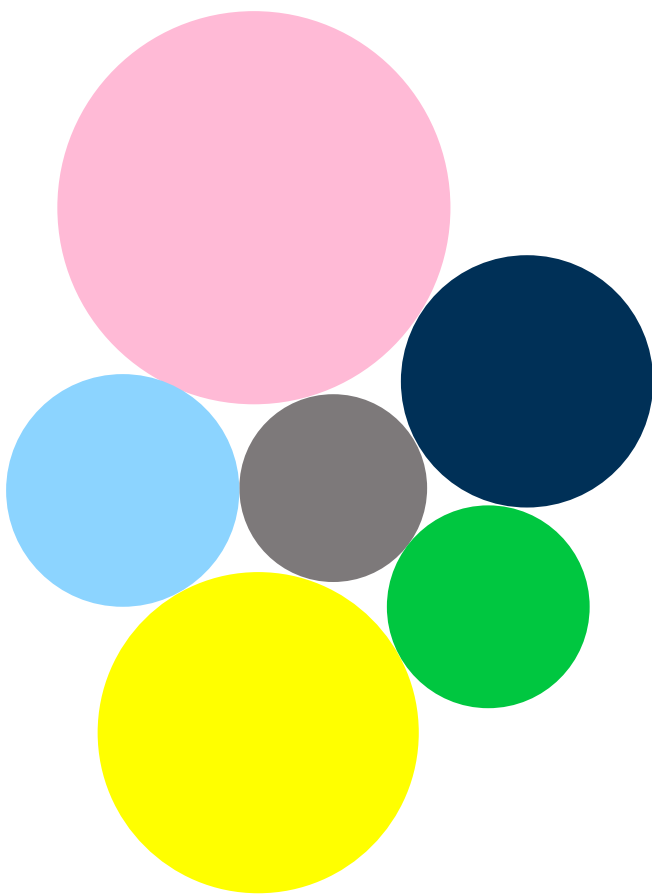


# Cultural hubs

*How to create a multidimensional experience*



# What is a cultural hub?

A clustering of cultural venues such as museums, galleries and performance spaces with secondary attractions including food and retail.



Did you know cultural hubs are on the rise in the UK? As museums and galleries increasingly pool resources, content and marketing, cultural consumers are also demonstrating an appetite for experiences that are multidimensional and incorporate more than one venue.

In recent years we have seen the launch of several interesting museum partnerships and marketing initiatives, such as the Cornwall Museums Partnership, Bath Museums Partnership, Coastal Culture Trail, London's Museum Mile, Yorkshire Sculpture Triangle and Art in Yorkshire.

What we haven't known until now is the scope of UK audiences' appetite for these kinds of groupings, or the scale of opportunity they present to attract and increase visitors – whether formally as 'hubs' or through a more informal setup.

In 2015 we commissioned research to discover how organisations could best capitalise on cultural hubs in order to grow audiences. We hope the results provide actionable insights you can use when collaborating with your peers to create a hub.

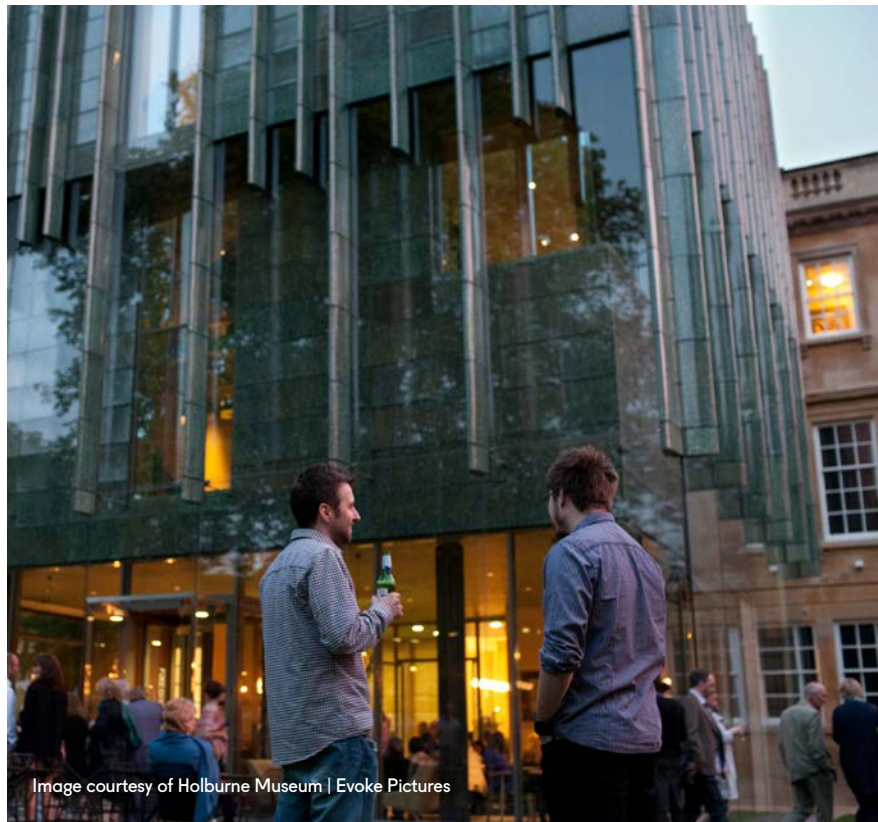


Image courtesy of Holburne Museum | Evoke Pictures



Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow © Robin Friend

# Aims and approaches

## Our aim: To grow your audiences through a shared vision

Our research was designed to find out how, by teaming up and collaborating, you may be able to find creative, cost-effective ways to engage new visitors – and take your organisation from venue to multidimensional experience.

We set out to investigate:

- What opportunities hubs present, with or without that label, among visiting audiences
- How these learnings can be acted upon to the benefit of individual museums and galleries and the sector as a whole



## Our approach

The research project comprised three stages:

### 1. Stakeholder research

Quantitative survey among cultural marketers

### 2. Visitor research

In-depth qualitative research using 12 focus groups comprised of different cultural consumers – Classically Cultured, Contemporary Cultured and Leisure Magpies – across four regions of the UK

### 3. Testing

Quantitative survey among cultural consumers to test significance of findings



Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Photo © Charlotte Graham

# Cultural consumers

Aims and approaches



Creative Quarter © Discover South Kensington

1

## Classically Cultured

Cultural consumers with a fairly traditional and classical repertoire

2

## Contemporary Cultured

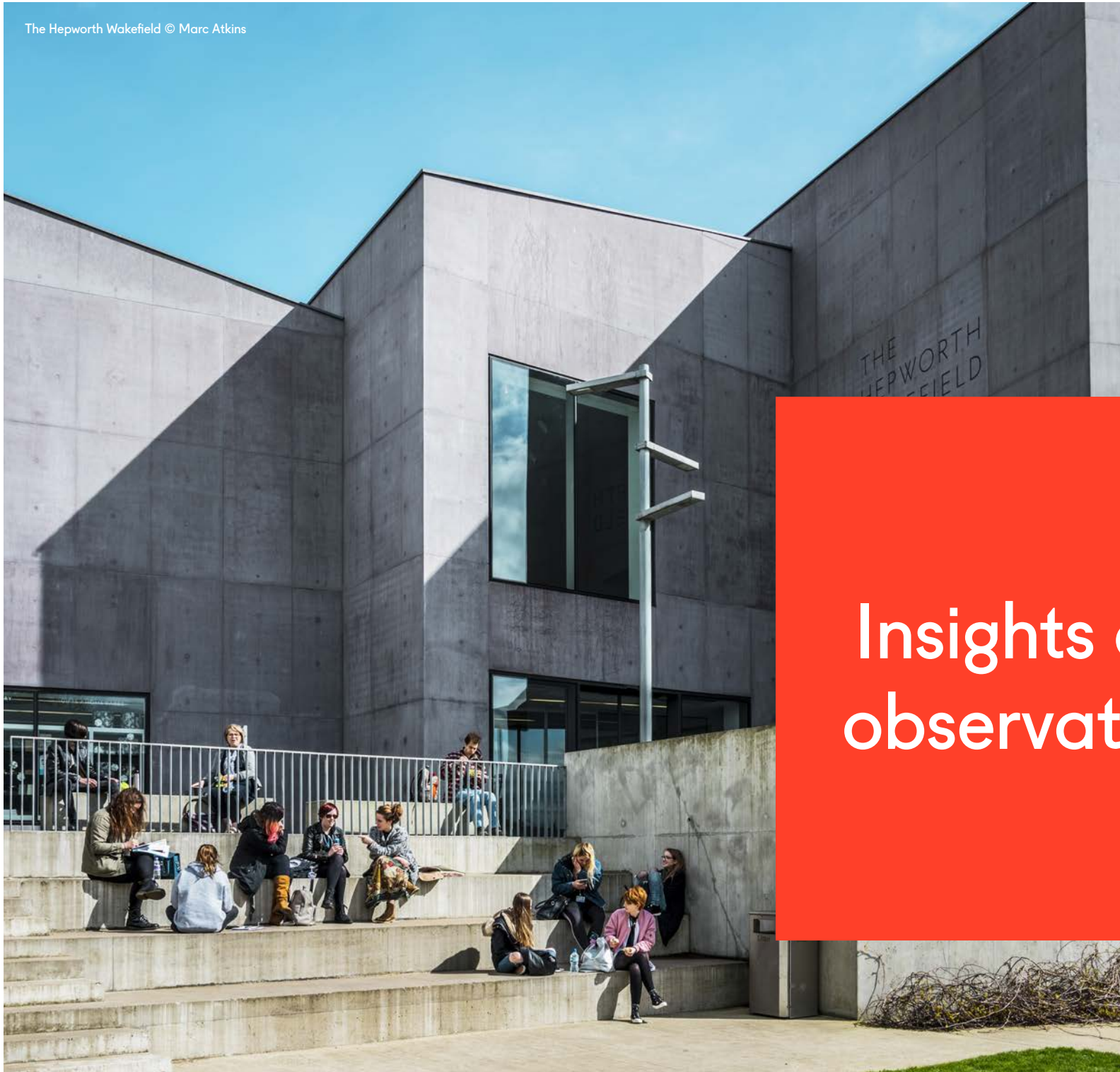
Cultural consumers with a voracious, diverse and progressive repertoire

3

## Leisure Magpies

More mainstream cultural consumers with a varied leisure repertoire

Aims and approaches



# Insights and observations





Insights and observations

Open Doors / Free Range, Old Truman Brewery, July 2017. Photo: Vincent Chapters

## Current engagement is varied

Our research found that, at this stage, even cultural marketers aren't fully engaged with the term 'cultural hub'.

In 2015 just over a third of people working in museum or gallery marketing departments claimed to be aware of the term in isolation. But when the concept was described there was more recall, and over half of marketers thought there were currently more than 10 cultural hubs in the UK.

Insights and observations

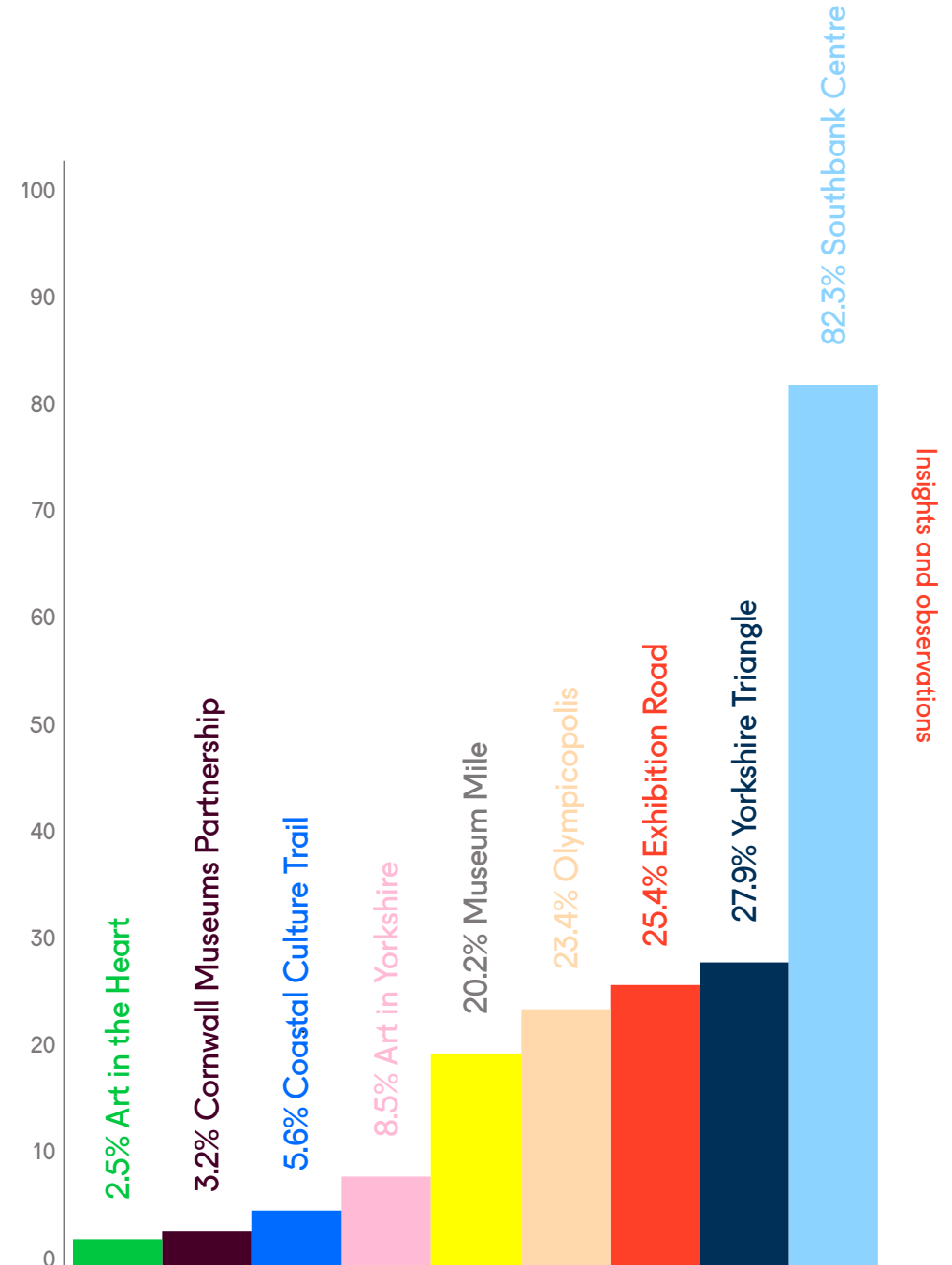
## The concept has real appeal

While the term 'cultural hub' isn't particularly confidently known by cultural consumers, the concept has significant appeal.

Among consumers, 42% say they are definitely not aware of the term and 46% say they think they are aware of it. Only 12% say they are definitely aware of it.

However, cultural consumers, particularly in London, do plan visits to multiple venues in a single visiting window. While they might not use the term, the concept is recognised – and attractive.

We asked: Which of the following cultural hubs are you aware of?



We asked: To what extent are you aware of the term 'cultural hub'?

Insights and observations



- 45.6% I think I'm aware of it
- 42.3% I am definitely not aware of it
- 12.1% I am definitely aware of it



Royal Ballet screening in Queens Gardens, Hull City of Culture, 2017 © Chris Pepper

Insights and observations

## Hubs can satisfy diverse interests

Cultural hubs comprising organisations with distinct and differentiated offerings can offer variety to visitors.

Meanwhile, thematic hubs such as Yorkshire Sculpture Triangle offer depth around a single subject and can also provide an opportunity to engage with smaller, less well-known venues in a grouping.

Ultimately, hubs can deliver volume of content for the voracious cultural consumer as well as encourage piecemeal and spontaneous engagement with a particular site.



Jonathan Borofsky, *Molecule Man*, 1990, Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Photo © Jonty Wilde

## Visitors want to 'culture stack'

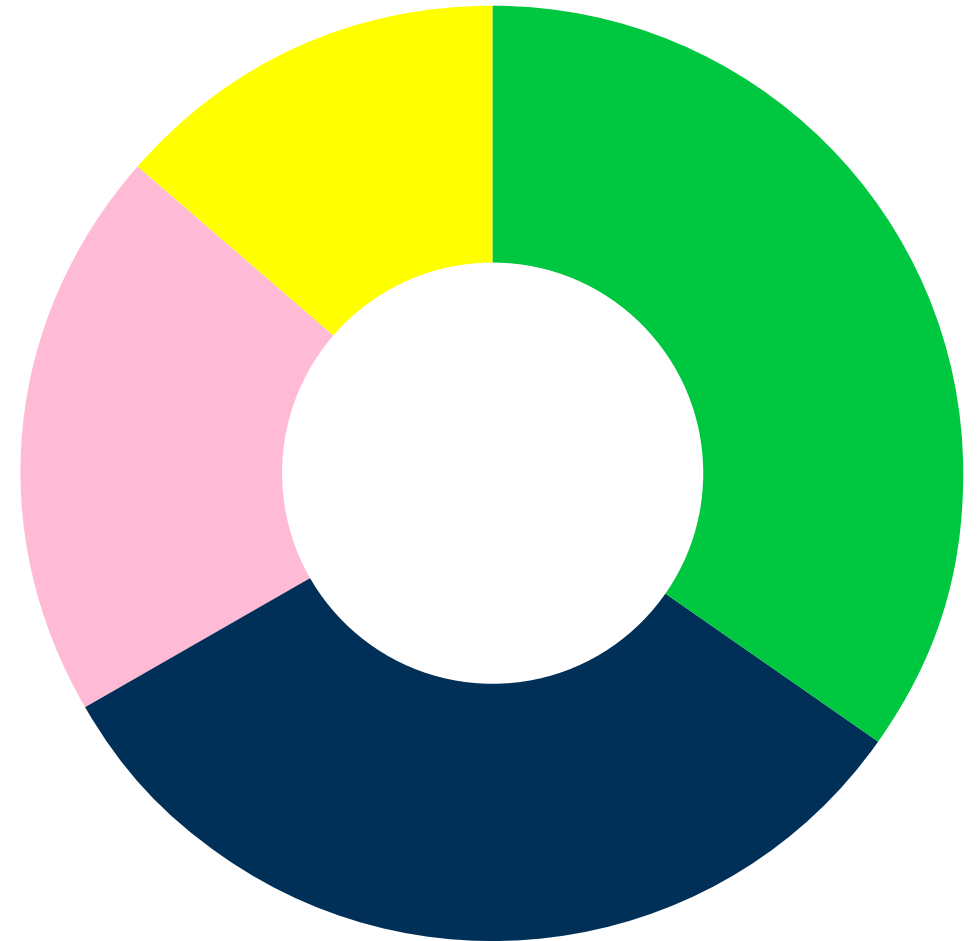
There is consensus around the ideal hub mix. Visitors expect at least one or two iconic, high-quality venues, which act as the main draw. They don't accept one single site or venue with a diverse cultural offering as a hub, although some organisations try to brand themselves as such.

Visitors want to 'culture-stack' – to engage with a number of venues during a single visit.

When visitors culture-stack, their engagement tends to be more around permanent collections than temporary,

paid-for exhibitions – for reasons of expense as well as an unwillingness to commit to several detailed exhibitions over a short period.

We asked: How appealing do you find a clustering of cultural venues and activities such as galleries, museums, performance venues and iconic architecture, etc?



- 32.1% Very appealing
- 29.6% Fairly appealing
- 12.4% Fairly unappealing
- 18.2% Extremely unappealing

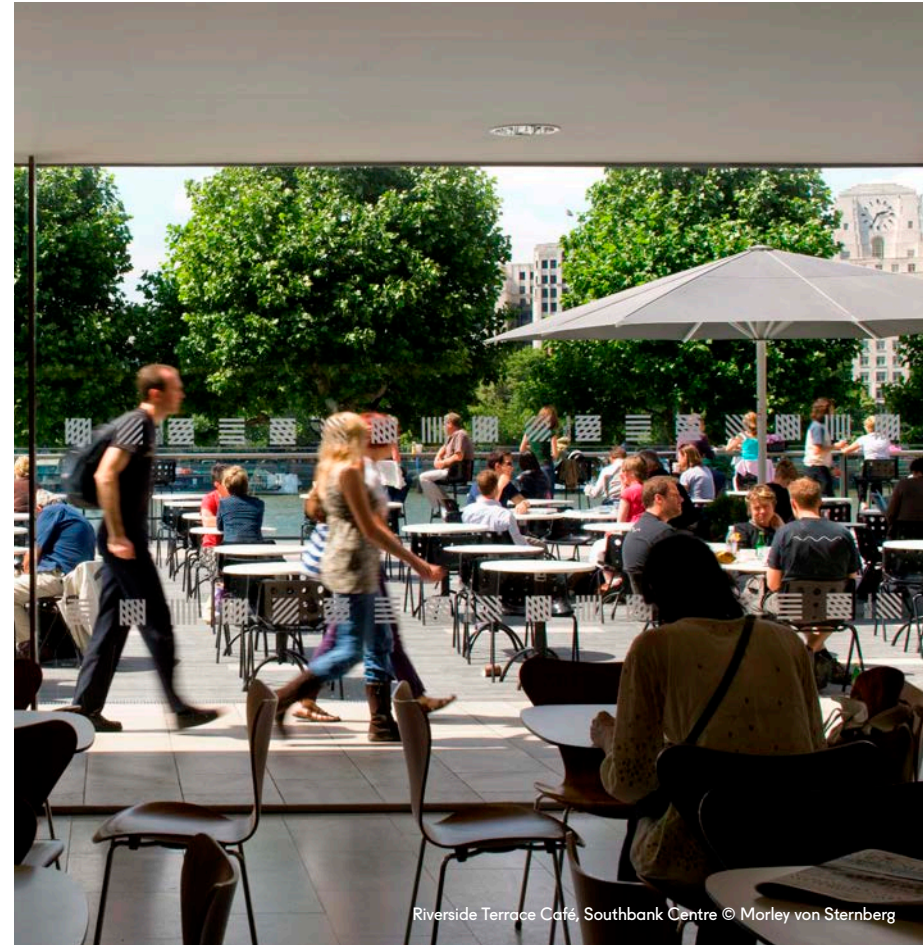
## Hubs can champion smaller venues

Cultural hubs encourage engagement with smaller, less well-known venues alongside well-established or even iconic organisations.

But while a hub may have a lead venue, it could also consist of a group of less prominent organisations that form an exciting mix of cultural offerings.

Cultural hubs aren't solely defined by 'landmarks'. Secondary attractions such as food and retail, architecture or street performers form an integral part of the offer.

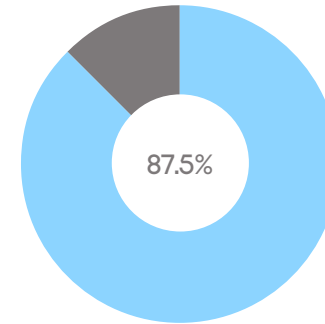
Moreover, visitors see hubs as fluid in their composition and expect them to be multifaceted. The energy of a hub, its sensorial elements such as music, food and drink and street art, and a sense of community are all integral.



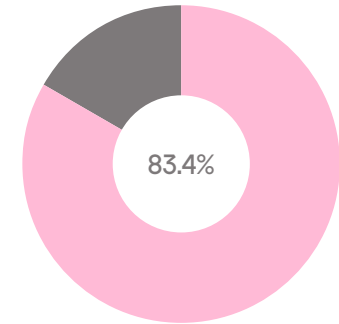
Riverside Terrace Café, Southbank Centre © Morley von Sternberg

*'You're probably drawn to a hub for one main thing but all the other bits have a role to play on the day – like supporting actors.'*

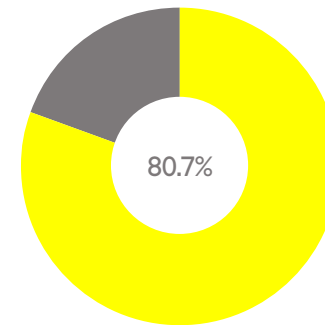
We asked: What do you particularly like about cultural hubs?



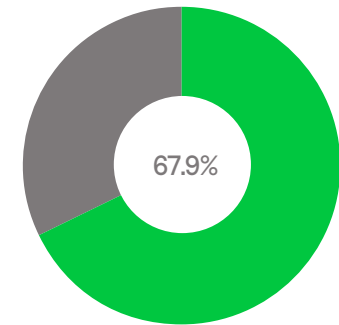
The mix of culture and social events



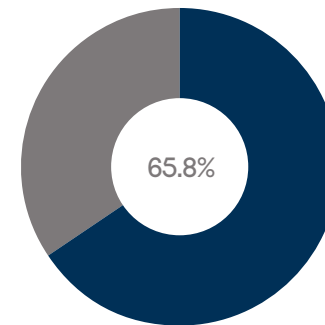
The diversity of venues



The number of cultural venues concentrated in a small area



The vibrancy and energy



The convenience of everything being easily accessible

## All venues should be walkable

For a cultural hub to work, it should be easy to 'join the dots'.

Anything beyond four cultural venues was dismissed by respondents as too big. If hubs become too unwieldy, either

because of the number of venues involved or the large geographical area they cover, they become irrelevant to consumers.

The acid test for any hub is if a visitor can explore it on foot. Journeying between different destinations needs to be economical, effortless and enjoyable.





## Visitors connect to a theme

Theming of ideas and content across hubs has considerable appeal, but the theme needs to be watertight and substantial.

A clear theme strengthens hubs' ties both internally and externally, making the offer feel more cohesive.

## People engage differently depending on where they live

Our research found that behaviour is dependent on where people are culturally active.

Principally, cultural consumers' behaviour is determined by whether they live in or outside London.



Jeremy Deller: *Joy in People* installation view, Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre, London. Photo © Linda Nyland

## London is a hotbed for hubs

Because of the proximity and concentration of cultural venues, hubs work well in London.



Exhibition Road, London © Discover South Kensington

Londoners use hubs to make the most of the capital's abundance of cultural venues – whether these hubs are formally working together, or are being created by the consumer themselves.

Visitors to London and tourists also use hubs to consume lots of cultural activities in a smaller visiting window, and to help them navigate the city's culture.

## Regional hubs have great potential

Overall, regionally there are significantly fewer areas with a concentration of cultural venues than in London – and even where there is a high density of museums and galleries, local consumers don't tend to culture-stack. If there are exhibitions at two galleries nearby, they will tend to go to each on a different occasion rather than combine their visits, responding: 'I don't need to do it all at once when it's on my doorstep'.



However, hubs can still work well outside London as they can embed a sense of regional and civic pride. This feeling is very powerful, and you may want to think about how you could harness it in your vision. Your hub could become a beacon for the area; something residents want to champion.

It could even encourage a reappraisal of the area. Promoting somewhere as a place of culture can lift previously entrenched barriers to visiting.

Finally, since they increase awareness of all attractions within them, hubs can signpost and facilitate cultural days out – helping shift people's preferences from simply visiting a museum or gallery to planning an itinerary for a cultural outing.

# Recommendations: how to create a cultural hub



## Define a distinctive brand

Word of mouth is by far the most influential means of communicating about a cultural hub.

Brand recognition is critical, so your hub needs a brand idea that clearly positions its offer, for example 'The Knowledge Quarter'.

To be credible, your hub has to genuinely live up to that brand idea. The idea should act as a checker to measure all programme and communications activity against.



Towner Gallery, Eastborne © Avant Photographic

## Speak with one voice

Our research found that simply using consistent branding as badging, while each venue communicates on its own, doesn't work.

Cultural consumers want to find out about an experience in its entirety; just listing the components isn't enough.

Your hub will have a cohesive proposition; a single thought in which it is rooted. It needs to be communicated clearly and with one voice across all participating venues.

## Be authentic

A hub needs to be legitimate, and its offer truthfully communicated.

When respondents were given some existing materials, they were critical of artists' representations that make venues look very similar or unrealistically close to each other.



## Communicate a sense of space

In marketing materials, it's helpful to give a sense of your hub's lively atmosphere and to visualise people on site. A bit of wit goes a long way and further humanises the hub and its venues.

All participating venues must communicate the existence of a hub, for example through flags or banners – but this should not be overbearing. Tourists find it helpful to see some indication that they are in a cultural quarter, but residents don't need this for any practical purpose.

The presence of these materials performs a branding and communication function only.

## Empower your visitors with tools to navigate

Cultural hubs need to be altruistic and flag up secondary attractions that will appeal to audiences, like architecture, food markets, refreshments and retail.

## Develop a dynamic digital presence

All audiences now use social media to plan cultural outings. Social platforms allow your hub venues to talk as one, particularly if you don't have a joint website, and allow you to deliver content and event messaging with immediacy.

To navigate these, audiences expect joint print materials such as posters and leaflets – and maps are an essential inclusion to describe the footprint of the hub and allow route-planning.

Your maps should be bespoke, and provide plenty of supporting detail such as scale, distance, journey times between venues, and parking.

Our research also showed that there is significant desire among consumers for a hub app that would detail programming, suggested itineraries and walks – similar to our Art Guide.

## Reward your visitors' loyalty

Your visitors are key to making a hub work. For it to become a genuine communal space, it needs to feel like one.

Our research found that it's important to reward your visitors for their participation.

Respondents react very positively to the notion of a loyalty card that involves all hub venues. When a certain number of check-ins at venues is reached, rewards are released – and these rewards should go beyond a free coffee, which is seen as too mundane and something high street coffee shops already offer.

If your loyalty card were a digital smart card, you could track user behaviour and preferences, and build bespoke offers for your visitors.





## 10 ways to develop a cultural hub:

1. Focus your offer around core venues, e.g. museums, galleries, performing arts venues
2. Embrace partners of all sizes and don't be afraid to reach out to divergent art forms
3. Be driven by a clear, organic idea that your offer has to measure up against
4. Be as diverse as possible, but communicate as a hub rather than as disparate entities with a shared logo
5. Be a brand, or at least have a brand name and use it to underpin your offer
6. Be altruistic: tell audiences what else they can do in the area, beyond the partners involved in your hub
7. Produce print materials that incorporate a map and practical details
8. Visually communicate a hub that is alive, and write copy with wit and personality
9. Go digital and use social media; consider developing an app
10. Reward loyalty to your hub and all its partners

### About Art Insights

Museums and galleries face a challenging landscape. Social, political and economic factors are impacting how they innovate, engage with their visitors and share both knowledge and collections.

With challenges come new possibilities. At Art Fund, we want to help inspire the way forward.

We have commissioned research to explore the potential for museums and galleries to harness change, and reach new audiences. Offering key insights and suggesting actions you can take in your own organisation, our reports focus on a number of current sector trends.

We hope these reports provide rigorous, practical advice, and we invite arts professionals to use them in shaping the future of their organisation and the sector as a whole.

### About Art Fund

Art Fund is the national charity for art.

We help UK museums and galleries to build and share collections, do more for their visitors and support the curators of the future.

To keep up to date with our initiatives, funding schemes and news, subscribe to our monthly Museum Bulletin at [artfund.org/bulletin](https://artfund.org/bulletin)

[artfund.org/supporting-museums](https://artfund.org/supporting-museums)

### About The Muse Strategy

Based in Soho, London, Muse create marketing, brand and audience strategies. With clients in multiple sectors across the world, Muse have worked with some of the most commercially successful and creatively awarded brands of modern times. Culture sector clients span Art Fund to ZSL London, and include the British Museum, Imperial War Museum London and the V&A.

[musestrategy.com](https://musestrategy.com)

