

FACT SHEET 2: COMMUNITY EXHIBITION & SOCIAL VALUE

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Often run on a not-for-profit basis, screenings hosted by CSF members and their promoters create social value by bringing local people together in areas of the country where arts and cultural provision may otherwise be limited. This Fact Sheet examines the social purpose behind such activity, and the impact it has on communities



Introduction to social value

“Community Screen Forum’s activities are guided by recognition of the importance of film as a cultural experience, but also by the crucial role screen experiences can play in enhancing social engagement and connection, and supporting the vitality of communities around the United Kingdom.”

CSF web site

A defining characteristic of community exhibition is the desire among organisers (often volunteers) to provide a civic amenity for the enjoyment and benefit of local residents and visitors to the area.

This social purpose over-rides the profit motive of commercial cinema operators, driving everything from the choice of film programme and scheduling, to decisions around marketing, admission charges and the staging of events.

While cinemagoing can have intrinsic value as a cultural pastime, many CSF members

willingly acknowledge that their screenings are a means of drawing people together for reasons that go beyond film appreciation for its own sake.

“The film is nearly always the last thing on the list of reasons why audiences attended, with the social side being much more important.”

CSF member

In recent years, researchers and policy makers have shown increasing interest in this social aspect of community exhibition, despite the fact that funding from agencies like the British Film Institute (BFI) favours specific types of programming linked to their wider strategic priorities, notably in support of independent British and specialised (i.e. non-mainstream) films, rather than supporting community exhibition on the basis of the social benefits it can deliver.

A study conducted by Becky Innes and Jim Barratt, commissioned and published by the BFI in 2014 (*Community exhibition in the UK, 2014*), identified some common patterns around the particular social character of community exhibition, its responsiveness to local needs and circumstances, and the positive benefits of volunteering.

These themes were echoed in a more detailed analysis by the Social Value Lab, published by Regional Screen Scotland in 2016 (*Your Cinema, Your Community: The Experiences and Impact of Local Cinema in Scotland: An Exploratory Study*).

Drawing on extensive fieldwork with audiences and exhibitors, the report explores the full range of local cinema impacts in Scotland, identifying six domains where this influence is felt most keenly: culture, wellbeing, community, learning, local economy and heritage.

A follow-up Guide, issued in 2017, explains how exhibitors can gather evidence of the changes they bring about at individual and community levels in each of the six domains (to which was added 'environment').

“Local cinemas can play an important role in building social capital.

By this, we refer to the social interactions, trust, and shared standards of behaviour and expectations that enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other, and to knit the social fabric.”

Your Cinema, Your Community, Your Impact: A Guide to Measuring Performance and Social Value, 2017, Social Value Lab, Regional Screen Scotland
<http://bit.ly/2tPBgS5>

Social value in action

By recounting the testimony of Cine North promoters, the following case study helps to illustrate the social value of community exhibition under three broad headings: audiences, local community and volunteers.

About Cine North

Starting life in 2010 as one of three rural cinema pilot schemes funded by the UK Film Council, Cine North has since expanded its network of promoters across Yorkshire and Cumbria.

Led by the National Science and Media Museum, and working in partnership with Blaize (in Yorkshire) and Arts Out West and Eden Arts (in Cumbria) with support from Film Hub North, Cine North aims to improve access to cinema in isolated rural and hard to reach urban across the North of England.

Cine North supports over 50 promoters with a range of services including equipment loans, film booking, marketing and technical support, and volunteer training. In 2016, Cine North promoters delivered over 300 screenings, attracting 13,000+ admissions, and achieved an average occupancy rate of 46% (above the norm for commercial cinemas).



Figure 1: Cine North promoter locations

Audiences

The universal appeal of film makes it an ideal focal point for activity capable of drawing people from across the social spectrum to communal events.



“The most joyous part recently has been to see young and old [people] come together to enjoy The Sound of Music with an age range of 6 years to 90 years.”
Bampton, Cumbria

“Because I always insert an interval during the film, this is much appreciated by the vast majority of my audiences as a time to chat with friends and neighbours over a cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit.”
Swanland, East Riding of Yorkshire

“By varying the type of film you alter who attends, which helps people interact who do not necessarily know each other in the village.”
Cononley, North Yorkshire

Furthermore, community exhibitors can help to address social and cultural exclusion by overcoming some of the physical and economic

barriers that prevent people attending commercial cinemas.

"We are committed to keeping the ticket price low in our village to make the event accessible to all."

Lowther, Cumbria

This brings particular benefit to older age groups, families and those on low incomes who might otherwise struggle with the cost, practicalities or logistics of travelling to their nearest commercial venue.

"Many of our audience had long given up 'going to the pictures' as a night out because of travel or disability, especially in the winter, but can now resume this form of entertainment in a local, friendly, sociable environment."

Bampton, Cumbria



Some Cine North promoters actively encourage audiences to engage with the stories behind the making of films and the deeper ideas and themes they explore, through Q&As with local filmmakers and talks by other authorities.

Links with local schools have also been established, highlighting the potential for community exhibitors to contribute to learning in formal education settings.

"We ran a lecture on French Modernism prior to showing The Rebel with Tony Hancock. We also let the local school know when we showed Throne of Blood, the Japanese film based on Macbeth. We had a few young people come who were doing it at school."

Appleby, Cumbria

Local communities

Feedback from Cine North promoters and audiences consistently reveals how much

screening events mean to them in terms of strengthening community spirit.

"I've heard that our film screenings can be the topic of discussion on the local weekly bus. Also at church coffee mornings, people talk about the films, ask questions and share their thoughts, so it's certainly adding a positive dimension to the social life of the village."

Bampton, Cumbria

Audiences often feel a keen sense of loyalty to their local community exhibitor, fostering a shared sense of place and identity, as well as engendering civic pride.

"There's an element of village pride in having a film night. It's one of the more visible events as seen from neighbouring villages and I think it's seen as reflecting well on the liveliness of our community."

Burton in Lonsdale, North Yorkshire

The forging of local connections can be assisted by the choice of film programme.

For example, the inclusion of archive works by some Cine North promoters has proved popular, leading to a deeper understanding and appreciation of local history while keeping folk memories alive and highlighting the existence of other physical collections in the area.

"As a result of showing Appleby on Film, [the North West Film Archive] has been contacted by a local person who has given them their family's collection of cine films of the Appleby area. The film show also led to a renewed interest in the photographic archive of the Appleby Records Society, held by the Appleby-in-Westmorland Society."

Appleby, Cumbria

Equally, films either shot in the vicinity, or that recount local stories or episodes, can also draw in audiences who appreciate the sense of connection with their immediate surroundings.

"Any film with a local or Northern connection is always popular. If I could add 'Yorkshire', 'Sheep', or 'Dales' to any film title it would be a sell-out. Addicted to Sheep, Lad: A Yorkshire Story etc. were extremely popular."

Pateley Bridge, North Yorkshire

There is also ample scope for links to develop between community exhibitors and other local interest groups, for mutual support and benefit, thereby contributing to the rich variety of village life.

"We work with the Local History Group to select films relevant to their interests."
Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria

"As a celebration event for the local Guides to include Brownies, it went very well. The Guides used [the screening] as part of their community work helping the Brownies."
Bramham, West Yorkshire

Just as importantly, participation in events hosted by community exhibitors can bring financial benefits to other community amenities, like village halls, pubs and shops, in the form of much needed revenue from venue hire, refreshment sales and increased custom around screenings.

Indeed, residents will often attend events in recognition of the wider benefits that support for local amenities brings to the community.

"The Floral Hall was scheduled for closure and demolition as [...] it was a loss making local facility. The Cinema now makes ongoing profits which are a key element of the Floral Hall's income and ensuring profitability."
Hornsea, East Riding of Yorkshire



Volunteers



In addition to the enjoyment of hosting film events, volunteering can promote social inclusion among those taking part, and combat feelings of personal isolation all too common in small and remote communities, particularly among older adults.

"I'm a newcomer to the village so organising the film night has been a great way to meet the village and earn brownie points!"
Burton in Lonsdale, North Yorkshire

Volunteering can also help to develop new skills and showcase existing talents, which can, in turn, build confidence and self-esteem.

"Certainly gives the chance for people to take responsibility & showcase their skills (e.g. cooking, organising,) for the benefit of us all. There is a sense of achievement."
Bampton, Cumbria

"There are instances of people who have [become] involved where it may have helped confidence/self esteem. A person with Parkinson's felt confident taking the tickets. Another person not normally over confident going into unusual social situations did feel happy serving behind the bar."
Cononley, North Yorkshire

**For further details about Cine North see:
www.cinenorth.co.uk**

Check out...

- **Fact Sheet 1** for an introduction to community screen network activity across the UK
- **Fact Sheet 3** for details about film licensing arrangements