glasgow Life has been this incorporation of both emergent and intended strategy modes.

Referencing these models of strategy is not to suggest that either has been consciously deployed by Glasgow Life; rather they are heuristic tools to help understand the wider

significance of the (successful) ways in which the organisation has been managing change. And it provides a structure for this case study.

In adopting this analytical frame we are aware of our own involvement in the processes and evaluations. O'Neill came to Glasgow in the mid-1980s and for over 25 years worked with Glasgow's museums, including as Head of Arts and Museums for Glasgow City Council from 2005 and then as Director of Policy, Research and Development at Glasgow Life from 2009 to 2016. He has thus been central to the organisational change journey outlined above, and part of the leadership team within Glasgow Life that has responded to external and internal pressures. Rogerson's research over a similar period has engaged in different ways with the city's cultural organisations. This included conducting research on place marketing and quality of life for Glasgow Action in the 1980s, conducting community studies on regeneration and place-making for Glasgow City Council in the 1990s, and in last six years collaborating with Glasgow Life on exploring legacies from the Commonwealth Games and he is continuing to explore with Glasgow Life what future lies beyond being creative cities (Vickery, 2011; Scott, 2014) – what might be termed the post-creative city. His position has been primarily one of a peer reviewer or 'critical friend' (Purcell & Hawtin 2007), having been given access in different ways to the organisational decision making over that time but with expectations that these could be challenged.

### **The Glasgow Context: culture, arts, sport and the city**

Over the past four decades, the arts, culture and sport have been key components of Glasgow's successful redefining its global role and some would argue the recreation of its own soul (Morris 1992). Careful rebranding of the city based on international cultural events in the 1990s – from being the first post-industrial city to be given the title of European City

of Culture 1990 to being UK City of Architecture and Design in 1999 – helped to reposition the city and create long term legacies that brought economic benefits. These have been reinforced more recently by the city’s investment in sporting facilities and the attraction on a regular basis of major international sporting events. As Myerscough (1988; 2011) and Garcia (2005) have demonstrated, the legacies have been more than just economic – they have boosted the capacity and ambitions of the cultural sector and the self-confidence of the city.

Over the decades of investment and throughout the strategic approach to city marketing and re-imaging, the city’s public sector has been the driving force. Epitomising the shift to urban entrepreneurialism, but in contrast to the growth coalitions found in North America and other European cities where private sector partners lead, first the Glasgow Development Agency and then Glasgow’s city council have been the dominant actors – though always in partnership with the private sector, beginning with Glasgow Action (1985). This form of urban managerialism sought to take a multi-faceted approach to using the (public) assets and heritage of the city to foster the ‘creative city’ (Landry and Bianchini, 1995), to make changing from manufacturing to services into a viable economic strategy.

Since the late 1970s arts, culture and sport have formed a key part of Glasgow’s urban regeneration strategy as it sought to shake the image and change the often grim realities of being a ‘post-industrial’ centre associated with economic decline, social inequality and poor health. Narratives of transformational change in the last 30 years of Glasgow’s history consistently point to the vitally important role - socially and economically – that sports and culture have played (see for example Bryson, 1996; Garcia, 2004; Myerscough, 2011).

As Scotland’s largest city (population 600,000) and the country’s only city region (population 1.75 million), Glasgow has inherited from its Victorian heyday a significant heritage of physical cultural resources – especially in the largest concentration of Victorian

architecture in the world (Gomme, 1989) and in museums and galleries that boast internationally important collections. Glasgow is host to four of the five Scottish national performing arts companies, including The National Theatre of Scotland and Scottish Opera. Other national cultural organisations are based in venues managed by Glasgow Life – Scottish Ballet in Tramway, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra in the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, while the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra is in the City Halls.

The City Council is also the main funder of key independent arts organisations like the Citizen’s Theatre, which is also housed in a Council-owned building. With the addition of the Glasgow School of Art, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the BBC and STV, the Hunterian Museum and over 100 independent arts organisations, Glasgow has the largest cultural production infrastructure in the UK outside London (Myerscough 2011).

Leading the cultural and sporting sectors and managing the city’s cultural and sporting facilities is a complex operation. Today, Glasgow Life is the largest organisation of its kind in the world, with a staff of 2,000 and a budget in excess of £114 million. It is responsible for managing a vast range of functions and over 150 venues ranging from thirty local community centres and thirty-four local libraries to venues that represent the most prestigious aspects of civic culture, such as The Mitchell Library, The Burrell Collection, Glasgow Royal Concert Hall and Tramway (Scotland’s largest multi-arts centre), along with Scotland’s national indoor athletics arena and velodrome, and the national swimming centre. As well as being key contributors to the visitor economy of Glasgow these venues are embedded in local life and are a crucial part of both its sense of civic pride and its identity as a city of international stature.

The managerial challenges posed by scale and complexity are exacerbated by the social and economic context in which policy decisions and operational delivery take place. As well as being a prosperous city with significant financial services, retail, education and

creative industry sectors, Glasgow also has the largest concentration of poverty and ill-health in the UK, comprising about a third of its citizens, including 30,000 children. It is also the most culturally diverse city in Scotland, with 15% of its population belonging to black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, many of whom are refugees and asylum seekers who have been given leave to remain. Despite, or perhaps because of these problems Glasgow spends more on culture (and sport) per head of population than any other large city in the UK. While it is 30 years since the very survival of Glasgow as a city was a serious concern (Keating 1988), the grave issues confronting it create a greater sense of urgency than in more traditionally ‘cultural’ cities such as Edinburgh, Bath and Bristol – as demonstrated by Glasgow competing against such cities for - and winning - the European City of Culture title in 1990 and the UK City of Architecture and Design in 1999.

### **Creating successful organisational management**

Much has been written about Glasgow’s transformation – from its economic decline as a typical post-industrial city to a modern, creative centre and its successful re-imaging externally from the ‘mean city’ of the 1970s to the contemporary sports, culture and tourist destination of today (See O’Neill 2017 for a summary). In representing these journeys, previous studies have identified key moments and milestones that mark stages of the transformation. These include studies of the opening of museums and civic assets (O’Neill, 2006), regeneration projects in the inner city (Garcia, 2004), acclaimed branding and marketing campaigns (Paddison, 1993), and the hosting of one off events from the Garden Festival of 1988 to the Commonwealth Games of 2014 (Tucker, 2008; Rogerson, 2015)

In this case study we adopt a different approach to milestones and markers. The focus here is on organisational change and the role it has had in the city’s wider transformation. In particular we concentrate on one component of the city’s local government – the governance

and management of culture, arts and sport, widely acknowledged as key aspects of Glasgow's wider social and economic change. This offers a new perspective on Glasgow's story, focusing primarily on the inputs and decision making that lead to and generated the outputs, the hallmark events, venues and services, but also exploring the expectations, aspirations and assumptions behind the decision making.

On the journey towards the contemporary structures through which culture and sports are managed by Glasgow Life, it is possible to identify four distinct phases of organisational and managerial change. Each could be viewed as a 'stepping stone' to the current form, but there was no inevitability about the developments. The history is more complex and contingent, bound up with the global economy, national and local political agendas, city wide strategies and expediency.

**[insert Table 1]**

### **1983-1998**

Glasgow was the first city in the United Kingdom to deploy culture in the interests of urban regeneration, as part of a shift in government towards what would later be termed as New Public Management (Moore, 1995), in which culture and the arts are increasingly understood as means to an end rather than an end in themselves (Belfiore, 2004). This was typified by the city's audacious bid to be UK's European City of Culture (ECOC) in 1990. In contrast to the long-established cultural centres that had been previous title holders – Athens, Florence, Amsterdam, Berlin, and Paris – Glasgow was not seen by many as a plausible candidate. Indeed the Scottish Office had assumed that Edinburgh should get the title, even though they submitted a much weaker bid (Herald Scotland, 2010). Following the opening of the Burrell Collection in 1983 and the stone cleaning of the soot covered Victorian buildings

there was an increasing appreciation within both the Council and the business sector of the city's historic assets and its excellence in contemporary visual and performing arts. Coordinated by the City Council, the City Tourist Board and Glasgow Action, the city's cultural institutions were brought together as a sector for the first time to bid to be ECOC. The comprehensive bid, the strong private-public sector partnership and the strength of its cultural sector secured the title.

In order to manage the Year of Culture programme and to coordinate and mobilise the cultural sector, Glasgow Corporation set up an Events Unit - see Table 2. Its remit had a blend of cultural, social and economics aspirations, designed to achieve a complex mix of objectives, including boosting civic pride, creating the positive external image required for a city economy based on services, and engaging in the growing cultural tourism market (Booth and Boyle, 1993, O'Neill, 2017).

Though there was no explicit plan for following through immediately after 1990—creating debate over the long-term impacts of ECOC (Boyle and Hughes, 1991; Macleod, 2002; Mooney, 2004; Garcia, 2005; Quinn, 2005) and leading to a hiatus while the Events Unit was transformed into the Performing Arts & Venues department - clear lessons and legacies nevertheless emerged. At a time when the powers of local government were being reduced and budgets capped, culture, events and civic marketing had the great advantage of being areas where civic action, on an ambitious scale, was possible. And within the cultural sector, the opportunities created by being ECOC were enthusiastically embraced, generating long term legacies of increased ambitions, and new local and international networks.

## **1998-2006**

The reorganisation of local government in 1995/6, when Strathclyde Regional Council and Glasgow Corporation were replaced by the unitary Glasgow City Council, led to



the redrawing of boundaries in such a manner that the city lost 30% of its population – and a similar proportion of its tax base. The financial crisis this generated led, in April 1998, to the amalgamation of previously separate departments of Archives, Libraries, Museums, Performing Arts & Venues, and Sport & Leisure, resulting in a single Cultural and Leisure Services (CLS) department.

This re-organisation resulted in a drive towards more efficient and effective service delivery, bringing new partners in the public and voluntary sector into delivery models, while also seeking to increase community reach. With a gross budget of £86.6m and 1,948fte staff, there was a continuous struggle to reduce costs and generate efficiency savings. This was epitomised by a series of Best Value Reviews carried out during 2001-4. These resulted in yet more organisational changes – e.g. libraries and archives being brought together as Libraries, Information and Learning, and new staffing structures in Museums. By taking a radical approach to restructuring, these services were able to achieve cost savings, but also reinvest in expertise that had been lost in the earlier cuts – e.g. conservation, curators, education and access.

In 2001 Glasgow City Council was awarded what was then the largest ever Heritage Lottery Fund grant in Scotland (£12.8 million) to assist in the refurbishment of the city's Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, then the most visited museum in the UK outside London. With the need to raise a further £5m alongside Council funding, CLS set up the Kelvingrove Refurbishment Appeal Trust, based on the American model of philanthropic fundraising. This was the first ever cultural fundraising trust created by a local authority in Scotland. Continuity with the previous successful experiences of urban growth coalitions across public and private sector and spanning political parties was embodied in the selection by the Labour Council of Tory Peer Lord Norman MacFarlane<sup>1</sup> as chair. MacFarlane had already been influential as chair of Glasgow Action when it was set up in the mid-1980s at

the early stages of the city's marketing and regeneration process. With 14 trustees drawn from councillors and commercial organisations, the Trust (and appeal) was viewed as highly successful in leveraging support for culture and arts from across the city and beyond. More than 5,500 individuals donated money helping to raise more than twice the original target. Significantly, the experience of Labour councillors of the trust built their confidence that a 'trust model' could benefit the city in meeting other objectives.

Facing continuing financial pressures and anticipating worse to come, in 2007 (i.e. before the rush in the UK to create cultural and leisure trusts after the financial crash of 2008) the city created Culture & Sport Glasgow (CSG), now branded as Glasgow Life (GL) to manage its assets and deliver services on its behalf. Legally Glasgow Life is an independent charity, governed by a board, which includes City Councillors, whose primary responsibility is the good of the charity. GL is accountable to the City Council for services it delivers through a detailed contract, and to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) for meeting its charitable purposes

As has been the case in the creation of many of the UK charitable trusts set up to manage municipal leisure and cultural facilities (Reid, 2010), the primary driver was pragmatic: generating financial/tax benefits through the process of externalising facility management. In the case of Glasgow, the formation of CSG resulted in an immediate saving of approximately £8.5 million in its first year to the City Council.

In addition to fiscal advantages, it was also assumed that greater autonomy, the expertise of independent board members, and being a smaller organisation would enable Glasgow Life to adapt more quickly in a rapidly changing and unpredictable context. The charity also had the opportunity to change its organisational values and ethos, and take further steps in aligning its strategies with wider social, economic and wellbeing agendas.

This was reflected in new partnerships, reaching out to new stakeholders and involving them in governance and decision making.

The Glasgow move was certainly not without its critics (see for example Gordon Nesbitt (2011)'s assertion that Glasgow Life was subordinate to business interests), as the formation of Glasgow Life represented one of the most high profile transfers of functions from a Council to charitable trust in the UK. The inclusion of libraries was unprecedented and formed the basis of an unsuccessful legal challenge by the trade union, UNISON, arguing that this organisational change breached the 1887 Public Libraries Act and their contention that Councils had a duty to manage public libraries directly.

## **2011 and after**

In 2011 Glasgow Life took over the Glasgow Royal Concert Halls Trust, which managed the City's three main music venues and was running a significant deficit. In 2016 as part of a wider efficiency programme in the 'Council Family' of services and affiliated organisations, Glasgow Life took over the Glasgow City Marketing Bureau, which managed the city's international marketing as well as its conference bureau. While the term 'super trust' generally refers to pension funds which take the form of a complex non-for-profit organisation with different employer schemes, functions and priorities, it captures many characteristics of Glasgow Life, notably its exceptional scale and complexity. Glasgow Life is the tenth largest charity (by income) in Scotland - and the nine larger charities are all universities (Campsie, 2016).

These continuing changes not only enabled significant cost savings, but a strategic integration of the city's lead organisations for culture, sport and events with the regional, national and international branding and marketing of Glasgow. This integration had been

facilitated by the intensification of partnership working during the 2014 Commonwealth Games (Rogerson, 2015) and the preparatory rebranding of the city in 2013. This involved dropping the ‘Glasgow: Scotland with Style’ brand, which had become associated with the retail culture of the boom of the 2000s, replacing it with ‘People Make Glasgow’. This was crowd sourced from local people (more than 1500 people from the city and the wider Glasgow global diaspora took part – People Make Glasgow, 2018) and was perceived as authentic and capable of representing culture as well as other aspects of the city’s identity.

### **Building successful cultural organisations**

Today, Glasgow Life is widely viewed as a successful example of a civic-focussed organisation delivering social and economic benefits based on culture and sport, as well as achieving international standards in those domains. Despite being under similar financial pressures as other local authority organisations, the existence of the trust and the continued support of the Council and other stakeholders have enabled Glasgow to extend the range of arts, cultural and sporting facilities and opportunities over the past decades, and to balance investment that supports both local communities and the city’s international focus. This success has included:

- creating new high profile artistically successful and popular festivals, ranging from Celtic Connections (Scotland’s second largest festival after Edinburgh’s Fringe Festival) to the Glasgow International Festival of Contemporary Art;
- securing and delivering major sporting events, such as the 2014 Commonwealth Games, integrating culture into the sports programme to an unprecedented degree;

- managing major capital projects such as the £74 million Riverside Museum (European Museum of the Year 2011) and the £114 million Emirates Arena and Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome;
- developing an international reputation for innovative museum practices (see, for example, Gurian, 2007)
- supporting the development of the most extensive provision of artist studios outside London, helping to retain and attract a large community of practitioners; and
- increasing participation in culture and sport across performing arts, museums, libraries, and sports & physical activity among local and regional audiences.

Glasgow Life has achieved this expansion of the cultural sector in Glasgow while also reducing the proportion of the total cost to the tax payer by ten percentage points over the last decade. During the same period the everyday service quality has been recognised by sector measures such as the UK Cabinet Office's Customer Service Excellence scheme, a new government standard that is awarded to public sector organisations that can demonstrate the importance of excellent customer service throughout the organisation as well as continuing commitment to ongoing improvement.

This success - and the successful organisational change that facilitated it - has been achieved through a pragmatic and evolutionary approach led by a mixture of expediency and principle, rather than any theoretically or ideologically informed methodology. As a result, the organisational issues involved may have a wider resonance amongst cultural organisations. As such, the remainder of this case study reflects on these developments. Specifically, we consider three key organisational consequences that have arisen as part of the evolutionary

journey outlined above. These relate to: accountability and creating an organisational ethos and values; organisational working; and the creation of a coherent narrative of change.

### **Developing organisational ethos and accountability**

The creation of trusts by local authorities has been viewed as means to defend public services against financial pressures and to preserve a social welfare orientation (Curson, 1996). They also provide the advantages of being more entrepreneurial, encouraging greater staff involvement, and instilling a greater sense of ownership through more inclusive governance (Simmons, 2008). Trusts enable the generation of new partnerships to manage their (semi-) autonomy, resulting in complex structures of governance. Glasgow Life receives the majority of its revenue from, and manages assets owned by, Glasgow City Council. Half of its Board members are elected Councillors, with the remainder recruited from the private sector and community organisations. It is also accountable to the public, directly through the services contract and indirectly through large scale public use – approximately 72% of the city’s population uses at least one of Glasgow Life’s services and more than half use at least two services. Given that the public often do not distinguish nuances of governance, they address complaints to their local Councillors, who then make representations to Glasgow Life. The combination of a charitable and a democratic mandate to deliver services in every neighbourhood in the city along with very high profile venues and events creates what might be called *extreme accountability*. Part of the success of Glasgow Life’s has been its commitment to embracing rather than resisting the demands this generates. It has found ways of achieving ambitious plans rather than being bogged down by the range of active stakeholders.

Given the range of disciplines Glasgow Life engages with across the arts, heritage and sport it has proven difficult to articulate meaningful measures of success, especially those

based on outcomes for the public. These are often in tension with the simple output metrics of national government and the local authority. Likewise they rarely align with the motivations of professional/expert staff driven by their traditions and practice. Nonetheless, Glasgow Life devotes considerable resources to complying with both Local Authority and OSCR measures of accountability, as well as those of external funders such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (see section on Capital Projects below). Despite the focus on the ‘frontline’ imposed by austerity, it has made major investments in customer relationship management systems and in a team of business analysts to understand its user base better and to apply these insights to service development.

Underpinning this has been the desire to continue a public service tradition dating back to the Victorian origins of local cultural provision, which believes in providing excellence for all, and rejects the terms of recent debates which construe access and quality or intrinsic and instrumental value as opposed qualities (Bakhshi, 2012). While Glasgow’s attempts to achieve both excellence and equity have been criticised, from both conservative and radical perspectives (see for example Dawber 2006 and Burlington 2007 ), Glasgow Life has sought to take a position that is at once pragmatic and principled. Not all cultural services have to appeal to everyone, but everything should have points of access for novice audiences, and structured pathways for them to explore further should exist. Thus, even Tramway, which mostly programmes cutting edge contemporary performing and visual arts and serves as an R&D unit for these sectors in Scotland, has devised ways of engaging its local community and reducing the relatively high barriers to entry which this kind of work usually entails (see Paddison *et al* 2012,).

Maintaining a balance of excellence and equity across Glasgow Life has been challenged not only by fiscal and political pressures, but also by its emerging organisational complexity. Whilst most of the services provided have a statutory basis, the legislation does

not specify their quantity or quality, and for the most part Glasgow Life services are designed to compensate for market failure. In delivering these however, the creation of a ‘super trust’ has required the generation of a shared ethos, cutting across different delivery and business models. Many of the services are free - notably libraries, museums and physical activity programmes for priority excluded and inactive groups – funded through the Council service fee. But other services, including twenty one gyms (‘The Glasgow Club’) across the city, charge users, even though the locations range from areas where no commercial provision would be viable to others where there are both high-end and budget gyms – an extremely competitive market. In the music and theatre venues there is a mix of both subsidised and surplus generating performances. And Glasgow Life owns a community interest company that runs commercial services whose income, generated through catering, venue hire, and shops, is transferred to the charity.

In this complex array of funding and delivery approaches continuing to have a shared ethos of equity has required careful adaptive management and strategies. The rationale for what is free and what is charged for is often based on differing (powerful) traditions from within the constituent parts of Glasgow Life. The different business models required to meet strategic and financial objectives as noted above have generated creative tension within the organisation, and harnessing this towards a single set of values has required strong leadership, and the creation of a different approach to organisational working.

### **Organisational working**

Bringing together previously separate services that had a clear sense of their distinct identity and integrating them in the service of efficiency and wider economic and social goals created a new level of complexity. As former departments of one the largest councils in the UK (with more than 30,000 staff), individual service areas (and personnel) were used to



relative autonomy, despite the adoption of New Public Management – most of their functions simply went on below the radar. Becoming part first of Cultural & Leisure Services and then of Culture and Sport Glasgow meant a drive towards increasingly deeper integration and greater exposure of their idiosyncratic cultures. The amalgamation and reduction of senior management teams and back office functions, and the centralisation of services and communications, capital project management and events generated significant savings. But these actions also created risks associated with a loss of specialist knowledge in areas such as arts, libraries, museums, music and sport. The shifts – and continuities - in working and organisational goals can be illustrated by the changing key objectives in these civic organisations from 1983 to 2007, which are set out in Table 2.

Apart from savings, identifying opportunities arising from the amalgamation proved more complex than anticipated. Projects built on collaboration between culture and sport (e.g. an exhibition on Scottish Football in Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery) proved not to be very productive. The clearest indicator of the nature and scale of the opportunities came during the 2014 Commonwealth Games, when Glasgow Life created what has been acknowledged as the most integrated cultural programme for any global multi-sport events (Culture Republic, 2017). Thus the opportunities have so far been about audience crossover, rather than cross-disciplinary working - though there is a strong sense that these opportunities exist if the time and resources can be found to develop them.

In 2011, in order to develop a strategic overview and long term perspective on improving its effectiveness and coherence, Glasgow Life formally adopted an organisational development approach, using the Burke-Litwin model (Burke & Litwin 1992). This led to new processes and interventions that questioned inherited practices and has assisted in aligning resources with outcomes in a way that was designed to transform the organisation rather than simply make incremental improvements. Tools like Scenario Planning, Horizon

Scanning (with the International Futures Forum) Logic Modelling, Workforce Planning and Leadership Development have all been used to build capacity, create learning opportunities and to articulate meaningful measures of success. These have been consistent with the notion of emergent and adaptive strategic thinking. Drawing on the collective knowledge and experience of staff to analyse their environment and to plan possible responses, scenario planning in particular was used to cope with the complexity of the environment (Ringland & Schwartz 1998). By accepting the impossibility of embracing a single interpretation of the world and of predicting the future, the use of the tool has provided a deeper shared analysis of future directions and an increased confidence in the collective ability to live with a high level of ambiguity and to cope with whatever happens.

These tools are assisting Glasgow Life to move towards a more integrated form of organisational working but such change takes time, and in an environment of continuous realignments into a super trust structure, finding this time has become increasingly difficult.

Bringing together the discretionary services of culture, arts and sports made sense financially in terms of the organisational restructuring of the City Council. To the many other stakeholders with whom Glasgow Life engages, however, the fit was less obvious. Externally, delivery partners, other local and national cultural organisations, and (especially) Glaswegian service users, struggled to find effective ways to have productive dialogue with the new organisation and its emerging processes. Internally, cultural and operational differences existed and continue to challenge a move towards a more unified form of working – between Libraries, Museums, Sports and Performing Arts, and Communities teams, and within each of those teams. With a need to support those focused on professional processes (e.g. conservators, curators, sports specialists, archivists), staff providing access to services, and those charged with income generation, the ‘multi-employer’ feature of a super trust has not been moulded into a ‘steady form’ of organisation working.

Indeed one of Glasgow Life's strengths has been its willingness to adapt continuously, while seeking to retain its strategic goals and maintain the support of key stakeholders. A focus on building internal strength as well as on responding to often rapidly changing external demands and pressure has encouraged both initiatives to be suggested from within the organisation and to draw upon experiences elsewhere, best characterised as a combination of emergent and planned approaches.

### **Creating a (coherent) narrative**

Creating a single narrative that makes sense of this complexity has proven difficult, but has always been a priority. It took from 1998 to 2006 to produce a strategic policy, partly due to the need to rebuild services after the drastic cuts of the mid-1990s, but also partly because of the scale and diversity of the organisation. The policy document created at the time set out how all of these contributed to civic life under four strategic headings:

- encourage cultural and sporting participation;
  - encourage learning, training, volunteering and pathways to employment through culture and sport;
  - enhance Glasgow's cultural infrastructure and events programme to support the city in competing in the global economy; and
  - develop a vibrant and distinctive city which is attractive to citizens and visitors alike
- (Glasgow's Cultural Strategy, 2016)

Becoming a charity in 2007, the political and financial volatility and reducing public investment after the global financial crisis of 2008 and the Scottish devolution referendum of

2014 added to the complexity and the difficulty of sustaining organisational culture change and a clear direction. In 2010 Glasgow Life worked with consultants to try to distil the essence of its disparate services, and shifting from descriptive titles to those describing outcomes. The result was a unifying brand – Glasgow Life, as in ‘get the most out of Glasgow life’.

Though the annual business plan provides an overview of its unfolding strategy, Glasgow Life has not published an updated policy document since 2006. Though several updated policies have been drafted, the timing for publication never seemed right. The absence of a unifying strategic statement reflects the highly volatile environment that it functions in. The success of Glasgow Life - despite the lack of such a statement - reflects a high level of tolerance of ambiguity, and efficacy in finding other ways of sustaining a coherent direction.

Glasgow Life did create a unifying mission statement that says the organisation aims to inspire the city’s residents and visitors to lead richer and more active lives through culture, sport and learning’. Underlying this are beliefs that the services provided by Glasgow Life can offer rich sources of hope, meaning and social connection to citizens, and that, as a result of deep local roots, these services can attract tourists in a way that benefits all citizens. In the absence of an explicit strategy, and also because of the need to be accountable to a widened set of stakeholders and mobilise integration internally (see above), as with many arts and cultural organisations, Glasgow Life’s coherent narrative has been constructed around an ever changing sense of what long-term success means to different stakeholders (Daigle and Rouleau, 2010).

In this regard, two strands stand out. The first, reflecting its functions in communities within the city, has been how reorganisation has increased local participation in and support for culture and sport. Attendance at most art forms has moved from below the Scottish

average in 1990, to consistently above, while membership of the city's gyms has trebled in the past decade (Myerscough 2011). Glasgow runs cultural and leisure services that are several orders of magnitude greater than those of any other local authority in Scotland, indeed some of its services, notably museums and sports, are the largest services of their kind in the UK. The civic investment per head is greater than that of any other large city in the UK. This means that standard Scottish metrics often fail to reflect the reality. Glasgow Sports costs per head are higher than the Scottish average – but the organisation not only manages local services, but also the national indoor athletics area, the national velodrome, an Olympic-size swimming pool and a regional football training centre. Costs per visit to Glasgow Museums are above the Scottish Local Authority average, but Glasgow Museums achieves nearly as many visits per year as the combined total of the National Gallery of Scotland and the National Museums of Scotland, for approximately half the cost. The reality underlying these achievements is that, compared to national benchmarks, Glasgow Life's staff are very thinly spread and achieving international standards of excellence and local responsiveness. Sustaining this level of functioning at a time of reducing resources is a continual and complex struggle.

A second strand of the narrative has been the role of Glasgow Life as actively enhancing the cultural and sport assets in the city, through identifying, promoting and delivering significant investment opportunities for the City Council. Between 2000 and 2017 the organisation managed over £420 million in capital projects, including major maintenance works, major refurbishments and new builds - most of them on time and on budget, including the £30 million refurbishment of Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum, the £74 million Riverside Museum (European Museum of the Year 2011) and the £114 million Emirates Arena and Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome. These projects greatly enhanced the City Council's cultural infrastructure (as well as providing homes for Scottish Opera, the RSNO, the BBC

Symphony Orchestra and Glasgow Rocks, the city's professional basketball team). As well as providing a precedent for an independent trust which served civic objectives, these projects have also has a profound impact on the organisation in addition to significantly upgrading the quality of the cultural and sporting assets of the city.

Because they can take years, sometimes decades, to plan and deliver, capital projects (and major events such as the Commonwealth Games) on this scale provide a crucial long term perspective that is often missing in a highly politicised environment where budgets are set annually. They bring additional resources to the city and to Glasgow Life for the duration of the projects. However, the very significant external funding brings with it a whole additional layer of accountability to funders. Smart organisations like the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) require, and provide opportunities for, staff to upgrade their skills in areas that have an impact across the rest of the organisation's functions. These include project management, writing briefs that clarify outcomes rather than pre-empting solutions, user consultation, working in multi-disciplinary teams and combining international quality with local relevance. As an example, the Riverside Museum involved working with Zaha Hadid to create a classic 'iconic' building - but the museum is full of local content and attracts a whole new local audience, as well as tourists who contribute to the Glasgow economy. Likewise, the Emirates Arena and Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome helped to deliver the 'best ever' Commonwealth Games, but they incorporate gyms and exercise studios for local people. For this reason, the 2014 Games in Glasgow did not create any white elephants, a common problem with major multi-sport events (Rogerson, 2015)

While these are major project management achievements, at a time when capital projects were under exceptional scrutiny due to cost overruns on the Scottish Parliament and the Edinburgh trams, they are also significant design and political accomplishments. The sports venues, which are large and high quality enough to host international events, also need

to work for local people. This means managing competing demands for training time for elite sports clubs, for hosting local events, and for accommodating schools and fitness classes. Maintaining credibility and support from Glasgow Life's Board and the City Council and other funders (e.g. HLF) through the process of clarifying the realistic cost of £74 million of the Riverside Museum, from the original estimate of £40 million was a major task which required a high level of political skill.

### **Reflections on organisational adaptability**

Glasgow Life's repositioning of cultural services combines broad trends in the instrumentalisation of the publicly funded arts across the world with locally unique characteristics. As a local authority funded organisation it differs both from national cultural organisations, whose existence and prestige is rarely questioned, and from smaller independent arts organisations whose sense of precariousness may be severe. In concluding this case study, we believe that there are elements of its approach and practices that may be relevant for a wide range of cultural organisations, and insights to how such organisations' adaptation and evolution can be understood.

In reviewing Glasgow Life's incremental development into a 'super trust' as additional services and functions have been added, there is a tendency to focus on change within the organisation. Its successful adaptation has however also been constructed on a platform of continuity including:

- an approach to culture that both respects specialist expertise and ambitions and demands high levels of public accountability. Even at periods of high confidence and investment in culture (and sport) Glasgow Life has never evinced a sense of entitlement, and has always been aware of how contingent that support is, and how vulnerable non-statutory services are.

- a focus on the longer term in relation to organisational structure - both within and outside the Council. Glasgow Life has always tried to adapt its structure to fit its strategic goals, not just to make short term pragmatic changes.
- developing major flagship events and capital projects which meet both local and tourist needs as a means to focus on the longer term,.
- The drawing in of ideas and experiences (that seemed to be successful) from elsewhere – what could be termed pragmatic learning. It has invested a lot in learning for all its managers, but in particular for the senior management team, and recognised that mediating ambiguity and clarity is a key role for managers. While the business planning process helps provide as much clarity as possible for the operational delivery of quality services that reach their target audiences, other processes like scenario planning and IFF horizon scanning provide support in coping with ambiguity and complexity.
- The maintenance of a very high level of awareness of key stakeholders, both in terms of elite influencers and local residents, in the strategic planning and service delivery. As this stakeholder group has become more diverse, despite significant reductions in layers of management due to cutbacks, Glasgow Life has devoted a growing amount of time and effort to keeping them informed and engaged.
- Managing the tension between directive leadership and greater inclusiveness, and between planned and emergent strategy in organisational development.

With expectations by external stakeholders of clear direction and vision, strong leadership has been essential to respond to changing fiscal and organisational environments but internally a more adaptive approach has been essential to enable ‘multi-employer’ modes of working to be harnessed to support delivery of services, a shared ethos and organisational vision. In so doing, Glasgow Life has actively avoided adopting a single driving theoretically



driven perspective. Indeed, it has selected consciously from a wide range of perspectives, ideas and approaches which support its long term goals of improving the city's cultural, sporting and events infrastructure, boosting its image and economy and above all providing cultural services that are sources of hope, meaning and social connection for its citizens. The absence of a rigid theoretical frame has been an enabler!

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Table 1

**Cultural and Leisure Services (CLS): Key Objectives 2003/4**

- To develop the contribution of Cultural and Leisure Services in achieving the key priorities of social inclusion, education and lifelong learning, improved health, increased access and economic development and regeneration.
- To enrich the quality of life of Glasgow's citizens by providing accessible, attractive and exciting cultural and leisure services.
- To work closely with key partners in the public and voluntary sectors to improve the range and quality of cultural and leisure services in Glasgow.
- To ensure that all Glaswegians have equal and fair access to cultural and leisure services.
- To provide services which reflect a multi-cultural society and promote racial equality.
- To enable as many people as possible (especially young people) to participate in, and develop their full potential in the arts, play and sport.
- To enhance and promote the city's national and international image as a creative, cosmopolitan city - a centre for arts, sporting and cultural excellence.
- To ensure that our services are of high quality and offer Best Value.

Source: Annual Review 2003-4

**Culture and Sport Glasgow (CSG) Strategic Objectives 2007-8**

- to enhance the health and wellbeing of people who live, work and visit the city
- to create an environment where enterprise, work and skills development are encouraged
- to provide opportunities for making positive life choices in a safe, attractive and sustainable environment
- to create a culture of learning and creativity that lets people flourish in their personal, family, community and working lives
- to enhance and promote the city's local, national and international image, identity and infrastructure
- to demonstrate the ongoing improvement in the quality, performance and impact of the services and opportunities we provide

Source: Annual Review 2008-09

**Glasgow Life (GL) Strategic Objectives 2016/17**

Glasgow Life's strategic objectives are outcome focussed and ensure that we can align the delivery of all our services to the City's strategic priorities, as follows:

- Glasgow citizens will flourish in their personal, family and community life (through

- 
- regular participation in learning, sport, cultural and creative opportunities).
  - Enhanced skills and learning among (and contribute to the employability of) our citizens.
  - Glasgow's local, national and international image, identity and infrastructure are enhanced.
  - (Contribute to) Glasgow is a safer, greener and more sustainable city.
  - Glasgow Life is a continuously improving, effective and efficient organisation providing high quality services.
  - Glasgow's cultural heritage is protected and shared with its citizens and visitors.
  - Reduced inequalities in Glasgow (relative to Scotland and between Glasgow Citizens).
  - Enhanced health and wellbeing for all those who live and work in Glasgow.

Glasgow Life leads the Vibrant City strand of the refreshed Council's Strategic Plan (2015-17) which identifies the following key components as critical to the success of the city:

- Compete internationally with the best cities in the world for high profile sporting and cultural events and conferences.
- Make the best use of Glasgow's cultural assets and heritage.
- Ensure the people of Glasgow benefit through access to sport, culture and lifelong learning opportunities.

Source: Glasgow Life Service Plan 2016/17

## Table 2

European City of Culture: Evens Unit remit (1987)

- **Cultural objectives:** to co-ordinate the development of existing facilities and cultural organisations in the city; to provide incentives and encouragement for artists; and to extend cultural objectives (internationally).
- **Economic objectives:** to improve the regional economy by creating employment opportunities; to increase visitor numbers and expand the number of participants and spectators in cultural events.
- **Social Objectives:** to provide increased opportunities for participation in cultural activities with the emphasis on groups often ignored by mainstream cultural institutions; and to provide fun and entertainment for the citizens of, and visitors to Glasgow (Johnson 2009:69-70)