

# ARTS BUILDINGS SCOTLAND

A proposition for cultural  
buildings in Scotland.



from **Gwilym Gibbons & David Williams**  
**CREATIVE HELP**

in partnership with **RSA Scotland** and **Common Weal**

For years, there has been a growing tension between spending on maintaining homes for our cultural activity versus the very programmes of artistic activity they are there to serve. Although many of our cultural buildings (theatres, concert halls, museums and galleries) are our greatest assets, cultural gems and/ or historic artifacts in their own right we believe a tipping point has long passed in which the bricks and mortar, the critical mass and gravitational pull of our buildings has become the beast that has to be fed and served at the expense of the ambition and need for artistic challenge and wider community engagement.

Diane Ragsdale\*, Director of Cultural Leadership at Banff Centre for Arts talks about concrete buildings vs. squishy missions, noting how cultural buildings can become prisons for artistic activity because the concrete often wins the battle for resources.

As revenue and income streams come under unprecedented stress (as currently being experienced with the COVID-19 Pandemic) thousands of the makers and exhibitors of the arts have found themselves not just out of work but artistically homeless while venue leaders have bunkered down to weather the crisis. The venues have no choice but to spend what little money they have left on protecting their institution, represented by the darkened galleries and auditoria of their buildings. It is an uncomfortable truth that organisations who own or serve arts buildings are more likely to receive funding and bailouts to survive through periods of stress.

We believe we need to find a way to ringfence a portion of the limited revenue funding and income to support the creation of creative experience. We need to protect our creators against the disproportionate risk of ageing building maintenance and repair. We need to separate the presentation and making of art from the burden of servicing what have become our artistic prisons. Our proposition is that a new body which can raise capital and take a long-term view on the artistic infrastructure of our nation needs to be formed. This body would then work with arts bodies to fill, excite and animate buildings with artists and audiences. Creators will be unlocked from the chains of the long-term risk of the building with the option to bid for buildings which best serve their squishy missions.

#### About the authors

Creative Help founder and director Gwilym Gibbons is an experienced CEO, leader, producer, social enterprise grounded arts person and former park ranger.

Creative Help director David Williams FRSA is an experienced coach, facilitator and consultant including roles as chief executive, board member and chair.

With thanks to Jamie Cooke (RSA) and Craig Dalzell (Common Weal).

\*More information can be found: <https://www.artsjournal.com/jumper/2014/01/artistic-homes-excerpts-from-a-recent-talk/>

# OVERVIEW

Here at Creative Help, we have been thinking about finding a new way to fund and protect cultural activity - this is something we have been thinking of for a while. In fact, Gwilym first wrote about it in 2016 and it is now thrown into sharp relief by the current Coronavirus crisis and a desire to build back better.

It is clear that individual institutions and companies can only do so much, there needs to be system change from above (government and Creative Scotland).

# WHAT IF?

- There was a government funded **National Arts Buildings Trust** that allows Creative Scotland to focus on supporting creative people and activity?
- **Venue management** is funded by the Scottish Government and run by building experts who can take a long view about facilities, maintenance, refurbishment, new building projects, capital fundraising and so on.
- **Creative activities** are then freed up to allow individual companies to explore and bid for options that best suit them at the time (e.g. residency in a theatre, touring or a combination).



*"We need to separate the presentation and making of art from the burden of servicing what have become our artistic prisons."*



*"Creativity can be constrained by the limitations of a single company or artistic director."*

# INITIAL THOUGHTS

In many ways, venues have become prisons, with the board and executive spending inordinate amounts of time balancing artistic needs with essential maintenance of ageing buildings (often listed), which increases demands of health & safety and building regulations. Some lottery funded venues will likely spend much of the next ten years focusing on fundraising to refurbish their 20-year-old buildings.

In another context, creativity in a venue can be constrained by the limitations of a single, long-term, company or artistic director, with change becoming increasingly difficult.

Up to now, boards and executives have fiercely defended their turf, possibly afraid of losing their elevated position of being a core company and institution ("they can't close us down"). However, maybe now the time is right to *Build Forward Better* and at the same time address our concerns for *People, Place and Planet*.

## PROPOSAL

We now have a forced hiatus before theatre and arts centres can get back to work possibly for up to 12 months and many will not survive the pandemic. Some of our most esteemed venue institutions may be at risk, with buildings often falling back to Local Authorities to protect and run.

We propose an urgent debate to explore the options and benefits to the Scottish creative communities (venues, creatives and audiences) for a body to be formed that can serve two functions:

- **As a short-term safety net** for our vital venues to be homed and entrusted so they can be phased safely back into use in partnership with local and national governments and arts funding agencies.
- **As a long-term strategic trust** that can raise capital funding to refurbish and maintain the buildings, releasing Creative Scotland to fund creativity.

## Suggestions for exploration:

- **Audit and breakdown current ownership of Scottish cultural venues.**
- Calculate total cost of venue management in Scotland to Scottish Government, Creative Scotland, Local Authorities, individual charities and other independent companies.
- **Consider alternative ways to fund and manage this resource.**
- Consider options for a national organisation to manage the venue infrastructure
- **Consider options for Scottish Government, Creative Scotland and Local Authorities to review their focus (venues, creativity, audiences).**
- Consider opportunities for long-term thinking for venue infrastructure (50-100 years).
- **Consider new ways for Creative Scotland to fund creative people and activities, away from regular and one-off to more sustainable, long-term support.**
- Consider the future for indoor and outdoor events.
- **Consider the strengths and weaknesses of any considerations.**

*"Our purpose is to stimulate a discussion, undertaken in a spirit of curiosity, transparency and big picture thinking about the future."*

All to be undertaken in a spirit of curiosity, transparency and big picture thinking about the future.

At the moment, cultural activity as we know it is on hold and maybe for some time. Now is our chance to take a big step back and look at the cultural landscape from multiple perspectives:

- **System change** (*requires government support*).
- **Community change** (*requires local authority support*).
- **Organisational change** (*requires support from boards, executive officers*).
- **Individual change** (*requires support from audiences and participants*).



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