



Research strategy

Overview

While the city of Edinburgh is known for its vibrant public arts and cultural festivals, less is known about who accesses these cultural assets or about geographic differences in the cultural landscape across the city. This research consists of surveying existing cultural spaces through seven public participatory mapping workshops conducted in 2019, and combining the results with public data and web scraped data in 2020. The main output is a digital map of cultural spaces enriched with demographic and geographic layers, including the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, waterways, bike paths, open green spaces and schools. We hope this public resource will be of use to artists and cultural sector workers interested in Edinburgh's cultural geography and to advance research in arts equity and access to culture in Edinburgh.

What is a Cultural Space?

The question of how to define cultural space drove our research during the first two months of the project. We took particular inspiration from the project "Making Cultural Infrastructure" by the London-based group Theatrum Mundi. The report's principal question is: "What are the infrastructural conditions for culture, and can they be designed into the city?" (John Bingham-Hall). The authors explored the importance of non-traditional, flexible and affordable spaces for producing urban culture – whether for rehearsals or for painting or writing – and not only the more visible spaces where it is displayed and publicly consumed. Drawing on Theatrum Mundi's report, we understand a cultural space to be one entailing the whole chain of production of an expressive act.

We also drew from the Edinburgh-based report DesireLines, which emphasized the importance of flexible, multi-purpose, affordable spaces for local artists – for instance, spaces in churches – and the role of festivals on the (sometimes lack of) affordable and

accessible spaces for local artists. Especially in Edinburgh, the city of festivals, cultural spaces may have a temporal dimension that the map would need to capture.

For the next months, until June 2019, our aim was to gather qualitative and quantitative data about Edinburgh cultural spaces by inviting stakeholders from Edinburgh's various cultural sectors to discuss cultural hubs and engagement between cultural spaces and local communities. We left the process of defining 'culture' and the categories and subcategories of cultural space primarily to a series of participatory cultural mapping exercises that we describe next.

Cultural Mapping

Cultural mapping has become a process for citizens to define, categorise, and visualise local cultural geographies. The outcomes and goals of these activities, however, can vary. Very often, cultural mapping is a means to conduct planning in a more inclusive way. Since its origins in the 1970s¹, practitioners have used cultural mapping to democratise regional cultural policy, diversifying who takes part in decision-making as well as the types of cultural production that can be recognised. Cultural mapping can also be a community building exercise, a way to unearth local stories, relationships, and memories about art and culture that make a place meaningful (Duxbury, Garret-Petts, & MacLennan, 2015). This approach raises important questions about the relationship between cultural infrastructure and the communities in proximity to them (D. Lee & Gilmore, 2012)

The Culture and Community Mapping Project drew on these participatory methods to build a public dataset of cultural spaces in Edinburgh for community use. We held seven cultural mapping events from February till July 2019 where participants worked with large print-outs of a base map that included existing datasets of government museums, libraries, public schools, and churches². We asked participants to identify spaces that host cultural



events, as well as infrastructure that supports the creation of culture, from rehearsal to coworking spaces. We also asked participants to point out spaces that are crucial to the flourishing of their particular sector. Drawing on Theatrum Mundi's report, we began with three primary categories of spaces: performance, making, and virtual spaces – we use these three principle categories to characterise the Edinburgh map. Beyond these, we asked participants what categories they thought were missing that should be included. Over this time the dataset grew from 95 to 759 spaces and 14 categories.

Cultural mapping disturbs any distinction between mapping as a process versus as a product. Each output of a participatory mapping event is a unique representation of participants' understandings of culture. A cultural map should not be seen as a stable one-to-one representation of cultural spaces, but rather a set of interpretations and a series of selections and cuts made at a given time. There never can be a comprehensive overview of culture in Edinburgh, and no map can capture the dynamically changing cultural life of the city or all that culture entails. We prefer to see the map as an ongoing process, rather than a stable product, and as a result, any application of the map should take its limitations and dynamism into account.

Research Applications

The map's applications can be quantitative or qualitative, of use to city planners, cultural organisations, or artists. For instance, the map will be of use to policymakers in the City Council or Festivals who are interested in understanding cultural characteristics and differences across neighbourhoods, or the presence or the lack of cultural spaces in areas of deprivation (according to SIMD), or the proximity of cultural spaces to schools and community centres, waterways, bike paths, and public transit stops.

The map is also a scaffold for qualitative and artistic projects. We are working with the community

organisation LeithLate to design a virtual walking tour of the Leith neighbourhood's murals and shutter art. We plan to conduct interviews with cultural sector workers about important cultural hubs that have shut down, often due to gentrification or the impact of the festivals.

In its applications, the Culture and Communities Mapping Project reflects the descriptions found in the literature on the cultural mapping enterprise, which describes its use both as a democratising and humanistic resource as well as a pragmatic and utilitarian tool for shaping a city. Cultural mapping also raises the distinction between mapping as process versus product. Each output of a participatory mapping event is a unique representation of culture that can never be repeated in the same way. Likewise, any instantiation of the map does not reflect a stable one-to-one representation of cultural spaces, but a series of selections and cuts made at a given time. There never can be a comprehensive overview of culture in Edinburgh, and no map can capture the dynamically changing cultural life of the city. We prefer to see the map as an ongoing process, rather than a stable product, and as a result, any application of the map should take its limitations and dynamism into account.

References

- John Bingham-Hall, A. K. - Making Cultural Infrastructure report.
- Lee, D., & Gilmore, A. (2012). Mapping cultural assets and evaluating significance: theory, methodology and practice. *Cultural Trends*, 21(1), 3-28.
- Duxbury, N., Garret-Petts, W. F., & MacLennan, D. (2015). *Cultural Mapping as Cultural Inquiry*. New York: Routledge

Notes

1. General consensus in mapping literature places the origin of this practice with indigenous First Nation communities in Canada in the 1970, then Brazil, Australia and all around the world.
2. The base map was first outlined January 25th for a roundtable consultation with experts from the University, Council, and arts organisations.