

FOCUS TRACKS & WORKSHOPS

Panel-led focus track sessions as well as hands-on, practical, and interactive workshops ran in parallel over Days 1 & 2 of the convening. They were repeated to enable members to participate in different sessions

DAY 1 & DAY 2: FOCUS TRACKS

BUILDING MODERN AGORAS: THE BOTTOM-UP WAY

The power is in the storytelling, and these stories come from people. This was the headline from the session on building agoras from the bottom up.

We heard from representatives of local, community-driven action in Brooklyn, Copenhagen, Mumbai and Vancouver – each diverse in their population and ambition, each successful in building a consensus and community movement that empowered marginalised voices and led to positive change. These organisations were locally initiated and responsive to their specific cultural contexts, allowing them to be flexible and have direct impact on the communities involved. In comparison to the top-down discussion, which focussed more on buildings and spaces, this session emphasised programming through activating public space as a key strategy for bottom-up models.

Speakers:

Jesper Koefoed-Melson
Director,
Kulturdistriktet

Esther Rausenberg
Artistic and Executive
Director, Eastside Arts
Society

Natasha Sharma
Lead, Arts & Design
and Co-curator of
Govandi Arts Festival,
Community Design
Agency

Shelley Worrell
Founder, Little
Caribbean

Moderator:

Emma Wilcox
Consultant: Purposeful
Placemaking, Wilcox
Associates



In Copenhagen, **Kulturdistriktet** uses culture to mobilise the community by uniting organisations, artists and cultural producers. This approach enabled them to strengthen bonds and face challenges collectively. As a result, they have delivered partnerships across events, networks and locations that have developed a sense of pride and belonging.

Similarly, in Vancouver, collaborating with arts and cultural producers across the region enabled **Eastside Arts Society** to have a wider impact. Through stakeholder consultation, cultural mapping, consultations with indigenous communities, and identifying key assets at risk, they have developed a robust business plan and secured funding for further work that will change cultural policy within the city.

In India, **The Govandi Arts Festival** demonstrates the power of the arts to create positive change in communities that have been largely forgotten and sidelined. Through structured mentoring schemes, cross-sector partnerships, workshops and performances, they have highlighted the importance of culture, and reclaimed a community space to nurture future generations.

I am Carribeing also focuses on culture, community and commerce. Uniting the Caribbean diaspora across the boroughs of New York, it celebrates heritage and expression, fostering partnerships and commercial opportunities to cultivate collective belonging.

Having a limited budget and capacity necessitates agility, and doing so pushes for partnerships and collaboration. This makes projects become part of a larger creative ecosystem where top-down models and the leadership, scale and investment they bring are valuable. Bottom-up models should also consider production, commercial enterprise and entrepreneurship opportunities based on their core creative output. These models are iterative and emergent and there were calls for the need of stronger networks and collaborative problem solving.

In addition, smaller scale projects, which are often equated with a bottom-up approach, require longer time frames for measurement of impact. Moving beyond numbers to storytelling, utilising qualitative data as a way to demonstrate impact enables funders to be invested early and builds their understanding as a project grows.

Key Takeaways:

- Remaining flexible and authentic when scaling up, with an ability to pivot and redefine activities where necessary, is critical to success.
- Storytelling is also key: showing impact rather than telling is important, looking at transformation of the individual, the community and the environment.
- Soft power and the intangible value of art and creativity can act as the driver of change within a community.
- Co-creation and centring the voices of participants, residents and artists is crucial for authenticity. This honours the time that people contribute which is not often compensated. By delivering activities that are relevant to an individual community, organisations can foster pride and legacy for the projects and the people involved in them.