

ANNEX TWO: ESTIMATED AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT FOR COVENTRY 2021



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PREPARED BY

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The following is a report from **Indigo Ltd**, who were commissioned by the Evaluators to review and verify the audience engagement figures for the UK City of Culture 2021. For transparency, the data methods and verification process are presented alongside the results.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Coventry UK CoC 2021 achieved over 1 million points of engagement with audiences. This figure has been derived through mixed methods - mainly through ticket allocations, but also other methods for free and unticketed events, and online activity. The decision to ticket as much of the programme as possible results in a higher degree of accuracy than could be expected with a non-ticketed approach, but it is still important to recognise that there are some limitations in using this method.

Robust questioning and examination have been used to understand and verify the validity of the numbers, and the limitations of the data have been examined and explained.

Whilst there is no fail-safe way of guaranteeing final numbers, I can verify that the numbers used in the production of the Evaluation report are as accurate a reflection of the level of engagement as can be expected.

USING TICKETING DATA TO ESTIMATE TOTAL AUDIENCE FIGURES

How reliable is ticketing data as a proxy for attendance numbers or people?

In many arts and cultural organisations, it is relatively easy to calculate how many people have engaged with activities simply by knowing how many tickets have been issued or sold for an event. So, a theatre, for example, can rely on the 'number of tickets sold in a year' as a reasonable proxy for the number of attendances they have annually. Of course, there will always be people who don't turn up, having bought tickets, but for paid-for events, these are generally few-and-far-between, and therefore unlikely to affect the overall figures significantly.

If we wanted to be more precise, however, we could use 'scanned tickets' data – so that only those who attended, and had their tickets scanned, are counted as 'attendances'. In the early days of scanners, the speed with which staff could scan attendees into the venue was problematic, and therefore many were 'waved through' without being scanned – rendering this data meaningless. However, ticket scanning technology is improving rapidly, with many sporting venues, for example, insisting on scanned ticket entry as the only valid way of gaining admittance to events (made much easier if attendees have to pass through turnstiles). Anecdotally, however, relying on scanned data as the most accurate reflection of attendance for most cultural events is still problematic, as outlined below, and therefore tickets issued is usually the preferred measure.

Early on in the planning process the Trust took the decision to issue tickets for as many events and activities as possible, whether free or charged.

It was considered that this would allow them to:

- Count how many people had engaged
- Gather valuable postcode data for further profiling (as demonstrated in the ACORN Segmentation section within the Headline Measures in Part Three: Delivery of UK CoC 2021 in the final evaluation report).

However, they soon discovered there are conditions in which using ticketing or scanned data, may be problematic, and not give them the true picture. In addition, there are other factors at play that need to be considered in reporting accurate engagement figures for an event of this type:

1. Free Events

When tickets are issued for free events, two things happen that can make the ticketing data unreliable:

- i) People issued with tickets don't turn up – and if tickets are free, this is far more likely than in the theatre example above.
- ii) People without tickets arrive and expect to be admitted, especially if capacity isn't at its limit due to i)

Measures used to mitigate this at City of Culture included:

- **Scanners** being used to scan tickets issued, to try and gain a picture of the % of those having been issued tickets that did in fact arrive. (However, the technology proved challenging, wasn't used at all events, and the speed at which staff needed to give entry to attenders meant that this could not be fulfilled. Also, some of the events were hyper-local outdoor events, meaning that reliable Wi-Fi and data infrastructures were not always available.) Where it was achieved, the Monitoring and Data Manager estimated that approx. on average 50-60% of tickets issued became attendances.
- **Staff** on the ground keeping a 'count' of those admitted without tickets, so that those figures could be added back into the ticketing data after the event. This approach is reliant on access staff being briefed fully, on adequate systems/processes to record this data, and the figures supplied back to the ticketing manager in a timely manner. However, these processes weren't always followed, particularly adding the numbers back into the ticketing totals after the event, making the data unreliable.
- **Clicker counts** at every entrance point of the event, to estimate actual attendance, in lieu of using either ticketing or scanned data. The Trust deployed this method at larger free events, but this meant having clickers at every possible entrance point, and for smaller events this wasn't always possible. Where clicker counts were used to verify actual on the ground attendance at free events, attendance estimates were adjusted, and these numbers were used instead of the tickets issued figure.

The final numbers for in person points of engagement have been based on tickets issued for ticketed events and are therefore subject to a level of unreliability as outlined above. However, the adjustments made post-hoc when clicker counts were used and a reasonable assumption that the 30% 'drop off' in attendance for free events vs tickets issued is likely to be at least balanced by the additional attenders who arrived without tickets (otherwise unrecorded in the attendances) make this figure as reliable an estimate as can be reached.



Image Credit: Joe Bailey

2. Tickets vs People

Even if we can count the actual number of attenders at an event accurately, when aggregated over the course of the year, this does NOT necessarily equate to the total number of people who engaged.

One of the targets of the City of Culture, for example, was to encourage 80% of local residents to engage with culture three or more times in a twelve-month period.¹ So, if one person attended three events, they would be counted three times.

Whilst it has become common practice for an arts organisation to say they attract '500,000 audiences per year', what they mean is that there were 500,000 attendances, which may have included some people attending more than once. They can therefore only accurately report on the number of **people** this equates to by knowing the average **frequency** of these attenders.

Indigo's evaluation of Festival 2022², for example, found that whilst overall attendances were reported as 2.5m (p9), this equated to only an estimated 800,000 'unique attenders' (p69). (This was calculated by applying data from surveys asking how many events/activities people had attended at the festival.)

It is important, therefore, to understand what is being reported in these figures, and Coventry's Evaluation approach has been consistent in using the term audience 'points of engagements' throughout, rather than 'people' to make this clear.

3. Direct vs Indirect Attendance

The concept of 'direct' vs 'indirect' attendance is an important one when it comes to measuring engagement with a large-scale cultural event, such as City of Culture, especially when it includes non-chargeable events happening in the public realm.

If part of the delivery is a public artwork, in a particular location, is it legitimate to count everyone who walks past that artwork as having 'engaged' with it? If not, then what does 'engagement' mean, and how do we measure it?

The concept of counting 'direct' and 'indirect' attendance was developed in Indigo's evaluation of Festival 2022. It assumes that 'indirect' attendances are those where someone may be encountering the work or event, but only in passing, or indirectly as part of something else they were doing or attending. 'Direct attendances' are those where a person has engaged directly with the cultural activity or event deliberately.

All ticketing data is being treated as 'direct' attendance in this context, as obtaining a ticket and attending a specific event show intent and direct engagement.

However, there will have been a number of other engagements across the UK CoC 2021 activities that included both direct and indirect attendances – see online engagement below as an example.



¹ https://warwick.ac.uk/research/partnerships/place-based-research/impact-value/researchresources/city_of_culture_public_bid_2018.pdf – p9

² <https://www.birmingham2022.com/festival/evaluations>

4. Educational and Home-based Participation

Engagement from school children in school settings or from people engaging at home is not included in the audience ‘points of engagement’ figures.

There was engagement from 111 out of the 129 schools across the city. In total, 86% of the nurseries, schools, academies, colleges and further education establishments engaged with the programme. There was further engagement from schools in Warwickshire, who used the UK CoC 2021 programme as an opportunity to reflect on a range of key societal issues and themes, their connection to the city and West Midlands region and their own wellbeing.

The Arts Education Manager kept a log of the schools but the records did not count or show the number of pupils who engaged.

There were also home-based activities, such as Window Wanderland, which involved around 600 households for the second iteration of the project which took place during the UK CoC 2021 year. These have not been recorded in the figures.

5. Online vs In-person Attendances

City of Culture happened during the Covid pandemic, and it’s fair to say that very few people anticipated the need to account for ‘online’ attendances before 2020.

However, some of the artistic activity for the UK CoC 2021 was moved online or had options to engage with online. These included projects such as Coventry Moves (June 2021) and Our Wilder Family (May 2022).

None of this activity was ‘ticketed’, as it was all offered free to view on YouTube and Facebook, and in the same way that we have applied ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ to attendances, we have adjusted viewing figures for online activity so that only unique views are counted as audience ‘engagements’.

An independent broadcast study undertaken by MTM³ calculated that as of 5/09/22 there had been total views of 869,438 for YouTube and 6.8million for Facebook - hence a total video view count of 7.6million plus.

In order to calculate the number of ‘direct’ engagements, the Evaluation team have only counted:

- YouTube – unique views only - 86,142 (1% of the total views)
- Facebook – unique views over 60 seconds (unless the content is less than 60 seconds, in which case it includes those who watched 3 seconds or more) – 241,961 (4% of the total views)
- It is also important to note that the content included in these figures was artistic output and did not include promotional material such as trailers and teasers.

In addition, there were other sources of online viewing data:

Our Wilder Family offered:

- a ‘watch online’ portal, on the City of Culture website, which attracted 20,428 live views [figure provided by Celestial to the Trust]
- a BBC stream, which attracted 9,000 direct views [figure provided by the BBC to the Trust]
- a BBC Live link, which attracted 23,000 direct views [figure provided by the BBC to the Trust]

Coventry Moves had its own dedicated web page which embedded streamed content from Facebook and YouTube, of which we have attributed as ‘direct’ views 75% of the unique views, from people who watched at least 20% of the content – 135,588.

	Total Views	Total ‘Direct’ Views	Notes
YouTube	869,438	86,142	All unique views
Facebook	6.8m	241,961 (excluding Coventry Moves)	Unique views > 60 secs (or >3 secs for material under 1 min)
Our Wilder Family	52,428	52,428	All direct views
Coventry Moves Facebook ⁴	500,000+	135,588	75% of total unique views, watched >20% of content
Total online engagements		516,119	

³ MTM: Coventry City of Culture 2021-22 Broadcast Evaluation / mtmlondon.com
MTM London (2023) Coventry UK City of Culture 2021-2022 Broadcast Evaluation, Available at: <https://coventry21evaluation.info/traditional-and-digital-broadcasting/> (Accessed: 12 June 2023).

⁴ Data logged through Facebook Analytics for the weekend of 5th/6th June 2021 identified 180,784 unique views of Coventry Moves content on Facebook, to eliminate any potential double counting i.e., a single user engaging on multiple devices, the final figure is only 75% of this total.

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6. Centralised, Outsourced and Distributed Ticketing

City of Culture used a combination of centralised, outsourced and distributed ticketing channels

a) Centralised

Having taken the decision to ticket every activity (as discussed above), one of the main aspirations for Coventry City of Culture year was to develop a single portal from which audiences could find information, and book tickets for any event or activity within the year. A website which listed all the events centrally, would allow people to book for any event, in any location via that channel and in a single transaction. This was then to be integrated with an in-house CRM system, allowing City of Culture to communicate with people based on their location (e.g., were they 'locals'), interests (based on what kinds of events they booked for) and frequency.

It would also allow City of Culture to have accurate and up to date information on ticket sales and ensure direct access to postcode and behavioural data.

b) Outsourced

In scoping the options to deliver this approach, City of Culture considered having an in-house ticketing team, but instead opted to outsource the ticketing to the Ticket Factory, supported by one in-house Head of Ticketing at City of Culture. This therefore negated the need for the City of Culture to develop its own ticketing infrastructure, thereby reducing time and risk.

c) Distributed

However, there were a handful of venues who operated their own ticketing: Belgrade Theatre, Warwick Arts Centre, Compton Verney and the Assembly Festival Gardens. These were established venues/operations who already had their own ticketing and CRM systems, and who wanted to retain data on customers for both marketing and customer experience reasons. (e.g., capturing access requirements).

In order for us to be confident of the accuracy of ticketing data from these various channels, we had access to:

- Raw ticketing data from the Ticket Factory – these came straight from the box office system and can therefore be verified.
- Box office reports from the Belgrade Theatre and Warwick Arts Centre – similarly these have been verified.
- Visitor numbers data from Compton Verney, supplied from their own visitor figures.
- Visitor numbers from the BBC⁵ for the Radio 1 Big Weekend.
- Box office reports from Assembly Festival Gardens for 2021 – these were verified by viewing box office system reports.
- Box office reports from AFG for 2022 were not available due to ongoing payment/contractual issues between AFG and the Trust. However, these have been estimated using the ongoing sales vs targets report that the Trust used throughout the year.⁶
- Internal 'tracking' sales vs targets sheets, maintained by the Head of Ticketing.

⁵ These were supplied by the BBC to Coventry City Council and BBC website reports would suggest these numbers are correct: information on the BBC website states that Sat/Sun were both sold out, that capacity for each day was 39,500, and that the capacity for Friday was 8,000. This would make a total capacity of 87,000, but as we know Friday did not sell out, the figures supplied of 84,000 seem reasonable. Information, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220406204821/https://www.bbc.co.uk/backstage/bigweekend/tickets/> and <https://web.archive.org/web/20220327043507/https://www.bbc.co.uk/backstage/bigweekend/friday> (accessed 16 March 2023).

In-person attendances		Data Source
Ticket Factory	187,861	From Ticket Factory raw data
Warwick Arts Centre	4,579	From WAC Spektrix reports
Belgrade Theatre	11,182	From Belgrade Theatre Spektrix reports
AFG 2021	76,594	From Assembly box office
AFG 2022	18,000	From Sales vs Targets report
Compton Verney	12,874	From Compton Verney visitor figures
Radio 1 Big Weekend	84,000	From BBC/Coventry City Council
Total estimated in-person attendances	395,090	

⁶ This [tweet](https://twitter.com/AssemblyGardens/status/1565744896077611008) from Assembly indicates that total audience figures for 2021 and 2022 were 140,000. From our 2021 figures, this would suggest that 2022 attendances in total were 63,406, of which we have estimated (from the sales/targets record-ed) 18,000 is a conservative estimate of those who attended events that fell within the City of Culture delivery period (April – June 2022, the Legacy team within the Trust came into effect from 1st July 2022). Tweet, available at: <https://twitter.com/AssemblyGardens/status/1565744896077611008> (accessed 16 March 2023).

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7. Unticketed Points of Engagement

There were a number of events that were not ticketed, and so other methods were used to count attendees or estimate attendance. Events where the Trust was responsible for counting attendees, used clicker counts, operated by Trust staff, and supplied back to the Monitoring and Data Manager immediately after each event; other events had pre-registrations, or used a count of how many information booklets they distributed to attendees as a proxy for attendance; finally some projects relied upon counts provided by the event organisers or cultural partners, reported to the Trust, for example events which formed part of Coventry Opens where venues reported engagement numbers to the Coventry Opens Project Co-ordinator.

The table below shows the counts from each type of counting input:

In-person attendances	
Attendances from events with Clicker counts	76,734
Attendances based on pre-registrations	209
Attendances based on number of booklets handed to attendees	549
Attendances based on data supplied by partners to the Trust	15,866
Attendances based on data supplied to the Coventry Opens Project Co-ordinator	4,368
Total estimated unticketed points of engagement	97,726



8. Total Estimated Audience Points of Engagement for Coventry 2021

The total estimated audience points of engagement are summarised in the table below:

In-person ticketed attendances	395,090
In-person unticketed attendances	97,726
Online attendances	516,119
Total audience points of engagements	1,008,935

I can verify that these figures are a reliable and reasonable estimate of the total audience points of engagement.

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