

Literature Review: evidence of impact of museums in the fields of place-making and place-based approaches

Carried out by DC Research Ltd on behalf of Museums
Galleries Scotland (Final Report – March 2026)



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1. INTRODUCTION

Aims and Remit

Museums Galleries Scotland commissioned DC Research to carry out a research study: **“Literature review: evidence of impact of museums in the fields of place-making and place-based approaches”**.

The purpose of the review was to build on MGS’s recent work examining existing evidence and aims to provide an overview of key multidisciplinary studies. The study was a solely desk-based review of literature about the impact of museums in the fields of place-making and place-based approaches.

MGS specified that the review should address the following areas:

- The role of museums and galleries as anchor institutions in place-based development across Scotland;
- The impact of museums in applying place-focused policies such as Local Place Plans, Community Planning Partnerships, and 20-minute neighbourhood models, including movement patterns and connectivity to sustainable transport;
- The contribution of museums to addressing inequalities in participation and access through place-based initiatives;
- The extent to which museums support community wealth building and local empowerment through partnerships;
- Museums as vehicles for fostering a sense of place, belonging, and cultural identity within communities;
- The influence of place-based museum work on wider public outcomes; and
- Opportunities to scale or deepen this work, particularly in underserved areas.

Key Context for Literature Review

It is important to appreciate the wider **context within which this literature review work will take place**, with the natural starting point being the national strategy: ‘Scotland’s Museums and Galleries Strategy 2023-2030’.

The role of place is clear within the national strategy from the outset:

*“The three strategy strands highlight how Scotland’s museums and galleries can create impact and **inspire connection** between the people and places of Scotland: invest in the resilience of their organisations; and value the workforce which brings collections and spaces to life.” [emphasis added] (Scotland’s Museums and Galleries Strategy 2023-2030, p.6)*



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More specifically: *"The Connection strand explores how museums and galleries can help drive social change, impacting positively on the education and health and wellbeing of our communities and sense of place."* (Scotland's Museums and Galleries Strategy 2023-2030, p.7)

Indeed, 'Place' is a priority area within the Connection strand, with a clearly defined outcome (*"Museums and galleries connect and collaborate to address the needs of their locality with the aim of contributing to Scotland's thriving cultural life"*) and a list of actions for the sector and for MGS that recognise the role of museums in place based development, e.g.: *"Engage with place-based initiatives.."; "Connect museums with organisations undertaking collaborative, place-based activity to meet local needs"; and "Celebrate successful place-based collaboration in the museum sector, share learnings, and connect place-based work at regional and national level."* [emphasis added] (Scotland's Museums and Galleries Strategy 2023-2030, p.12)

Reflecting the interconnectedness of the national strategy, the Resilience strand within the Collaboration priority also explicitly recognises the role of 'place', with the sector action to: *"Help improve places in collaboration with other organisations and community groups."* (p.15)

The 'Museums Galleries Scotland Business Plan 2023-26' sets out specific action for MGS for 2023-26 to help take forward the priority around place, place-making and place-based activities and the MGS actions around place outlined above:

- Support museums to assess their local context and to build local connections using planning processes and forums and engaging with an asset-based approach.
- Build networks with organisations engaged in place-based activity to facilitate greater museum connectivity.
- Develop strategic partnerships on behalf of the sector including those with a focus on tourism, destination development and community wealth building.

As well as:

- Share examples of inspiring practice through Knowledge Exchange and MGS website.
- Advocacy with government, partners and stakeholders.

This context therefore clearly sets out the role of this literature review and where it is expected to support MGS and the wider sector in fulfilling the potential of museums around place-making and place-based approaches. This literature review aims to directly contribute towards the last two actions listed above as well as support MGS and museums in further achieving the wider priorities and actions around place.



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Key Considerations about Scope of the Review

It should be noted that the review was a time (and resource)-limited project that sought to provide an overview of specific studies within the fields of place-making and place-based approaches – primarily focused on the themes set out at the start of this section. It was not a systematic or meta-review but was focused on identifying strong examples of evidence of the impact of museums on place-making and place-based approaches. Through the review, MGS was seeking high-level evidence-based statements that demonstrate the impact of museums within the areas listed above.

The brief for the study specified that all literature reviewed should be drawn from peer-reviewed sources that adhere to rigorous research standards and substantial sampling. As such, there was a strong emphasis on research that met these standards – typically those that have appeared in peer-reviewed academic publications, applied appropriate research standards, and had adopted sufficient sampling. These requirements typically lead to a focus for the review towards empirical studies that had adopted some scale of primary research – and would mean that studies that are themselves overviews, summaries of other research, other literature reviews, are more qualitative in nature, or are case study based (rather than having involved substantial sampling) might be excluded.

However, it became clear as the review progressed, especially given the policy-based nature of much of the literature, with the concepts of ‘place-making’ and place-based approaches’ themselves being closely aligned, and related to, recent and current policy developments, of the resultant qualitative nature of some of the research in these fields – with examples of qualitative, comparative analysis and also case study research being common in some of the literature. Whilst, as reflected below, there is merit in including some of this literature, especially where it helps provide relevant examples of museums’ role and impact around place-making and place-based approaches this is also a finding in itself from the literature review – that there is disconnect between the type of literature sought as specified in the brief, and the type(s) of literature that exists around the role of museums and place-making.

As a result, where relevant, the review findings draw on literature that includes case studies and some more qualitative studies, alongside the literature that has used peer-reviewed academic publications, applied appropriate research standards, and had adopted sufficient sampling. In addition, the review has also considered exceptions to the requirement for the literature to have been peer-reviewed (in terms of appearing in peer-reviewed academic journals), where some key examples of the impact of museums have featured in commissioned research rather than peer-reviewed academic journals.

However, it is also important to note that, given the focus of the review on developing high-level evidence-based statements that demonstrate the impact of museums in these fields, the review has not considered literature that critically examines, reviews, offers think pieces, or explicitly critiques the role of museums in place-making and place-based developments. It is acknowledged that such literature does exist, and given the nature



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of the topics around place-making and place based approaches it is not insubstantial, but it is considered to be outside the scope of this review, which has sought to focus on identifying specific studies that provide direct evidence of the impact of museums in these fields.

It should also be noted that whilst this literature review has identified a range of peer-reviewed and other literature which seeks to evidence the impact of museums in the fields of place-making and place-based approaches, the literature also includes studies that have reflected on the lack of empirical evidence, or highlighted concerns around particular aspects of the role of museums in place-making and place-based developments. In addition, there is also literature that calls for further research in these areas – emphasising that, for at least some aspects, there is more work to be done to build upon some of the more exploratory research in order to test and further support the generalisability of the findings.

Literature Review Process

As an initial step, the study focused on reviewing a wide range of literature about museums and place-making and place-based approaches – initially through carrying out a review of publicly available research studies, evidence summaries, research digests, reviews, and evaluations. The search terms used to identify the literature focused strongly on explicit terms within the specified themes for the literature review outlined at the start of this section.

The aim of this step was to trawl a wide range of sources to identify examples of evidence about the impact of museums on place-making and place-based approaches that could be suitable for inclusion in the review. Implementing a wide search strategy at this stage of the review ensured that a broad range of literature was considered.

This process helped the review to identify a long list of potential examples of the impact of museums in the fields of place-making and place-based approaches. These examples were then assessed for their appropriateness for inclusion based on the following factors: (i) fit/alignment with the agreed themes of the review; (ii) strength and quality of the evidence; and (iv) appropriateness for inclusion (i.e. relevance of the evidence to museums in Scotland).

Clarifying the Remit

What became clear through the initial stages of the literature review was a range of sources of evidence of impact of museums around some of the themes (especially: (i) the role of museums and galleries as anchor institutions in place-based development; (ii) the contribution of museums to addressing inequalities in participation and access; (iii) the extent to which museums support community wealth building and local empowerment; and (iv) museums as vehicles for fostering a sense of place, belonging, and cultural identity within communities).



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In contrast, the explicit policy-focused nature of the second theme (i.e., the impact of museums in applying place-focused policies such as *Local Place Plans*, *Community Planning Partnerships*, and *20-minute neighbourhood models*) resulted in very limited explicit evidence being identified of the impact of museums in applying such named policies. However, whilst not explicitly mentioning specific place-focused policies, the evidence of contribution of museums to the four themes noted above is, by implication, recognition of the role of museums in contributing to place-making and place-based approaches, it is simply that the academic literature does not (yet) reflect this contribution to these specific policies in an explicit way.

To exemplify both the currency around museums and place-making and place-based approaches, two recent publications can be drawn on to show both the public and the sectoral recognition of museums and their contributions to various aspects of place-making/place-based approaches. Recent (March 2026) research by The Diffley Partnership for MGS as part of the Understanding Scotland series of public opinion polls found that:

"...respondents most frequently agree with the statement that museums and galleries help us celebrate our local stories, with over four in five (83%) respondents either strongly or somewhat agreeing. A similar proportion (79%) agree that museums and galleries help us care for and share our local collections, while seven in ten (71%) say they help us understand the links between here and the wider world. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) agree that museums and galleries help us feel part of our wider region and that they help us understand connections between our local area and legacies of empire, historic slavery and colonialism (65%)."

(Museums Galleries Scotland Report by The Diffley Partnership, March 2026, emphasis added)

The report concludes that: *"These findings generally indicate broad support for local museums and galleries and Scotland's Museums and Galleries Strategy."*

In addition, recent (March 2026) findings from The Big Think: Place work commissioned by the National Lottery Heritage Fund¹ found that:

- *75% of organisations are actively working with community groups and volunteers, and these relationships are most commonly cited as the most important in their place-based work.*
- *Heritage organisations have wide networks, but tend to go deep with a few key partners: community groups, local authorities, and other heritage bodies are a priority.*
- *More than half of respondents say heritage is involved in discussions about their place's future, and 55% say it is central to their place's strategy.*

¹ [The Big Think: Place \(February 2026\) - UK Heritage Pulse \(https://heritagepulse.insights-alliance.com/updates/the-big-think-place-february/\)](https://heritagepulse.insights-alliance.com/updates/the-big-think-place-february/)



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These are just two examples (one of which is Scotland and museum specific, one of which is UK based and about heritage more generally) of the current position and role of museums in place-making.

Early discussions with MGS clarified that the latter two themes were not expected to be given the same focus within the literature review as the other themes, but that these were an opportunity to: (1) draw on findings from previous MGS-commissioned literature reviews on other aspects of social impact (in terms of the wider public outcomes theme), and (2) to reflect on areas where there is an opportunity for more to be done to enhance the evidence base about the impact of museums around place-making and place-based approaches (in terms of the opportunities to scale or deepen this work theme).

Finally, it was agreed that a key consideration for the literature review was that it should focus on research and evidence about museums – and not culture and heritage more generally – in terms of the impact on place-making and place-based approaches. This focus has underpinned the review, and is reflected in what is presented in the subsequent report sections – as such, this review does not consider the wider role and impact of culture and heritage on place-making.

The main sections of this report deal with each of the following four themes in turn – although it should be noted that the nature of ‘place-making’ results in a number of aspects being cross-cutting, where some of the literature could have been included in more than one report section. This has been avoided as far as possible and the relevant sections note any interlinkages/overlaps (where the same literature sources may show a contribution to more than one theme).

- **Role of museums and galleries as anchor institutions in place-based development across Scotland.**
- **Contribution of museums to addressing inequalities in participation and access through place-based initiatives.**
- **Extent to which museums support community wealth building and local empowerment through partnerships.**
- **Museums as vehicles for fostering a sense of place, belonging, and cultural identity within communities.**

A summary of the main findings from the literature review are presented in the rest of this section – in the form of headline statements highlighting the key areas where the literature review has identified the impact of museums.



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Headline Findings from the Literature Review

Role of museums and galleries as anchor institutions in place-based development across Scotland

- The role of museums and galleries as anchor institutions is well recognised in the literature and they provide a wide range of benefits around place-making.
- This role can be summarised in three main ways: museums as flagship projects; museums role as an important presence in a place; and the contributions of museums from being tied to, and embedded within, a particular place.
- Case study examples clearly show the role that museums can have as anchor institutions, including as a key contributor to the wider local economy through their purchasing and as a direct employer, as a tourist attraction, and as a hub for the local community, and for learning/education.
- Museums of all sizes can fulfil this role as anchor institutions – whilst the role of larger museums may be more obvious, smaller museums that are an important presence in their place also make important contributions as anchor institutions.

Contribution of museums to addressing inequalities in participation and access through place-based initiatives

- There is clear evidence and good recognition in the literature of the inequalities in participation and access that exist for museums, and that museums recognise and are taking proactive steps to address these challenges.
- It is also evident that museums are carrying out a range of activities and initiatives around seeking to address these inequalities.
- Examples from the literature show that whilst some of this work is general in nature, much of it seeks to address particular inequalities in participation – such as in relation to young people, migrants, lower socio-economic groups, and disabled people.

Extent to which museums support community wealth building and local empowerment through partnerships

- Building on aspects of museums as anchor institutions, there is clear evidence that museums support community wealth building through place-based activities.
- The literature and research show that museums support community wealth building and local empowerment in a variety of ways – especially on employment, purchasing, and attracting people to, and retaining people in, a place.
- In addition, museums also support local empowerment through partnerships, with evidence suggesting that much of this activity now involves co-production, co-curation, co-creation, collaboration and active community participation.

Museums as vehicles for fostering a sense of place, belonging, and cultural identity within communities

- There is very strong evidence from a wide variety of robust studies in the literature that museums fulfil a clear role in helping people to develop a 'sense of place', a 'sense of belonging'; and a 'cultural identity'.



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Report Structure

The structure for the remainder of this Report, finalised in March 2026, is based round the four main themes outlined above:

- **Section 2** considers the findings about the role of museums and galleries as anchor institutions in place-based development across Scotland.
- **Section 3** presents the findings about the contribution of museums to addressing inequalities in participation and access through place-based initiatives.
- **Section 4** looks at the extent to which museums support community wealth building and local empowerment through partnerships.
- **Section 5** considers the findings on museums as vehicles for fostering a sense of place, belonging, and cultural identity within communities.
- **Section 6** reflects on the overall findings of this literature review, as well as considering areas where there is an opportunity for more to be done to enhance the evidence base about the impact of museums.
- **Appendix 1** sets out the sources and references used in this literature review, including both the specific studies that have been used to provide direct evidence of impact (listed in the main report sections), as well as setting out the wider list of sources and studies that were considered as part of the literature review.



2. MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES AS ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS IN PLACE-BASED DEVELOPMENTS

This section considers the literature on **the role of museums and galleries as anchor institutions in place-based development across Scotland.**

Museums are well-recognised as one of a number of key anchor institutions in the literature, which provides evidence of the different aspects of the roles that museums can provide as anchor institutions – covering three main themes: museums as flagship (re)developments driving place-based regeneration; museums (typically larger museums) having an important presence in a place and therefore an impact on the place; and museums being tied to a particular place by their mission, history, assets and local relationships.

A useful starting point is to summarise what is understood by anchor institutions. Whilst there are many different interpretations in the wider literature, CLES provides a useful description which highlights the role that museums provide²:

"The term anchor institutions is used to refer to organisations which:

1. *Have an **important presence in a place**, usually through a combination of: being largescale employers, the largest purchasers of goods and services in the locality, controlling large areas of land and/or having relatively fixed assets.*
2. *Are **tied to a particular place** by their mission, histories, physical assets and local relationships. Examples include local authorities, NHS trusts, universities, trade unions, large local businesses, the combined activities of the community and voluntary sector and housing associations."*

This distinction is useful and highlights an important aspect for museums in that they can be seen as providing one or both these aspects - having an importance presence in a place and/or being tied to a particular place.

In addition, within this there is also the role of museums as contributors to wider place-based developments and the contribution that museums can make to wider economic development and regeneration through flagship redevelopment/regeneration projects (with commonly cited examples in the literature including Bilbao, Liverpool, London, Manchester, as well as Scottish examples including Dundee and Glasgow).

Importantly for museums, it should be noted that with regard to the first of these two aspects of anchor institutions can mean that a (relatively) small museum can fulfil the role of anchor institution in a place – contingent upon on the size of the place – e.g., a small/medium sized museum in a town/village can be an anchor institution for a place given its relative importance to the place as an employer, purchaser of goods and services, attractor of visitors, provider of public space, etc. Therefore, whilst in a larger

² <https://cles.org.uk/what-is-community-wealth-building/what-is-an-anchor-institution/>



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city, it is likely to be larger museums that fulfil the role of anchor institution in that first aspect, in smaller places, smaller museums can be an anchor institution in terms of having an important presence in a place.

A report entitled 'Arts and Culture Anchor Institutions as Urban Anchors: Livingston Case Studies in Urban Development' (Penn Institute for Urban Research, University of Pennsylvania) notes that: *"The appeal of many of the country's most successful cities comes from their anchor institutions, geographically rooted entities that offer the jobs, services, entertainment options, social centers, and other necessities and amenities that make urban life attractive. These may be universities, hospitals, sports facilities, performing or visual arts and other cultural facilities, public utilities, and some large churches and local corporations. Serving as engines of urban renaissance – and sometimes even survival – in many places, anchor institutions are also magnets for economic development. Their influence derives from their landholdings as well as from their capacity as large employers, revenue generators, and goods and services purchasers. They contribute to urban reinvention and civic pride, and attract knowledge-industry workers and suburban spenders."* (p.1)

The report argues that whilst other types of organisation may be more readily viewed as anchor institutions: *"much of the existing literature on anchor institutions focuses on educational and medical anchors ("eds and meds") and stadiums, which – while important – are not the only urban anchor institutions in their communities"* (p.2) there are a range of 'less publicized types of anchors' and the report contains a range of case studies, including highlighting the role of museums as anchor institutions.

A report entitled Art Institutions: Initiators and Reflectors of Neighbourhood Change (Ekaterina Mizrokhi and Melissa Vincent, 2016) highlights some of the key aspects of the role of cultural anchor institutions, reinforcing the contributions that museums make in this role: *"Arts institutions, such as prominent, established museums and galleries, complement the inherent heterogeneity and the definitive dynamic mix of urbanity. As civic anchors, they are institutional entities that occupy sizeable amounts of land, real estate and social capital. Anchor institutions have an interdependent relationship with the communities they're located in, interacting in various capacities such as service providers, workforce developers and community infrastructure builders. Anchor institutions drive shared value for both the institution and the neighbourhood. As destination landmarks that denote world-class status, these institutions are magnets for high profile investment, creating pockets of increased real estate values across the city."* (p.2)

A 2025 paper 'Museums and Urban Sustainability: A Comparative Study of Athens and Singapore' (Koutsoumpela & Metaxas, 2025) uses a qualitative approach, case study and comparative analysis, to *"scrutinize the dynamic connection between the role of museums and the viable development of cities as well as the salience of this interdependence."*

The paper found that: *"There are several examples across the globe where cities use*



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their cultural assets and museums for urban development planning in order to increase tourism flows and help communities flourish from an economic, environmental and social perspective. This study underscores the vital role of museums as strategic instruments in the sustainable development of contemporary cities.” (p.19)

And also concluded that *“...it has been demonstrated that museums, beyond their traditional function as custodians of heritage, operate as interdisciplinary platforms that foster innovation, inclusivity, and cultural diplomacy... As cities increasingly seek models of sustainable development grounded in cultural vitality, museums emerge as essential actors in achieving environmental responsibility, social cohesion, and long-term urban progress.” (p.19)*

Within the UK, a 2023 study carried out by Liverpool John Moores University (‘Arts & Wellbeing A review of the social value of place-based arts interventions’) highlighted the role of museums as anchor institutions: *“In terms of evidencing and promoting the health and wellbeing value of arts and culture as community assets, we are seeing influential work in the museums sector as anchor cultural institutions.” (p.7, emphasis added)*

An Arts Council England commissioned study, carried out by Wavehill (‘Arts and Place Shaping: Evidence Review’, May 2020) included consideration of place shaping and economic growth and found that: *“Cultural anchors such as libraries, theatres or museums can play a key role in hosting events, attracting additional footfall, underpinning regeneration and boosting the evening economy” (p17).*

A 2022 discussion paper (‘The Relationships Between Cultural Organisations and Local Creative Industries in the Context of a Cultural District’, AEA Consulting for the PEC) includes examples of museums as anchor institutions within cultural districts, and the paper reports that: *“our findings also suggest that master-planned cultural districts have a significant impact on area branding and placemaking – these strengthen the pull of creative businesses and professionals despite the lack of direct economic relationships. We also found that there are areas of synergies and efficiencies in the operations of cultural organisations and creative businesses where colocation can encourage collaboration, skills development, innovation, and research. This can take the form of formal and informal knowledge exchange, through professional forums and networking events, for example, project and programming collaboration, and creative workspace provision.” (p.4)*

A report by the RSA in partnership with the British Council (Antink et al, 2020) looked at the area of heritage (including museums) for inclusive growth, where they: *“define heritage for inclusive growth strategies as locally developed plans utilising and supporting the heritage assets and activities within a place to create sustainable, equitably distributed growth and to enable the development of inclusive place-based identities.”*

Of particular relevance, the report outlines a typology of approaches to inclusive growth,



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one of which is: *"Museum-led: Museums are key heritage institutions and spaces embedded in communities everywhere. These interventions cover a range of approaches that utilise their assets and expertise and engage with their communities to support inclusive growth outcomes to go beyond the traditional remit of collections and conservation and functioning as anchor institutions in their local places."* (p.27)

The report contains a range of case studies, and three in particular are relevant to this literature review – Dundee, Scotland; Mid and East Antrim Museum and Heritage Service; and St Fagans National Museum of History.

The Dundee case study is highlighted as adopting an approach that is described as a *"whole place-based regeneration of post-industrial city"* with key outcomes including: *"Thriving local cultural and heritage sectors and renewed place-based pride and identity"* with explicit recognition of the role of museums in this place-based regeneration.

The approach of the Mid and East Antrim Museum and Heritage Service case study is described as *"integration of local authority museum and heritage services within local economic development"* with key outcomes including: *"Cultural tourism offer developed in collaboration with local businesses and communities that is built around local people, places and experiences"*.

The St Fagans National Museum of History case study is described as an approach that was about the *"redevelopment of open-air national museum of history"* and whilst the outcomes included "Redevelopment harnessed as opportunity to become more inclusive, representative and participatory" the key lesson from St Fagans is around the "emergent role of museums as anchor institutions", with the report stating that:

"St Fagans is a nascent example of how larger heritage institutions can begin to think of themselves as anchor institutions within their local economies. In St Fagans' case, they have leveraged funding for a large-scale capital project to maximise wider social and economic benefits in the local area through their procurement practices. (p.59)

A variety of evidence offered to the House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee reported in 'Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda Third Report of Session 2022–23' reported on the variety of benefits to people and places as a result of cultural placemaking emphasising various aspects of the anchor institution role: *"Cultural placemaking can have direct and indirect economic impacts, both in terms of generating creative industries jobs and volunteering opportunities in the local area and by stimulating other local businesses such as food and beverage, retail, tourism and the night-time economy, encouraging private sector investment and creating attractive, long-term propositions for businesses as places of work."* (p. 9)

Guidance from the Local Government Association and Arts Council England (Making the most of your museums A handbook for councillors) also highlights the role of museums: *"...a strong museum can be a key anchor for a cultural quarter, and a major attractor of*



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businesses." (p.3)

An AHRC Place-Based Research Programme Report (Developing a People-Centred, Place-Led Approach: The Value of the Arts and Humanities Glasgow University, June 2023) explains that: *"The Place Programme evidences the contribution that arts and humanities approaches make to place-based policies and practices and uses this evidence to develop innovative approaches to achieving a people-centred, place-led approach."* (p.5) and the report highlights examples of knowledge exchange projects where museums are active partners.

'Museums and Galleries: Creative Engagement' is a 2004 research report commissioned by the NMDC which looks at a wide variety of impacts and contributions of museums, including the role of museums within 'urban regeneration and connections':

"The contribution of cultural buildings commissioned by NMDC members to the urban regeneration agenda is equally significant. Apart from creating local jobs and allegiances, well-designed cultural buildings create a sense of civic identity and pride for local communities." (p.40)

This summary exemplifies multiple aspects of the role of museums as anchor institutions (both aspects that CLES highlights) and also their role in place-making more generally.

Whilst it not museum specific, 'The role of culture, sport and heritage in place shaping' report (2016, CASE Programme) used an econometric analysis approach to analyse the role of culture, sport and heritage assets in promoting and driving positive economic and social outcomes at the local level: *"This study focuses on generating evidence to support the argument that culture, sport and heritage infrastructure and investment have the ability to promote and drive positive economic and social outcomes at the local level. It aims to examine the extent to which culture, sport and heritage infrastructure and investment within a place influence (through direct and indirect impacts, tangible and intangible) the economy and society of that place."* (p.1)

"The study is by design highly exploratory and it is important that this is borne in mind when interpreting the results. Nevertheless, the study provides some important and interesting evidence of the positive role that CS&H assets and investment play in place-shaping, when examined through the lens of the economic performance of the creative industries and the wider local economy more generally." (p.4, emphasis added)

Looking at more specific examples, a report by the LGA and CLOA ('People, culture, place The role of culture in placemaking', LGA/CLOA, 2017) presents a range of case study examples of embedding the role of culture in placemaking, including specific museum examples such as Barnsley, where the case study notes: *"Creating the museum within the town hall has led to a closer relationship between the council and community. The project has highlighted the value and impact of culture in changing people's lives and driving economic improvement. As a result, the culture and visitor economy service is now valued more highly within the council, both through investment and encouragement to develop new ways of working. Visitor economy partners across the*



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borough are working more closely together and taking forward a joint approach to developing the visitor offer.”(p. 10)

A 2010 research paper (Research Paper 2 Anchoring Growth: The role of 'Anchor Institutions' in the regeneration of UK cities by The Work Foundation January 2010) presents a case study of Bradford *"a city with a rich history and a tapestry of vibrant anchor institutions"* and recognises Bradford's museums as being part of this tapestry. The paper provides an overview of anchor institutions' activities in the city, and for the National Media Museum highlights that its impact through day-to day activities includes the fact that it: *"acts as a learning and education centre; acts as a large tourist attraction (9% of visitors from London/South East); local economy benefits from £30m from tourism; employs 160 people."*

A research study about 'Robert Burns and the Scottish Economy' (Pittock, 2019) includes examples of the role and contribution of the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum (RBBM) as an anchor institution in a variety of ways including as a local purchaser: *"A good example...is Robert Burns Birthplace Museum that attracts different suppliers and offers a large range of products from local suppliers and crafters...Local suppliers identify the RBBM as a significant source of revenue."*(p.92)

A research study carried out in 2023 for Derby Museums ('The Impact of the Museum of Making Social Return on Investment') provides evidence of the redevelopment of a museum and the role that this can provide as an anchor institution in supporting place-making. Headline results of particular relevance to the anchor institution role of museums included: *"1,566 people were actively involved in making the museum, gaining new skills, and contributing to over 400,000 hours of in-kind support; 52 direct FTE (full-time equivalent) equivalent contracted jobs and an estimated 153 indirect jobs have been created; 7,944 people participated in informal learning opportunities in 2022/23; Annual Economic Impact to Derby estimated at almost £4 million p.a.; For every £1 invested, Derby Museums can claim £5.86 of social value over five years attributed to the Operational phase of the Museum of Making; Volunteers increased their higher-level practical skills; Volunteers reported a notable increase in their self-ratings of confidence, self-esteem as a result of their engagement with the Museum of Making; Visitors reported that they were more likely to visit other museums or take part in the wider cultural offer; Visitors reported a significant increase in their knowledge of Derby/Derbyshire heritage and Makers of the past and present; Makers highlighted the role of the museum in networking and collaborating with their peers"*(p.7)

A 2025 OECD report ('The role of culture-led regeneration in place transformation', OECD, 2025) highlights a variety of international examples of the role of museums within culture-led regeneration in place transformation, and reinforces both aspects of the role of museums as anchor institutions set out above:

"In contrast, 1.1 million out of the 1.3 million visitors to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Spain, in 2023 came from outside of the Basque region...While this difference mainly reflects Bilbao's well developed international tourism market, the comparison also serves



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to highlight that the profile and origins of museums users can vary, as strategies target different markets and cultural experiences. This in turn has implications for the types of benefit offered. For example, higher returns from tourism may be evident where overnight stays are more common and there is a critical mass of cultural and other attractions to encourage visitors. Whereas, cultural infrastructure which caters more towards a local audience may generate greater social benefits for the local community.” (p. 14)

A publication by the OECD (CULTURE AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT: MAXIMISING THE IMPACT Guide for Local Governments, Communities and Museums, OECD/ICOM, 2019) highlights the role of museums across a variety of areas – two of which reaffirm the role of museums as anchor institutions in both the aspects outlined above. On the role of museums for urban regeneration the report notes that: *“A prominent element of the contribution of museums to local development is their impact on urban regeneration, the emergence of vibrant cultural and creative quarters and the creation of new bridges between and within communities.”*(p.32, emphasis added)

The report also highlights the theme of leveraging the power of museums for local economic development: *“In addition to preserving and creating cultural value, museums also generate economic value. The economic value that museums generate has been more widely recognised thanks to studies that quantify the direct and indirect impacts of museums...The direct economic impact of museums is typically measured by the number of visitors, the amount of their local expenditures, and the length of their stay, as well as the number of people employed or revenue generated through ticket sales. The indirect impacts are much broader, for example, through purchases from a wider supply chain. They also include the so-called induced effects which capture the impact of tourist expenditures and employees spending their wages locally.”* (p.20)

A book chapter on anchor institutions in the US (Anchor Institutions in the Northeast Megaregion: An Important But Not Fully Realized Resource) also highlights the role museums can play as anchor institutions: *“Like any industry, anchor institutions attract external dollars by exporting their product...For example, art museums mount “blockbuster” exhibitions that bring in viewers from the suburbs and neighboring states. In 2012, the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s fourteen- week Van Gogh show attracted 150,000 visitors from forty-four countries and forty-eight states.”* (p.209, emphasis added).

These types of specific examples start to highlight the place-based economic contribution and impact of museums – something that links to the community wealth building covered in Section 4 in terms of the local community aspects of this. In general terms, the economic impact and contribution of museums is well evidenced and well-established in the literature.

As one example, a 2017 paper (‘Museums – A Catalyst for Sustainable Economic Development in Sweden’ by Gustafsson & Ijla) highlights that: *“Museums have a great impact on the cultural economy of every country and museums have a very significant*



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meaning for social integration within socio-cultural and socio-economic contexts. Studies have shown that the impact of museums may vary from one city to another, and from one country to another, at local, regional or national level. The role of museums in the cultural economy is very important, because they sustain cities in promoting themselves as cultural centers in the domestic and regional market by fulfilling their demands and expectations of visitors and investors. One can say that museums act as "the instruments" for cities in the regeneration process." (p.1)

More specifically for Scotland, a 2023 study for Museums Galleries Scotland estimates the 'Economic Impact of Scotland's Museums and Galleries' – which found that *"the £132 million of turnover plus grants income for museums and galleries supports: a total of £221 million direct, indirect, and induced output effects; a total of 3,689 direct, indirect, and induced FTE jobs; and £115.1 million direct, indirect, and induced GVA effects."* (p.1) In addition, it found that: *"Visitors to Scotland's museums and galleries also have a notable impact on, and make a clear contribution to, the economy. Whilst not all this impact can be directly attributed to museums and galleries, the gross spending impacts (both on-site at museums and off-site elsewhere in the economy) of the 17.8 million visits in 2019-20, is estimated to be close to £900 million."*

Other recent examples include work commissioned by AIM ('Economic Impact of the Independent Museum Sector 2024') which looked specifically at the independent museum sector in the UK and found that *"Adding together the direct employment, direct procurement, and off-site visitor impacts shows that the independent museum sector's overall gross, direct economic contribution is in the region of 11,300 FTE jobs, which can also be expressed as £531.8 million of expenditure... These results provide estimates of the overall (gross) direct economic contribution of independent museums to the local economies in which they are located. Applying standard local economic multipliers to these direct impacts suggests that the overall gross economic impact (i.e. direct, indirect and induced impacts) of the independent museum sector could be around 17,900 jobs - which can also be expressed as £838.7 million of expenditure."* (p.4)

These examples highlight that some elements of the role of museums as anchor institutions are linked to their economic footprint – around employment, purchasing, driving visits, etc. Furthermore, the extent to which these impacts contribute to community wealth building are considered in Section 4.

It is clear from the range of academic literature and commissioned research that both the ongoing direct, indirect and induced economic contributions and impacts of museums, and also the role that museums can have as place-making economic drivers through flagship museum (re)development projects, is well evidenced and shows the role of museums as anchor institutions, especially in terms of having an 'important presence in a place'.

Reflecting more on the second aspect of museums as anchor institutions – about being 'tied to a particular place', research ('Civic responsibility in times of crisis: museums and galleries in northern England during the COVID- 19 pandemic', Child, Gray and Weeks,



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2024) used a combination of three case studies and 36 interviews to consider the changing civic and local role of museums, focusing on the context and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the shift witnessed in museums due to this, reinforcing the increasing role and contribution that museums are making to the places in which they are located (i.e., their place-making role): the research characterised *"the changing nature of organisations' conceptions of their civic value in terms of a shift from museums and galleries seeing themselves as having a 'civic role' to play to their feeling a sense of 'civic responsibility'."* (p.224)

Their findings reflect and evidence the increasing role of museums in place-making, and their role as anchor institutions, without explicitly using such terms, focusing more on the language around civic responsibility and localism/hyperlocalism: *"We have identified here four key shifts that these conditions have precipitated with regard to museums' and galleries' civic work. Firstly, that this work became increasingly important, particularly in larger and more secure organisations, and in organisations with a pre-existing commitment to social engagement. Secondly, that the pandemic fostered a heightened focus on localism and hyperlocalism. Thirdly, that this work has been widely framed in terms of utility.... Finally, that the underlying impetus behind this shift lies in institutions feeling a sense of civic responsibility (as opposed to a civic role)."* (p.227)

Within the context of museums' roles in place-based developments, an important consideration emerges from a 2023 paper ('Networking and spatial interactions: What contributes most to increasing museums' attractiveness?' by Bernini and Galli) about the importance of partnerships and networking for museums in Italy. The paper highlights the importance of collaboration and coordination to help museums fulfil their role as promoters of social and economic development: *"Given the relevance of museums in promoting cultural, tourism and economic development in local territories, we investigate the influence of both spatial and non-spatial interactions on museum attractiveness. In particular, we assess whether non-spatial collaborations such as partnerships and networking, contribute to enhancing their level of competitiveness and if spatial dependence occurs among neighbouring museums."* (p.1215)

The research found that *"...being part of a network through an integrated management structure as well as partnerships with other cultural institutions contributes to enhanced museum performance"* and recommended that *"given the relevant role of non-spatial networking in enhancing the competitiveness of Italian museums, public policies should focus on further promoting coordination among Italian museums. Local authorities should facilitate and support the creation of collaboration practices, in particular for museums in remote areas, as partnerships and alliances are the most effective strategies for this types of structures."* (p.1229)

Whilst acknowledging that the research was carried out in an Italian context, the authors state: *"We expect our results to be confirmed in other EU countries although with different intensities linked to the specific characteristics of the territory and current legislation."* (p.1230)



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Finally, whilst this section has presented the evidence from the literature around the positive impact of the role of museums as anchor institutions, it is important to acknowledge that some of the other literature reflects on the challenges and issues around this. For example, a 2009 paper by Grodach 'Beyond Bilbao: Rethinking Flagship Cultural Development and Planning in Three California Cities' used case study research and reflected that: *"Since the widely publicized revitalization success story of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, local governments have been scrambling to create their own flagship cultural projects...However, little research specifically examines the localized complexities of the flagship cultural strategy...the article illustrates that much more than impressive architecture influences their catalytic ability. Flagship cultural projects are highly dependent on a variety of contextual factors and, therefore, should be positioned to build on existing arts and related commercial activity rather than gamble that they will generate new development from scratch"*(Grodach, 2009).



3. CONTRIBUTION OF MUSEUMS TO ADDRESSING INEQUALITIES IN PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS

This section considers the literature on **the contribution of museums to addressing inequalities in participation and access through place-based initiatives.**

Museums are active in seeking to address inequalities in participation and access in general – this section focuses on evidence of examples where museums are seeking to do this via place-based initiatives or where they are seeking to do this by reflecting on the needs of their local communities – so literature and examples are included where it is clear that this is the case, even if it is not explicitly considered to be through a place-based initiative.

The challenge of inequalities in participation and access for museums are well recognised and a range of studies highlight some of the specific evidence around this.

For example, the paper 'Impact of place on museum participation paper' (Widdup and Cutts 2012) *"examines the impact of place on museum participation in England"* and the findings *"show that the traditional social order remains intact, although other social cleavages have become important, and that significant variation exists in museum participation simultaneously at both the neighbourhood and local authority district spatial scales. We conclude by arguing that future research into cultural consumption patterns must take account of the fact that individuals reside in different places."* (p.47)

Also, a paper by Brook (2016) 'Spatial equity and cultural participation: how access influences attendance at museums and galleries in London' is an example of considerations around the factors that influence attendance. Brook (2016) used quantitative analysis to develop an accessibility index and found that: *"Alongside social stratification, significant neighbourhood characteristics are identified, including, importantly, access to museums and galleries...Improved access to museums and galleries has a significant and powerfully positive relationship with the probability of, and frequency of, attendance."*

A 2022 briefing paper by What Works for Wellbeing ('Cultural, arts and community engagement can benefit wellbeing, but how do our neighbourhoods influence our participation?') also found that *"effectively, people living in the most deprived places are less likely to engage than those living in the least deprived places, independent of individuals' demographic background, socioeconomic status or regional location. And it applies to all three types of activities (arts participation, cultural attendance, museums and heritage sites)"* (p.6, emphasis added)

A 2022 report by Brook and Scott 'Art For The Many Not The Few: Addressing Cultural & Other Inequalities At Scale' provides a *"summary of evidence that inequalities in access and opportunities for cultural production and consumption are socially stratified and systemic."* (p.3) summarising the challenges that are faced around addressing



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inequalities in access and participation.

The report looked at the example of Coventry City of Culture 2021 and the approach that was taken there to seek to address such challenges, finding that: *"The three statistics³ we highlighted in the introduction to this case study are good. The scale of investment offered to UK CoC's can allow them the opportunity to engage citizens from the entire social spectrum. But reducing spatial inequalities and class barriers requires careful and considered planning, utilising data to target work at a hyperlocal level is key to reducing spatial inequalities and class barriers."* (p.17)

A 2016 report by Sally Matthews for Kids in Museums ('Hurdles to the participation of children, families and young people in museums: a literature review') looks at hurdles barriers to participation by children, families and young people in museums, and identifies the following as the key hurdles: practical barriers; social and attitudinal barriers; pressures on schools and curriculum changes; limited consultation with young people; poor collaboration – museums and community groups; and project funding and funding cuts. However, the author does note: *"Although set out under one of six headings, as would be expected they do not form discrete groups and are frequently interconnected"*. The report also highlights that: *"Through discussions with those working in museums it is clear there is much innovative and exceptional activity around the country, but we need to learn more about what that is."*

A 2023 research report by Alma Economics for DCMS ('What Works to increase equality of access to culture for lower socio-economic groups: evidence review and scoping research') states that it *"acts as a synthesis to increase understanding of the evidence around equality of access to culture for lower socio-economic groups."*

The report highlighted that the main reasons for low or non-engagement are found to be determined by: *"social factors including people's perception of themselves, social networks, parents' social status, and education; economic factors including the cost of attending cultural events; geographical and physical factors including lack of accessibility and distance; and cultural factors including language barriers or lack of representation and relevance."* In addition, the report emphasises that: *"Whilst these are limiting factors for sustained cultural engagement, the evidence and interviews with cultural sector stakeholders suggested that the (lack of) relevance of cultural products to many population segments is a cross-cutting determinant of willingness to engage with culture."*

Of particular relevance to this literature review, the report also highlights a range of strategies and best practices from the evidence reviewed that were identified as being successful in increasing cultural engagement of people from lower socio-economic groups:

³ • Activity took place in all 42 neighbourhoods within Coventry, • 43% of tickets issued to Coventry postcodes went to those in lower economic groups, and • 77% of the programme, excluding commercial activity, was co-created with local residents.



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- "• *Co-creation and participatory practices where communities define, shape, and have ownership over the cultural offerings in their local area.*
- *Using community settings to increase proximity, familiarity and promote opportunities for socialising.*
- *Communication and outreach strategies that ensure messaging is tailored to a target audience and distributed effectively.*
- *Subsidising attendance costs to alleviate financial barriers, for example, by reducing or removing ticket prices for cultural events.*
- *Using digital technologies to diversify cultural offerings and alleviate geographical barriers.*
- *Improving workforce representation and offering training for staff within cultural organisations to engage diverse audiences.*
- *Encouraging children and young people to engage in culture at an early stage to promote engagement in later life."*

A paper by Stearn and Hide (2021) 'The University of Cambridge Museums: Working in partnership to address social and cultural inclusion in one of the UK's most unequal cities' highlights the opportunities for museums (especially university museums) to work in partnership to address social and cultural inclusion: *"By working together, we can play a fuller and more effective role for our diverse stakeholders and communities. This includes contributing to tourism and the local economy, promoting health and wellbeing, helping address inequality, supporting outcomes for children, and opening up the museums and university to a more diverse range of people."*

The paper outlines some of the strategies that have been developed to do this: *"(i) We undertake audience research to understand who visits and who is excluded, consult directly with non- visitors, and plan audience development approaches accordingly. We use local population data to understand who our under-served communities are, what challenges they face, and what difference we can make; (ii) We invest in specialist staff in learning, inclusion, programming and communications, both within individual museums and in the central team, to co-ordinate joint approaches; (iii) We develop partnerships with local government, schools, health and community partners, and other museums and cultural organisations to deliver work that connects local communities with our collections for mutual benefit."*

Whilst not peer reviewed research, the publication 'Open Up: Museums for Everyone' (written by Julie Aldridge, Mel Larsen and Pam Jarvis) presents a number of case studies to support museums to increase the diversity of their visitors, showcasing a variety of approaches that museums across the UK have adopted to increase the diversity of their visitors.

'Museums as Spaces for Wellbeing: A Second Report from the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing' focuses on health and wellbeing (which has been the subject of a previous literature review, so is not dealt with here) also identifies the place-making role that such initiatives can have: *"Similarly, dementia-friendly Memory Walks*



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run by National Museums Liverpool elicit group reminiscence that becomes part of a shared cultural heritage with important implications for collective wellbeing. Such sharing plays a vital role in place making.”(p.9)

A range of additional international examples, including of museums, is included in the 2012 report on *'Policies And Good Practices In The Public Arts And In Cultural Institutions to promote better access to and wider participation in culture'* written by the Open Method Of Coordination (OMC) Working Group of EU Member States' Experts On Better Access To And Wider Participation In Culture.

A 2024 report by Dr Patria Román-Velázquez *'GALLERIES, Get It Together: Community-Led Responses to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Creative Sector'* looked in detail at EDI initiatives, and the research on which this report is based included *"a systematic analysis of EDI policies across publicly funded galleries in London (18); in-depth interviews with artists (16), gallery staff (30), community groups (7), local government officials (1); an eight week participatory arts-based project...and ethnographic research"*

Interestingly, the research found that: *"The economic imperatives of regeneration are diverting attention, resources, and funding from galleries as place-based community assets in favour of creative entrepreneurship, 'meanwhile spaces', and creative enterprise zones"*(p.5) highlighting the potential conflict between some of the different aspects of place-making that museums are active within.

There are also examples in the literature of museums seeking to address inequalities in participation and access for specific groups.

A 2025 report commissioned by Child of the North *'A country that works for all children and young people: An evidence-based approach to creating a culture of inclusive opportunity through arts and creativity'* highlights examples of museums that are involved in initiatives and projects that seek to ensure all children and young people have inclusive opportunities. For example: *"My Primary School is at the Museum was a project which tested the hypothesis that there may be beneficial learning, social, and cultural outcomes for the museums and for primary school children and their families when a significant portion of their learning takes place in a museum setting"*(p. 22). The report includes various case study examples of museums engaging with children and young people and the benefits this provides to the individuals.

A case study entitled *'Understanding the impact of museum practice when engaging the Syrian refugee community in Milton Keynes'* (Bhambri, 2020) *"investigates the motivations for museums to engage communities and the benefits of engaging refugee communities for the museum and the community"* drawing on literature and specific case study examples, and the paper found that: *"The results outline the significant impact of engaging refugees in museums on integration, improving employability, democratizing museums, challenging stereotypes and increasing participation."* (p.99, emphasis added)



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Looking specifically at young people, a 2023 report by the Institute for Community Research & Development (University of Wolverhampton) and Arts Connect with Historic England ('Young People's Engagements with Heritage Tackling Inequality & Other Opportunities for Public Policy') *"...examined seven case studies across England using qualitative research methods. While distinct, each project utilised heritage to address social exclusion, foster social cohesion, enhance health and wellbeing, and improve the lives of young people."* (p.ii)

The report highlights the contribution of heritage, including museums, to tackling inequality, with two of the key findings from the report being particularly pertinent to this review: *"(2) Heritage engagement offers unique opportunities by which to foster identity and belonging; giving young people the chance to reinterpret and re-present the places in which they live. This aligns with current Levelling Up policy ambitions to cultivate communities, local pride, and belonging in deprived places. Heritage allows young people to view places in new ways, to explore new forms of identity and belonging, and to establish new networks of friends and collaborators. (3) Participating in heritage programmes can help those involved to confront barriers that lead to social exclusion, and can also make telling contributions towards building strong cohesive communities."* (p.ii, emphasis added)

A 2025 paper by O'Connor ('Participatory Accessibility in Museums: The Case of the Murney Tower Museum's Audio Tour') presents a case study of a specific initiative to argue that: *"accessibility initiatives which are developed with the active participation of disabled people and other target audiences, may create better results in facilitating greater access to museums and cultural spaces."* (p.1)

The paper highlights the *"significance of participatory accessibility practice in museums, revealing how the active participation of people with disabilities in accessibility initiatives may bring museums a step closer to greater access and inclusion and to overcoming existing physical, sensory, and cultural heritage barriers."* (p.2)

Whilst not research based, one example of a museum service explicitly referencing specific place-focused policies is contained within the Museums and Galleries Edinburgh Temporary Exhibitions Policy, where under 'outreach' it is stated that: *"Temporary exhibitions displayed in community venues such as libraries, schools, care homes and shopping centres are a key part of our outreach programme. This aligns with the City of Edinburgh Council's 20-minute neighbourhood plan and Citywide Culture Strategy (2023-2030), bringing cultural opportunities to local neighbourhoods across Edinburgh."* (emphasis added, p.7)



4. ROLE OF MUSEUMS IN SUPPORTING COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING AND LOCAL EMPOWERMENT

This section considers the literature on **the extent to which museums support community wealth building and local empowerment through partnerships.**

As noted in Section 2 of this report, anchor institutions can play a role in creating and reinforcing local economic ties and as such make a contribution to and support community wealth building. Therefore, much of the literature referenced in Section 2 also helps evidence the role of museums in supporting community wealth building and local empowerment.

CLES outlines five principles upon which they state community wealth building strategies should be based: Plural ownership of the economy; Making financial power work for local places; Fair employment and just labour markets; Progressive procurement of goods and services; and Socially productive use of land and property⁴. These principles help to identify some of the ways in which museums can, and do, support community wealth building.

The importance of community wealth building in a Scottish context is clear from the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill which became an Act in March 2026. In passing the Bill in the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government emphasised how it will help: *"It will support investment in communities with councils, health boards and other public bodies focusing on the generation, circulation and retention of wealth in local and regional economies. This could include buying or procuring more goods and services from local businesses, boosting social enterprises or helping community groups to acquire vacant buildings and land."* (<https://www.gov.scot/news/investing-in-local-economies/> emphasis added)

As such, the current role of museums in supporting community wealth building builds upon some of the factors mentioned in Section 2 – including most notably the employment role of museums as anchor institutions, and the local procurement practices of museums, as well as the role of museums in supporting other local businesses through both attracting non-local visitors to places to spend money as well as helping to retain local residents within places when they carry out economic activities.

As reported in Section 2, it is clear from the range of academic literature and commissioned research the role that museums have in generating direct, indirect and induced economic contributions and impacts on an ongoing basis as anchor institutions as well as the role museums can have as place-making economic drivers through flagship museum (re)development projects which can also support community wealth building.

⁴ <https://cles.org.uk/what-is-community-wealth-building/the-principles-of-community-wealth-building/>



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In addition to the individual examples in Section 2 (e.g., Derby Museums, Barnsley Museums, Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, etc.) specific evidence around the community wealth building role of museums is clear when specific aspects of wider economic impact work are considered.

For example, the recent research commissioned by AIM ('Economic Impact of the Independent Museum Sector 2024') including consideration of the local dimensions of the overall economic impacts and found that:

- *"In terms of direct employment, it is estimated that the independent museum sector accounts for more than 7,200 jobs.*
- *This is equivalent to almost 4,700 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs.*
- *70% of these jobs are in the local areas where the independent museums are located, showing the significant direct local employment impacts of independent museums.*
- *The independent museum sector spent a total of £131.4 million on the procurement of goods and services in 2023.*
- *Almost half (49.5%) of this procurement spend takes place in the local areas where the independent museums are located, showing the direct procurement impacts of independent museums on their localities.*
- *Applying standard economic assumptions to this procurement expenditure shows that this level of procurement expenditure equates to around 2,900 FTE jobs.*
- *Independent museums attracted more than 19.5 million visitors in 2023 based on the survey findings, and of these, it is assumed that around 14.6 million are adult visitors.*
- *The survey results show that of the 19.5 million visitors, around 8.9 million are local visitors, whilst 10.6 million are day/overnight visitors from further afield – clearly showing the role that independent museums play in attracting visitors to places.*
- *It is estimated that the overall (gross) spend of these visitors is more than £497 million, and much of this expenditure will contribute to the local economies in the places where independent museums are located.*
- *Based on the survey results, it is estimated that most of this visitor spending (more than £279 million) takes place off-site – i.e., outside of the museums themselves and in the local economies and communities where the museums are based." (p.4, emphasis added)*

These findings present clear evidence of the role of museums in supporting community wealth building, especially in terms of local employment, procurement practices and attracting visitors to places.

Beyond community wealth building specifically, there are other areas where museums support local empowerment through partnerships. In this context, it is local community empowerment that is being considered – individual aspects around empowerment were dealt with in a previous MGS commissioned literature review which looked at health and



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wellbeing⁵.

A 2022 report by Crooke, et al 'Museums and Community Wellbeing: A Report of the Museums, Crisis and Covid-19 Project' which used a mixed method approach (including interviews, focus groups and surveys) found that: *"The project has shown the enormous impact that museums can have on community wellbeing by bringing people together in inclusive and welcoming spaces. Supporting people with dementia, engaging children and their families and tackling social isolation are just a few of the ways that museums are promoting wellbeing. The most forward-thinking museums are also able to empower communities and give them a voice."* [emphasis added]

A GEM publication from 2021 'Case Studies Creating Community Partnerships Vol 27' presents *"an array of projects which create meaningful and sustainable community partnerships from all four nations of the UK, as well as abroad"*. The cases provide examples of a variety of partnerships involving museums, and include two Scottish case studies that show impacts around the themes of local empowerment and effectively engaging the local community. Whilst not a research study, the report identifies useful lessons for such partnership work by museums including: *"Take time for informal conversations – the investment of time is essential for building trust and confidence; Flexibility is key, so have a plan B for every session; Adaptability around school runs, holidays and even bus times increased engagement; Partnership approach can build trust and engagement faster; Involving other cultural partners added variety to the programme."* (p.15)

In the context of supporting local empowerment, a 2024 discussion paper entitled 'How do we define effective public involvement in cultural decision making' from the University of Leeds and Cultural Commons (Jancovich, Gigante & Burnill-Maier): *"investigates mechanisms that have been effectively deployed to support local cultural decision-making. Drawing on theories of participation, co-production and deliberative democracy, it explores the risks and opportunities of approaches such as public value, co-production, citizens' assemblies, participatory budgeting, community asset transfers and place-based funding. The paper considers potential implications for policy that seek to avoid the pitfalls of 'best practice' and 'one size fits all' approaches in favour of a more granular understanding of how different methods can achieve different purposes in different places and for different people."* (p.2)

With specific reference to museums and local empowerment, the paper reports that: *"While forms of participatory governance have been observed in other cultural sectors, such as theatre, the shift in museums and art galleries appears more recent, albeit long-awaited, with Arts and Humanities Research Council's recent report Democracy at the Top documenting museum directors' intentions to integrate forms of participatory democracy into the structures of their organisations."* (p.34)

'The Impact of the Museum of Making Social Return on Investment' research study from

⁵ <https://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/research/social-impact-evidence-summary/>



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2023 mentioned earlier in this report (around anchor institutions) also presents evidence of the achievement of local empowerment, with an underpinning theme of the Museum being 'empowering the makers of the future'. The report notes that: "*The Museum of Making placed community involvement and empowerment at its heart, uniquely reintroducing manufacturing to the site of what is widely regarded as the site of the world's first fully mechanised factory.*" (p.13, emphasis added)

"Co-production, collaboration and participation with community and business partners have characterised its approach to development. Over 1,500 people took part in the project alongside companies and civil society organisations, contributing over 40,000 volunteer hours." (p.5, emphasis added)

A 2016 report, 'Strengthening Networks, Sparking Change: Museums and Libraries as Community Catalysts' (Horton and Dowdell, 2016) (which incorporated a literature review, site visits to four museums and libraries actively engaged with their communities, phone interviews with museum and library staff from across the country as well as a town hall gathering of more than 60 leaders from museums, libraries, universities, foundations, government agencies, and related community service sectors) looked at the role of museums as community catalysts and included consideration of the role of partnerships in this, with key themes emerging including the flexibility of partnerships ("*From ad hoc to legally bound, museums and libraries adjust the formality of partnerships to different contexts*" p.21); the variety of roles for museums in such partnerships ("*Museums and libraries play multiple roles in community-oriented partnerships*" p.22) the commitment required ("*Community-focused efforts thrive when commitment to them permeates all organizational levels, and lines of responsibility for creating and sustaining initiatives are clear*" p.24) and the importance of process ("*Partnerships are most effective when they are developed strategically, with clearly defined roles for each partner that account for their particular capacities and resources.*" p.27).



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5. MUSEUMS AS VEHICLES FOR FOSTERING A SENSE OF PLACE, BELONGING AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

This section considers the literature on **museums as vehicles for fostering a sense of place, belonging, and cultural identity within communities.**

It is clear from the review, and from the scale of literature and evidence included in this section of the report, that this area is one of the most well developed in terms of research – a wide range of research exists that has considered the role of museums in helping to foster a sense of place, sense of belonging and a cultural identity.

The currency of this for Scottish museums is reinforced by the findings reported in Section 1 from the March 2026 public opinion survey for MGS by The Diffley Partnership which found that: *"...respondents most frequently agree with the statement that museums and galleries help us celebrate our local stories, with over four in five (83%) respondents either strongly or somewhat agreeing. A similar proportion (79%) agree that museums and galleries help us care for and share our local collections, while seven in ten (71%) say they help us understand the links between here and the wider world. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) agree that museums and galleries help us feel part of our wider region and that they help us understand connections between our local area and legacies of empire, historic slavery and colonialism (65%)."* (Museums Galleries Scotland Report by The Diffley Partnership, March 2026, emphasis added)

An important study around this is 'The impact of historic places and assets on community wellbeing - a scoping review' commissioned by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing (and carried out by Pennington et al, 2019). Within this detailed review, there are a range of studies identified that show the impact that museums have around 'sense of belonging'; 'sense of identity' and 'sense of place'. These examples are taken from two of the nine evidence themes addressed in the scoping review: 1. Heritage-based cultural activities in museums; and 3. Visiting museums, historic houses, other heritage sites.

On the heritage-based cultural activities in museums, the report found that: *"Five higher quality mixed-method evaluations (Flow Associates, 2017; Morse et al., 2015; Dodd and Jones, 2014; Neal, 2012; Neal and Coe, 2013) identified a range of positive impacts of participants and their wider communities."* (p.37)

- *"Flow Associates (2017) provide evidence on potential benefits to participants and their wider communities, including improvements to social relations, the physical environment, and participant's sense of empowerment, sense of belonging, self-worth, and confidence."* (p.38, emphasis added)
- *"One higher quality qualitative study (Todd et al., 2017) provides evidence of beneficial impacts on a wide range of wellbeing-related determinants and outcomes from a museum-based programme that targeted socially isolated older*



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people. Benefits included...sense of place." (p.38, emphasis added)

In addition, another higher quality studies that identify relevant themes include Morse et al (2015) where the main outcomes are listed as *"increased confidence, social interaction, personal wellbeing, pride, sense of achievement, sense of identity, learning & skills"* (p.40, emphasis added).

Other lower quality (using descriptive case studies or mixed methods) studies of relevance include:

- Neal & Coe (2013) where the main outcomes are identified as: *"Increased or improved knowledge & skills (e.g. problem solving, team working), sense of trust empowerment (feeling trusted to undertake important tasks), sense of belonging, ownership & memory."* (p.42, emphasis added).
- Balshaw (undated) where the main outcomes were: *"Increased sense of place, social connectivity & empathy, sense of belonging"* (p.43, emphasis added).
- Goddard & Rasbery (undated), where the main outcomes included: *"...Increased learning & skills, confidence, enthusiasm, sense of place, sense of belonging, sense of achievement, pride, self-esteem."* (p.43, emphasis added).

On the visiting museums, historic houses, other heritage sites theme the review also found: *"Three qualitative studies also provide evidence that heritage visiting may improve a wide range of wellbeing-related outcomes, including social cohesion, the urban environment, community identity, social connectivity and cohesion, sense of belonging, sense of place, enjoyment, satisfaction, confidence, and learning, and provide opportunities for 'escape'/respite and recuperation"* (Bryson et al., 2002; Everett & Barrett, 2011; Packer, 2008)" (p.49, emphasis added)

A rapid review of the wellbeing evidence from place-based arts and culture interventions ('The social value of place-based arts and culture: rapid review and synthesis', Musella & Bignall-Donnelly, 2022) included findings relevant to this theme:

"Increases in a perceived sense of purpose was reported in three studies, all of which had a volunteering component. These included two high-quality studies of museum-based interventions where: the act of dedicating time and effort to something increased feelings of value and belonging; building social connections and support were key pathways to improvements." (p.4, emphasis added)

A 2018 English Heritage report 'Wellbeing and the Historic Environment' (Reilly, Nolan and Monkton, 2018) identified six routes into the wellbeing agenda for the historic environment, including: *"Heritage as Place: reclaiming a sense of place is seen as a potential solution to social isolation, sustainability and environmental degradation. There has been a wealth of research on 'sense of place' ... and specific studies that articulate the character of place to the feelings of its inhabitants ... Developing this further, the idea of 'place-shaping' naturally emerges; ensuring local people have a voice, feel*



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empowered and express a sense of belonging. Culture and heritage generally are understood as key methods of generating belonging." (Historic England, 2018, emphasis added)

A recent report 'Evidence Enquiry for Wellbeing and Heritage Review of literature 2019-2024 and policy context' (Bundhoo et al, 2025) whilst looking at heritage generally, with any museum specific references focusing on individual mental health and wellbeing impacts, does also highlight a number of ways in which "*heritage participation fosters both hedonic (happiness-based) and eudaimonic (meaning-based) wellbeing, contributing to:...Social Wellbeing and Community Cohesion – Strengthened social bonds, intergenerational exchange, and increased civic participation, particularly among marginalized and vulnerable groups...Cultural Identity and Ontological Security – A sense of continuity and stability in a rapidly changing world, particularly in areas with contested histories or shifting demographics.*" (p.2, emphasis added)

Emphasising the cross-thematic nature of much of the research, as noted in Section 1, this research also highlights: "*Economic and Regenerative Benefits – Heritage-led regeneration projects contribute to place-making and sustainable tourism, fostering economic prosperity alongside social wellbeing.*" (p.2, emphasis added)

An article by Twells et al (2018) - 'It's about giving yourself a sense of belonging': community-based history and well-being in South Yorkshire' explores "*the potential of involvement in community-based history in the South Yorkshire region to contribute to social identity and well-being and to inform public policy concerning health and wellbeing*. In terms of method, the authors note that they adopted a modified grounded theory methodology and "*developed two concurrent modes of data collection: a survey and in-depth interviews...of the 93 people who completed the survey, 42 indicated willingness to take part in an interview. A total of 24 individuals participated in interviews.*" (p.11)

The authors' report that: "*We demonstrate the role of community-based history in building social capital and creating social links, tackling the negative effects of isolation, providing meaning, generating public and self-esteem and contributing to personal identity and belonging, as well as improving and strengthening local communities.*" (emphasis added)

The article also identifies that: "*Motivations for engagement develop over time, with ongoing involvement inspired by unanticipated rewards: making social connections, gaining a sense of identity and belonging, satisfaction in new skills and achievements, the respect of other people, and improvements in physical, cognitive, emotional and psychosocial well-being.*" (p.23 emphasis added)

A 2022 paper, 'Caring Spaces: Individual and Social Wellbeing in Museum Community Engagement Experiences' (Wallen & Docherty-Hughes, 2022) "*explores the narratives of participants in museum community engagement projects in Scotland*" through a qualitative study using semi-structured walking interviews. The research found that:



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"Participants' narratives reveal the positive impacts that "caring spaces" engendered through museum community engagement work have on overall feelings of wellbeing, achieved through deep processes of critical reflection, which resulted in enhanced self-esteem and confidence, and a heightened awareness of participants' situated ontology in the context of broader issues of social inequality and identities." (p.93)

A research study about 'The Value of Arts and Culture in Place-shaping' (Wavehill, 2019 commissioned by Arts Council England) aimed to aid ACE's understanding and *"help them to articulate if and how the arts and cultural offer within a place can attract and retain individuals and businesses and help to shape its identity."* (p.iv, emphasis added). The research used a multi-method approach including *"a nationally representative survey of adults with the sample derived from the Active Lives survey, a series of focus groups in six locations...interviews with a sample of businesses and business leaders across these six locations, and interviews with strategic partners..."* (p.iv)

Whilst the research looked at arts and culture overall, it did include museums, and some of the headline findings are of relevance to this theme. On the topic of 'creating desirable places to live', the headline findings included: *"A strong and vibrant arts and cultural offer provides opportunities for communities to come together. It contributes towards people having a stronger attachment to place by fostering a sense of collective identity."* as well as *"Arts and culture supports personal wellbeing and a strong arts and cultural offer makes people feel more content and thus more likely to stay within an area."* (p.3, emphasis added)

In addition, under the theme of 'attracting and retaining people to live and work' one of the headline findings was that: *"Arts and culture is important in supporting community integration. Participation and engagement can foster a stronger sense of community, identity and belonging which makes places more attractive to live."* (p.9, emphasis added)

A 2021 article 'It's part of our community, where we live': Urban heritage and children's sense of place' (Grimshaw & Mates, 2021) deployed *"data from a qualitative research project in a primary school in a former coalfield area in the north-east of England to argue that children's experiences of learning about their urban local history and heritage can help to develop their sense of place"*. The research adopted a qualitative approach based around observation and focus group interviews with school children. The research: *"focused firmly on the experiences and views of children in order to contribute to an understanding of the ways in which a sense of place can be developed in childhood. Specifically, we have argued that learning about local post-industrial heritage can develop children's sense of place, and have demonstrated the various ways that this can happen."* (p.1348, emphasis added)

The article concludes that: *"Learning about local history allows children to create and interpret historical events and develop a sense of place: they become active participants in telling the history of their place. By taking ownership of and interpreting their history, they can begin to develop their own place and even develop a new way of seeing*



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themselves in this place." (p.1349, emphasis added)

The book chapter 'Museums as a public space of belonging? Negotiating dialectics of purpose, presentation, and participation' (Eckersley, 2023) presents the findings from research that investigated "*the ways in which museums might act as democratic public spaces*" in German museums. using mixed methods: "*Twenty museums and exhibitions were visited in person to undertake exhibition and display analysis – mostly between 2019 and 2021, some in 2018 during preliminary research. Following site visits, semi-structured, qualitative interviews were undertaken with museum staff from 12 sites.*" (p.19)

In the analysis Eckersley argues that "*the museum is a public space in the dual sense of being both symbolically representative as an institution of the demos, and in offering a place where contrasting and varied concepts of belonging may be negotiated and tried out*" (p.22, emphasis added)

Importantly for museums' consideration around this area of work: "*The analysis draws out the layered ways in which museums address belonging: firstly, through museum professionals' understanding of the role of museums; secondly, through the display strategies chosen by them for museum exhibitions; and thirdly, through the institutional practices used by them to engage with specific communities.*" (p.17)

A paper 'Creating Place Identity Through Heritage Interpretation' (Uzzell, 1996) carried out a research study in Guilford that looked at social identity, where 120 interviews were carried out with an equal mix of museum visitors and non-visitors and: "*The results show that Guildford Museum was successful in communicating a sense of place and a sense of identity to its visitors.*" (p.7)

An important final reflection in the paper summarises the findings, and also the general issues around this wider theme: "*If museums and interpretive centres see their role as one of telling people about place, the past and their position in both then they should also be about enhancing people's sense of identity with place and the past. Museums have an important role to play in this process and, as has been shown, can help people to acquire a sense of identity and a sense of place.*" (p.9, emphasis added)

A research report by MeLa (European Museums in an age of Migrations) 'Museums & Identity in History and Contemporaneity' (MeLa, 2015) explored "*the importance of place in European museums for the construction of identities*" with the methodology involving site visits, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups with visitors and non-visitors. The research identified three clusters of case studies (Placing the nation; Peoples, borders, movement; and European cities and "other" places) and the Placing the nation cluster identified the National Museum of Scotland as the primary case study.

Some of the key findings for this cluster included: "*museums in nations where the political conception of the nation has undergone significant changes may highlight the fluid and changing nature of national identity*"; that "*professionals see museums as an*



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important resource for debates on national identity and actively encouraged visitors to use the museum collections in this way"; and that: "although national identities are plural, national museum representations of national histories have the capacity to provoke strong feelings of pride and attachment among visitors, including those with migrant backgrounds." (pp.12-13, emphasis added)

A 2025 paper ('The Study of Social Interaction and Sense of Place in Private Art Museums of Eastern China from the Perspective of Cultural Sustainability' by Liu, Xu & Song, 2025) investigated *"the social processes of place-making, sense of place, and place branding within the context of private art museums in Eastern China, highlighting their role in fostering social interaction and contributing to urban sustainability."* (p. 1, emphasis added).

Using a mixed methods approach, including surveys (a survey of 235 visitors) and case studies (using a combination of observational research and interviews), alongside statistical analysis, the research found that *"These museums enhance emotional engagement, promote cultural understanding, and support sustainable cultural identities within urban spaces"* (p.1).

In addition, *"The findings emphasize how art museums function not just as display spaces, but as dynamic cultural and social agents, shaping both individual and collective identity within urban contexts."* (p.7, emphasis added)

A 2026 paper about museums in China ('In-depth analysis of the psychological mechanisms of social identity in museum heritage and innovation from the perspective of cultural thought' by Cui, 2026), used *"mixed research methods and analyses data from 680 valid questionnaires and 35 in-depth interviews, utilizing statistical techniques"* to assess the role of *"museums as material carriers of cultural memory and constructive spaces of social identity"*.

"The findings reveal that: museum cultural heritage practices significantly promote the construction of historical identity, national identity, and civic identity through activating collective memory, disseminating heritage conservation concepts, and fulfilling educational functions" (p.1, emphasis added)

Finally, a 2025 paper ('The Study on the Impact of Museum Tourism on Visitors' Cultural Identity' by Shen, 2025) looked at the impact of museum tourism on visitors' cultural identity and using a survey of 600 people and 25 in-depth interviews to assess the impact. The results: *"...found that the immersion, education, and interactivity dimensions of museum tourism experience are significantly positively correlated with visitors' cultural identity"* (p.56)



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6. REFLECTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section briefly reflects on the findings of this literature review and considers potential future opportunities around these areas of research.

In reading this section, it should be recognised that this review has had a particular focus – and this has influenced what has been (and what has not been) considered. In addition, this review should be seen in the wider context of the previous literature reviews that MGS has commissioned – as this review has avoided repeating what was covered in those studies (available here: [Social Impact: Evidence summary - Museums Galleries Scotland](#)).

As Section 1 noted, there is (to some extent) literature on each of the key themes covered in this review. However, in some areas there is a lack of, or limited, evidence or literature especially of the type sought in the brief. This reflects the specific policy-based nature of some of the themes and the nature of much of the literature, with the concepts of ‘place-making’ and ‘place-based approaches’ themselves being closely aligned, and related to, recent and current policy developments as well as requiring articulation to ensure clarity and consensus of understanding. This is evident in the qualitative nature of some of the literature, the extent of literature that critiques these areas, and the fact that the academic literature does not (yet) reflect museums’ contributions to these specific policies in an explicit way. This is not because museums are not doing so, but because there is limited research that looks through this specific lens.

Section 2 clearly shows there is evidence on museums as anchor institutions – summarised in three main ways (museums as flagship projects; museums having an important presence in a place; and museums being tied to a particular place), around which there are a wider variety of roles that museums fulfil. However, it also has to be acknowledged that some of the literature identifies issues and challenges around this role for museums.

Section 3 shows that the challenges around addressing inequalities in access and participation are well recognised in the literature. It is also evident that museums are carrying out a range of activities and initiatives around addressing these inequalities – both generally and with specific target groups/potential audiences in mind. However, the extent to which there is current evidence of impact here is limited. It is to be expected that this is likely to be as much about a lack of research on the impact, as it is about a lack of impact in and of itself, although future research will be required to confirm this.

Section 4 builds on some of the aspects of museums as anchor institutions from Section 2, and shows that museums support community wealth building and local empowerment in a variety of ways – especially on employment, purchasing, and attracting people to, and retaining people in, a place.

Section 5 is the area where the literature is very strong indeed and there is a good range



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of literature evident across this theme, as well as this being an area of research where there is clear and strong evidence of the impact that museums have in helping develop a sense of place, sense of belonging and cultural identity.



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