

DEMOS

report

Bidding for a competition that doesn't exist!

How Cornwall imagined a Region of
Culture and found a new future.

A brief report outlining the findings of the
Cornwall Region of Culture Campaign.

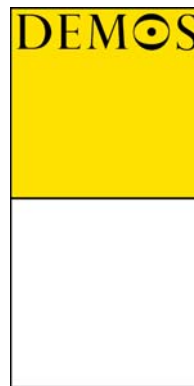
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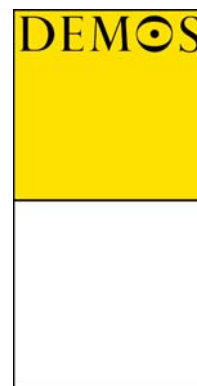
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1. Context

This report is based on an analysis of the outputs from the Cornwall Region of Culture campaign that took place during 2006. The campaign hopes firstly to convince the European Commission to create a new designation for “Regions of Culture” mirroring the existing Capitals of Culture scheme, and secondly to establish Cornwall as the first “region of culture”. In addition to the outputs, the report draws on a discussion with leaders of workshops that took place during the campaign. The outputs analysed included:

- A quantitative and qualitative analysis of responses to a questionnaire that aimed to establish what “culture” meant to people in Cornwall.
- A video of the project. The video included footage of 32 different workshops that took place with different groups of people across the region. It also featured various different outputs from these workshops including video diaries, songs and dances.
- A video of a discussion between different cultural sector and policy making leaders in Cornwall.
- Various different inputs to the Cornwall Region of Culture website. These included images of what culture in Cornwall meant to people and related discussions.
- Press coverage from the local media.
- Correspondence between Cornwall Arts Marketing and members of the public giving feedback on the project.

The following report provides a brief outline of the links between different responses to the project and makes suggestions as to how they can be taken forward.

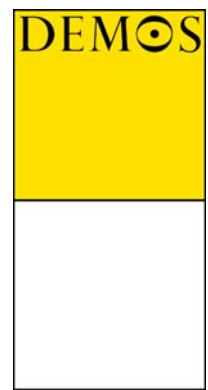
1. Bidding for a Competition that doesn't Exist

Cornwall operates on a different time signature to the rest of the United Kingdom. Its physical isolation has provided the foundations for a distinct identity for thousands of years - most people entering Cornwall arrive by bridge over the River Tamar, or at a coastal port. Cornwall famously has its own language, traditions and some of the most iconic scenery in Britain. Significantly, despite having some of the oldest industrial traditions in the world, Cornwall never urbanised, giving it a balance of urban and rural unseen elsewhere in the UK.

But despite its comparative isolation, Cornwall has been defined by its relationship with the world outside. While coastal tourism has declined across the UK, Cornwall has remained a stubbornly popular attraction. During the summer months its population increases from 500,000 to 800,000. Over the last 25 years, for many, regular holidays in Cornwall have morphed into second home ownership. The winners are those with houses to sell, but for others, second home owners are seen as bad for community life, bad for local first time buyers and for some they play into a perception that “Cornish Culture” is under attack.

Cornwall's historical isolation, distinctive heritage and mixture of insiders and outsiders boil down to “a different way of doing things”. This approach to life sits at the heart of culture in Cornwall - some people believe it to be under threat, for others it's what makes taking a holiday in Cornwall attractive. It sits at the heart of why people move to the region, why people want their ashes scattered there and why the Cornish Diasporas are still so well connected across the UK and around the globe.

It has also driven a consortium of cultural and creative organisations to mount a campaign for the European Commission to recognise Cornwall as a “region for culture”. Added to this it has informed the way that the campaign has been conducted. Through a range of different activities in different institutions across Cornwall, a website and a questionnaire, the campaign has sort to get at the heart of what it is that people like about Cornwall, where they find pride and what they think is distinctive and special about it. It rested on open-ended questions that have produced a plethora of different responses.



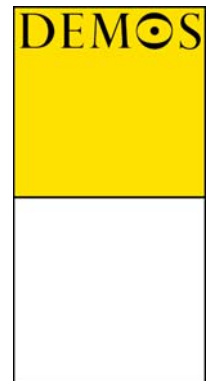
The exercise has been designed to inform the culture that Cornwall will showcase and develop during its campaign to be recognised as a Region of Culture. The project has appreciated that since people are at the heart of the culture of Cornwall, they need to be a part of communicating it. To coin the marketing parlance; the culture of Cornwall is a *collaborative brand*. The impressions, thoughts and feelings that people have about Cornwall cannot be conveyed or summarized by one person, object or building. Rather, the communication of the soul and culture of Cornwall as a region can only come from the active involvement and participation of its people.

In the world of urban policy, bid-processes for major events are seen as good in themselves. Bidding is seen as a way of forcing conversations between different public bodies to happen that might otherwise be avoided - a catalyst to future railroads, bridges and buildings. However, when bids fail, the impetus often begins to fall away. Given that the organisations involved in Cornwall's campaign are effectively bidding in a competition that doesn't exist, this will not be such an easy option. The campaign, if successful or not will need to lead to something.

The project to find out what culture means to Cornwall is therefore not just about applying to be recognised as a Region of Culture but is about the next phase of social, economic and cultural development in the region. Beyond informing a bid process, the project has the potential to inform:

- How Cornwall communicates with the world around it,
- How culture is developed and exchanged within Cornwall,
- What kind of people it needs and wants to attract, to live, work and visit Cornwall
- How organisations in the region will grow and support one another
- How individuals and organisations will respond to the major problems of our age; climate change, support for lifelong learning, education of children, how to care for the elderly, the poor and the sick.

The application to become a Region of Culture may partly be about securing further financial investment for Cornwall, but it is primarily an opportunity to think about what kind of "inward investment" Cornwall needs. If the organisations involved in the campaign are seeking to change aspirations and create vibrant communities in Cornwall, it is unlikely that this will come through financial sources alone.



3. Culture and People in Cornwall

The project to find out what culture meant to people in Cornwall consisted of a series of different exercises ranging from interactive “pods” that toured different cultural organisations, to a website asking people to submit pictures of what culture in Cornwall meant to them.

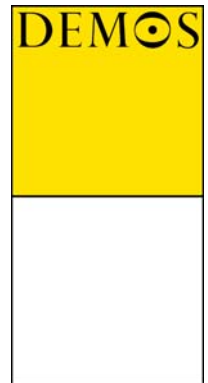
There was no one uniform methodological process deployed in the project. This provided many different routes for people to participate in the project creating a rich evidence base, expressed in many different ways. But on the flip-side, it also created some issues when coming to look at the information¹.

Diversity of Responses

Given the open-ended nature of many of the questions asked during the project, the responses tended to be wide-ranging and inconsistent. For example, some people responded to the website by sending in pictures of landmarks, scenery and objects, others took pictures of the themselves, while others just used the comments as an opportunity to talk to each other, not necessarily about Cornwall.

Layers of Interpretation

In addition to the sheer diversity of responses, some of the materials analyzed had placed a layer of interpretation onto thoughts that people expressed about culture in Cornwall. Video footage had been edited, while there were also analyses of questionnaires. Although this made knowledge manageable, it was difficult to separate the interpretation of the “editor” from what was being expressed i.e. is the video a creative response from a singular film-maker or a collected response from thousands of people across Cornwall?



¹ If this work is to be the basis for further comparative studies, in other areas around the United Kingdom and further a field it is important that where possible the same questions are used; the questions in the questionnaire would provide a good starting point for a comparative study, incorporating the suggestions made in the qualitative analysis.

Status of Responses

In addition it was also difficult to ascertain the “status” of different contributions. The words “Cornwall” and “culture” are clearly emotive terms in Cornwall, and may have drawn disproportionately strong voices from some quarters. For example, voices of people talking about the “traditional customs” of Cornwall were particularly strong. On the website, some contributors had sought to “vote-up” certain pictures, making it difficult to see how much importance should be attached to different responses. Likewise, given the grounding of the exercise largely in workshops in cultural institutions, this may have also influenced the voice of the project.

With such disparate sources of information there is no possible way of saying; “people said X, which means X”. We subsequently used Grounded Theory to isolate patterns in the data and information².

People talked about culture in Cornwall as museums, art-galleries, crafts, scenery, village culture, their families, how they felt about tourists, how tourists felt about locals, their school, their friends, global problems and grounded theories. Many of these responses challenged some of the correlations between background and opinion. For example, locals tended to be more tolerant of tourists than tourists themselves.

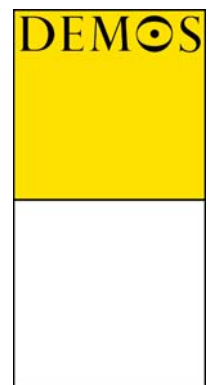
Beneath the breadth of responses sat several different ways of talking about culture. The basis of these were two distinctions.

Universal Vs Located Culture

People either spoke about culture as belonging to specific places, or as something that could be used to understand many different places. So, when asked what culture in Cornwall meant to them, some people responded by talking about the language, customs and symbols that they believed were particular to Cornwall as a place. This was people defining themselves against their immediate surroundings. At the other end of this spectrum, people referred to different forms of creative expression, as a way of understanding other ways of behaving and all cultures in Cornwall or elsewhere. The former is an assertive, approach to culture that sees culture as a finite explanation or interpretation of a specific place, the later approach to culture is to see it as an infinite resource to learn from.

Material Vs Behaviour Culture

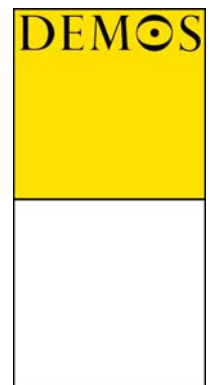
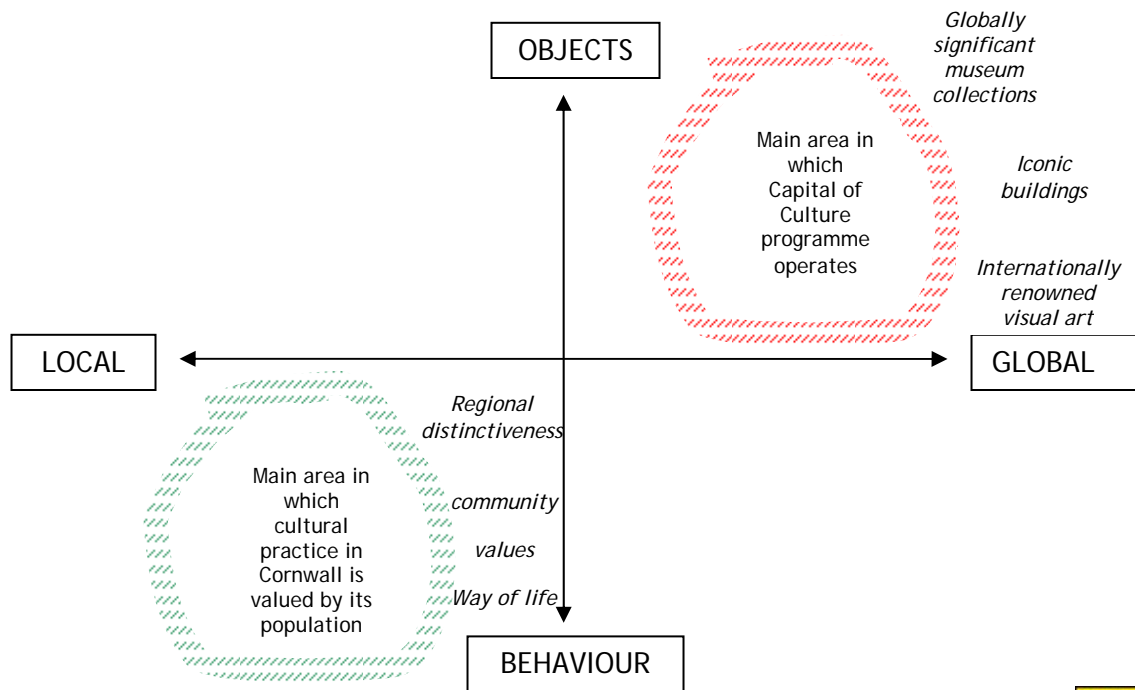
The second way of dividing up responses is somewhat more straightforward. When talking about culture, people either referred to culture as specific, tangible



² More information about Grounded Theory can be found here:
<http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/grounded.html>

things, that you can touch or they referred to it as ways of behaving. So at one end of the spectrum people referred to paintings, objects and books, while at the other they referred to culture as “a way of life” or a specific set of traditions or customs associated with different groups of people.

The combination of these two ways of categorising information, gives us a quadrant, on which different responses can be grouped.



Universal/Material: Paintings, Art Galleries and Photos

Respondents in this grouping talked about culture as specific creative disciplines. They referred to painting, literature, photography and the fruits of different creative activity as culture. Culture in Cornwall is where these forms of expression exist. So powerful is this interpretation of Culture in Cornwall that some people, responded by saying that “culture had nothing to do with Cornwall and was for people from London”.

Located/Material: Pasties, Fishing Boats and Cornish Folk Songs

Respondents in this grouping talked about the specific things that represent themselves and where they come from. For some these are individually defined, while for others, they are collective symbols. So, on the website, where visitors were asked to submit pictures that meant Cornwall to them some chose specific bits of scenery, road signs or buildings, while others chose more universal symbols –

pasties, the Cornish flag, famous sites and landmarks. Culture in Cornwall for these people is these specific things.

Located/Behaviour: Street Spirit, Community Life and Local Values

Respondents here talked about culture as “the Cornish way of life”. This was seen as what motivates people to live in Cornwall, how people treat each other in Cornish villages or how people in Cornwall like to bring up their children. The work that people do, why people left where they live to come to Cornwall. Culture in Cornwall in this instance, is the way that people live in Cornwall.

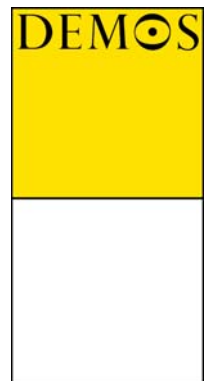
Universal/Behaviour: How Different People Live

Respondents here talked about culture as the way people behave generally. These respondents referred to culture as a kind of “social soup”. They embody the most abstract, relativistic definition of culture, in that they do not refer to specific things, or specific places, preferring to see culture as something that cannot be defined, limited or aggregated, but is personally determined and specific to different people. Culture in Cornwall is whatever it means to people in Cornwall.

These ways of talking about culture are by no means specific to Cornwall - these are four universal ways that as people and societies we have come to understand the term culture. Nor do people’s responses fit comfortably into single quadrants. By their very existence people have a relationship to things and behaviours that are located close to them, and things that are far away – just they tend to place different levels of significance on them. For some people the major Cornish symbols may be the most important part of culture in Cornwall, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they think “the Cornish way of life”, painting, theatre and the arts aren’t important too.

4. A Different Way of Life?

But if these are the different ways that people talk about Culture, then which of them is the most significant for Cornwall? The campaign will need some sense of what is particularly distinctive about life in Cornwall, and that is unlikely to come from just reflecting the full spectrum of what broadly fits into the whole quadrant outlined above.



Facilitators of workshops recognised that the most effective way of establishing what was distinct about Cornwall, was by focusing on the bottom right hand corner of the quadrant - Located/Behaviour: *Street Spirit, Community Life and Local Values*. It was when people described the “way of life” in Cornwall that they were most passionate and felt they were describing something that did not exist elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Cornish quality of life

In the different exercises that featured in the campaign participants consistently commented on the “quality of life” in Cornwall. They talked about a “different way of life”, a more relaxed atmosphere - a place where people worked so that they could live their lives, rather than living their lives in order to work.

Cornish landscape

At the heart of the different way of life, appears to be a strong relationship, and sense of shared ownership of Cornwall’s natural environment. People’s favourite places to be in Cornwall were invariably outdoor places, rather than places in their own home.

When people talked about what they missed in Cornwall when they went away, regardless of whether they were visitors to Cornwall, or whether they had lived in Cornwall all their life, it was these things that they felt they missed most. When people talked about why they moved to Cornwall, it was these factors that they tended to highlight.

Cornish values

Respondents who were most active in talking about the way of life in Cornwall appeared to be describing it as a platform to pursue a different purpose. It was not always clear what this was different from; but people perceived Cornwall to be less materialistic, fashion conscious and superficial than the rest of the United Kingdom. Values were lived in what people did, rather than displayed.

Creative fulfilment, exercise and being outdoors, were not things that either had to be shoe horned into economic work, or squeezed into the day, but could be pursued on a daily basis. They were part of the culture of Cornwall.

These values are probably related to the “scale” that Cornwall operates at. Small businesses and part-time employment dominate the Labor market. In 1995 44% of Cornish employees worked in small firms with fewer than 25 employees, much more than the 31% in the UK. In 1996 24% of the workforce was self-employed, nearly double the UK average of 13% (although both rates have fallen since then, partly because of changes in taxation policies). In 1998 Cornwall had the largest

percentage of workers in any South West county working part time (36%) and being female (52.5%).

If these are the values that underpin life in Cornwall, the question becomes, is this a culture of non-conformism in the established system? Is Cornwall a belligerent outsider, a refuge for people tired of the rat-run and the pressures of urban life? Or is Cornwall configured for a different pathway to the future. *Basically, is Cornwall counter-culture, or new culture?*

Let's take a step back.

There are three emerging trends that are shaping the values of people, the organisations they want to work for and the places that they want to live. They are based around the distribution of power amongst individuals.

Distributed Creativity

The long term rise in the provision of education, access to broadband and digital technologies has given more people the ability to make and create things in more ways. The effect has been to blur the boundaries between professional and amateur, economic and non-economic activity and, work and play. Creative activity is an aspect of our lives that is more likely to seep into the workplace, our schools and homes.

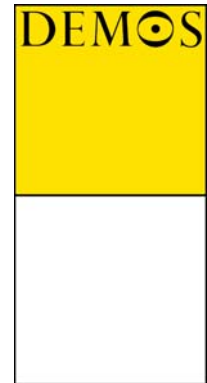
Distributed Values

People are less willing to see their values solely projected into political parties and grand institutions. Work, organisations and schools have become places where we expect to be able to articulate them as consumers and citizens. The solutions to social problems can come from a wide range of actors in a range of ways. Care for the environment for example, is the cumulative result of the work of government but also the values of companies, preferences of consumers, the actions of citizens and interventions of entrepreneurs.

Distributed Learning

The rapid movement of people, ideas and information in the global economy, combined with the emergence of new technologies, creates a pressure for people to continually learn and find new ways of living and working. Careers no longer consist of the development and refinement of one single set of skills and their application to one particular role. The pressure for continual reinvention and adaptation means that learning has to come from many different sources - it cannot solely come from education institutions.

The Cornwall described by participants in the Region of Culture campaign appears to be in sync with these trends – without cities, Cornwall is after all, a *distributed*



society. A place where small communities can form up around extreme sports, rambling and different kinds of community activity. A place where quality of life, landscapes and values form an experience and culture. This offers Cornwall the opportunity to present a programme that prototypes a new cultural model based on behaviours and values.

5. A New Model for Distinctiveness

The current model for communicating distinctiveness through culture is inherited from cities. The Capital of Culture program relies heavily on investment in famous architects, iconic buildings and new cultural institutions as a way of leveraging in private sector investment in the property market. These new icons of international “high” culture are then combined with the “authentic” culture of old buildings, traditions and industrial heritage. These are then pitched as a package to the outside world.

This model aims to lift tourism and attract high value-workers thinking about relocating themselves or their business. The programme has transformed derelict quay-sides and former industrial urban areas.

Thinking back to the quadrant outlined earlier, the programme is highly reliant upon a version of culture that encapsulates the top half and mostly the top left hand corner. The challenge for Cornwall will be to flip this model to communicate distinctiveness through the bottom right hand corner - through the behaviour and values of people living in Cornwall.

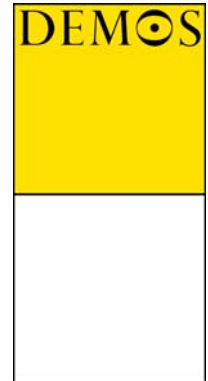
But this is not about a choice between a Region of Culture programme for people in Cornwall, or for attracting people from outside Cornwall. The question is about the kind of relationship Cornwall wants with the outside world.

Principles for a Region of Culture Programme and some practical examples

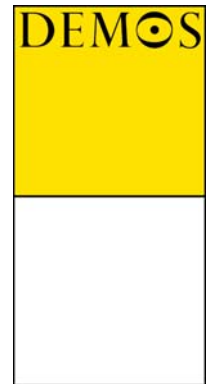
1. Narrative

The Region of Culture campaign and particularly the workshops, have reflected the power of narrative as a way of helping people to think about and discuss where they live: people telling stories about their lives using objects in discussions; using pictures on the website as a way of telling stories about what Cornwall is; using film and moving image as a way of constructing stories about themselves. If people are going to have an active role in Cornwall as a region of Culture, then the use of different kinds of narrative will be important.

This could include;



- Cornwall experimenting with mass participation film projects and festivals - as recently developed in Margate in The Exodus project³ and during the Manchester Passion⁴.
- The commissioning of a series of films about Cornwall, or with a heavily Cornish content, screened in Cornish cinemas and film festivals around Europe
- A marketing campaign for Cornwall not based around attractions, but around narratives of people's individual lives – DVD in a newspaper, a supplement of personal stories, a website. This could encourage people moving to Cornwall to see themselves coming to join a value system, a way of life, rather than as a series of attractions and products. This seems to be the right approach to encouraging *second lives*, rather than *second homes*.



2. Intimacy

If Cornwall is a place of distributed power, then the communication of Cornwall will need to be a shared activity. Where possible Cornwall should seek to build relationships between individuals in Cornwall and people outside Cornwall – for example by mobilizing the Cornish diasporas. Building these interactions should leave a legacy for Cornwall beyond the end of the campaign, or a potential designation of Cornwall as a Region of Culture – most obviously in learning and sharing of practice and contacts.

- A fortnightly newsletter, to build communities around particular issues, enterprises and endeavours in Cornwall, built around positive stories of working and recreational life, told in the first person. The “letter” would be a fortnightly e-mail consisting of three parts. Firstly, stories written in the first person by people detailing things they had recently done and how readers could do them themselves, secondly, a section outlining activities that readers can do, authenticated by first person experiences, thirdly a section where people outline things that they want to do or learn, asking for help from other people. The letter needs technical administration, but each week it is edited by different groups of people. Each week those people tap their own networks for stories, and information for the newsletter, incrementally expanding its reach.

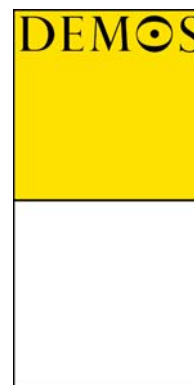
³ www.margateexodus.org.uk

⁴ www.bbc.co.uk/manchester/content/articles/2006/01/26/260106_manchester_passion_feature.shtml

3. Self-Organisation

One of the most successful aspects of the campaign was the website. A key role for the agencies supporting culture in Cornwall should be to create the frameworks and structures, around which people can develop their own interpretations and forms of meaning. The use and widespread availability of digital technology widens the dimensions of these possibilities but, the possibilities are not dependent on them.

- A dictionary of Cornish life constructed in the same way as wikipedia. It would reflect back to people in Cornwall and the world outside the broad understandings and interpretations of culture in Cornwall. Within Cornwall it would reflect back the contested nature of the regions culture and identity.
- A brokering organisation works as a conduit for different people exchanging different cultural products. So, somebody sends a recorded CD of music to this organisation, they send it on to somebody else, who has also submitted something and so on. This could be extended beyond music, to paintings, photographs, and outside the county across the UK or overseas.



About Demos

Who We Are

Demos is the think tank for everyday democracy. We believe everyone should be able to make personal choices in their daily lives that contribute to the common good. We focus on the connections between individualism, self-expression and collective interest.

What we work on

We focus on six areas: public services; science and technology; cities and public space; people and communities; arts and culture; and global security.

Who we work with

Our partners include policy-makers, companies, public service providers and social entrepreneurs. Demos is not linked to any party but we work with politicians across political divides. Our international network – which extends across Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, Australia, Brazil, India and China – provides a global perspective and enables us to work across borders.

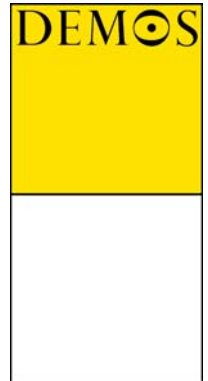
How we work

Demos knows the importance of learning from experience. We test and improve our ideas in practice by working with people who can make change happen. Our collaborative approach means that our partners share in the creation and ownership of new ideas.

How we communicate

As an independent voice, we can create debates that lead to real change. We use the media, public events, workshops and publications to communicate our ideas. All our reports can be downloaded free from www.demos.co.uk

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www.cornwallculture.co.uk



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