
COVID-19 Impact & Policy Bulletin 3

Re-opening Culture in World Cities:
adapting to the new reality

24 August 2020

Introduction and Overview

This is the third in a series of Bulletins summarising discussions taking place within the World Cities Culture Forum about the impact of COVID-19 and policy responses to it.

It draws on information shared between member cities and additional research and analysis covering:

- How world cities are responding to COVID-19 – in support of the cultural sector and culture's role in recovery
- Key challenges & opportunities for culture
- City actions & innovations
- Emerging patterns & regional variations
- Questions for city leaders

It is designed for: WCCF member cities; to inform broader global discussion on how best to respond to COVID-19; and plan for recovery and reinvention.

Our discussions have shown reopening culture is the beginning of a new and uncertain way of working. Cities are uniquely positioned to support organisations navigate this uncertainty.

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Reopening Culture in World Cities: adjusting to the new reality

WHAT CITIES CAN DO

Cities must listen, lead, co-ordinate, support

When to reopen

Consider safety but also business viability, audience experience and wider city impact.

Physical adjustments

Public health requires new ways of working, both inside and outside.

Manage attitudes

Visitor confidence varies widely, but is crucial to success.

Monitor & Review

Reopening is a process: restrictions can be relaxed or re-tightened.

Financial support

Support helps make reopening more viable.

Practical guides

Standard guidance is vital to safe operation.

Incentives

Voucher schemes and discounts can encourage public re-engagement.

Communication

Clear communication of regulations and visitor expectations is crucial.

Transport

Cycling and walking initiatives relieve pressure created by reopening.

Public realm

Support space for outdoor performance or crowd management.

Marketing campaigns

Cities have a common interest in saying they are open again.

Plan for uncertainty

Reopening may be the beginning of a longer process of disrupted activity.

Safety is not the only consideration...

Public safety comes first, but must also consider:

- Positive audience experience: crucial to sustain visitors long-term.
- Viable business case: visitor numbers are likely to be lower and costs higher. If the financial gap is too big, reopening is unviable.
- Manageable city impact: attracting audiences into the city must not strain transport systems or other infrastructure.

What can cities do?

- Financial relief helps make reopening business plans viable.
- WCCF's COVID-19 Response Tracker shows at least 32 WCCF members provided direct financial support to cultural organisations.
- Support both core operating costs, and COVID-19 adaptations. Barcelona launched a subsidy of 200,000 Euros for venues to adapt.
- Infrastructure adaptations help cities reopen safely, e.g. more space for cycling and walking. Paris announced 650km of new cycle-lanes.

Physical adjustments are essential...

Infection prevention in venues requires distancing and hygiene measures

- Reducing capacity and managing routes.
- Extending hours.
- Increasing cleaning.
- Timed tickets.
- Masks, temperature checks, health apps.
- Screens and contactless payment.
- Good ventilation or moving events outdoor.

What cities can do?

- Provide guidance on best safety practice. Seoul Foundation for Arts & Culture, prepared detailed 12 point theatre operation guidelines. Vienna and Los Angeles launched guidelines for cultural venues.
- Create space for culture in the public realm. Simple adjustments can help queuing and crowd management. Vienna is creating 25 stages across parks and other public spaces for the Kultursommer.

Attitudes must be managed...

Attitudes vary widely. Many potential audience members remain nervous.

What cities can do?

- Discounts and financial incentives: The Tour Shanghai App and Culture Tourism e-Passport includes 140 cultural ventures offering discounts, coupons and other incentives.
- Assurance schemes to build confidence in safety measures: San Francisco are introducing different sector kitemarks.
- Marketing campaigns: Barcelona launched a campaign for neighbourhood culture.
- Coordinated initiatives: Brussels launched a campaign covering:
 - Discounted 48 hour Brussels Card giving access to museums and other attractions.
 - Special label guaranteeing hygiene requirements.
 - National and international destination marketing campaigns

Review and adjust...

Re-opening may not be a one-off event with infection rates fluctuating. Rules may need to be tightened and relaxed.

- Safety guidelines may have several levels from closed to open as normal. This is challenging, especially for smaller organisations with less administrative resource.
- Future business plans need to account for multiple periods of disruption, not just a single period of closure with a gradual return to normal.

What cities can do?

- Communicate: Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture receives information directly from the national Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasure Headquarters. Venues wait for daily updates on the number of new COVID-19 cases confirmed to see if they can open.
- Plan long-term: Seoul is working on a second Seoul Artists Plan for 2021-25 looking at major issues like the response to disasters, continuity of artistic projects and artists support.

Questions for city leaders...

- Do we need targeted financial support for reopening?
- How can we make city infrastructure (eg. transport, public realm) work for reopening cultural institutions?
- How do we practically help smaller organisations with implementing public health procedures?
- How can city controlled spaces model safe reopening?
- What do we have to do to promote reopening venues and events?
- How should reopening cultural activity feed city marketing and promotion?
- Are our channels of communication agile enough for sudden changes to safety rules or guidelines?
- How do we plan for disruption into the medium term?

About World Cities Culture Forum

The World Cities Culture Forum is the leading network of senior policy-makers from 40 world cities providing global leadership on culture.

We are a collaborative network of influential city leaders championing culture across urban policy.

We enable city members to share experiences, develop knowledge and grow leadership.

This bulletin is part of the WCCF programme for 2020-21:
Response, Recovery, Reinvention

1. **Response** – Phase one responds to the current crisis cities are facing through weekly briefings, webinars, virtual events and analysis bulletins
2. **Recovery** – Phase two adapts and extends our existing programme to answer the central questions about recovery for culture in cities
3. **Reinvention** – Phase three looks to the future of culture in cities. What have we learnt? What are the new opportunities? What does city leadership look like?