THE UNUSUAL SUSPECTS FESTIVAL

4 Years in Review
UNLIKELY CONNECTIONS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The Unusual Suspects Festival is a unique set of collaborative events, hosted by different organisations from a variety of sectors, across different venues in a city. It brings together people who would not usually meet, despite sharing an enthusiasm for creating real social change through collaboration.

The Social Innovation Exchange (SIX), created the Unusual Suspects Festival and designs its programme to facilitate serendipity between organisations and people, who would otherwise remain unconnected.

“As a result of my involvement in the festival, I will commit as a civil servant to make the unusual more usual.”

- Albert Garcia Macian (Mollet del Valles Council)
UNUSUAL ENGAGEMENT
PEOPLE AND PLACES

Across Sectors

The Unusual Suspects Festival brings together diverse groups of people across sectors and generations, ranging from people from community organisations, foundations, public sector organisations, universities to designers, artists, researchers and young people.

Global Representation

The Unusual Suspects Festival brought together people from over 100 cities around the world and had representatives from the following countries:

- Portugal
- Spain
- South Korea
- Canada
- France
- Belgium
- Italy
- Denmark
- USA
- The Netherlands
- UK
- Colombia
- Ecuador
- Bolivia
- Eritrea
- Argentina
- Germany
- Austria
- South Africa
- Kenya
- Latvia
- China
- Malaysia
- Singapore
- Australia
- India
- Norway
- Mexico
- Ireland

Intergenerational

The Unusual Suspects Festival encourages intergenerational dialogue. In 2017 Festival, we explicitly encouraged participants to bring someone from different generation (mum, dad, child, neighbour, friend, or a colleague), who’d never think of signing up to an event such as this.

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In September 2014, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, SIX (the Social Innovation Exchange) and Collaborate, hosted the first Unusual Suspects Festival of ideas, solutions and debates. We explored what happens when we facilitate collaboration between people, many of whom are already doing social innovation but don’t identify as ‘innovators’, together with a community of social innovators, practitioners and experts.

“At its root is a belief in the power of collaboration and social innovation to change society for the better — and a desire to bring these concepts together in practice. The concept itself is collaborative, developed through a coming together of three organisations. We wanted to start filling what we saw as a series of disconnects; incredible innovation that wasn’t making a difference to mainstream public services; collaboration across government that remained too insular; rhetoric around social action that remained just that. We created the Unusual Suspects to provide a space for people to come together and find solutions to these problems and generate new possibilities.”

- Henry Kippin from Collaborate

Session Highlights

How can we harness the power of creativity to change society for the better?
Held at Battersea Arts Centre, this session focused on the close relationship between arts and social innovation, and the way in which art (of all forms) can be used to enable conversation about local and community issues

Session partners: Battersea Arts Centre & local artists

Food, social innovation & collaboration across Europe
This session explored the role of food in stimulating innovation and collaboration. Stories were shared from the Netherlands, Sweden and the Basque Country - they illustrated how food is connecting partners across sectors.

Session partners: URBACT - Agirre Lehendakaria Centre (Basque Country), City of Sodertajle, Green Planet Project, Brussels City
Harnessing an appetite for change and people power

As the festival moved out of London for the first time, Glasgow became an obvious candidate for the next venue city. A city with a reputation for being welcoming, friendly, people driven, pragmatic & energetic, it provided a very different festival experience from London in 2014.

Taking place in the wake of the 2014 Independence Referendum, the festival aimed to utilise the strong sense of restlessness and an appetite for change, creating new bonds of collaboration.

The festival worked towards helping already brilliant people and organisations, who were already undertaking innovation work, to identify themselves as innovators and leaders. Due to the size, and nature of the city, many of the festival participants already had pre-existing relationships with each other, so a large part of the Glasgow festival focussed around reframing old relationships of collaboration, as well as nurturing new ones.

Session Highlights

Developing science gardens in schools

This session explored how science gardens can transform communities and schools, develop and network with other schools and organisations (both locally and internationally) to future support and develop the curriculum

Session partners: Glasgow City of Science, Rotary Club of Dennistoun, the RSA Wellbeing Network, the Glasgow Tree Lovers Society, OPAL, Field Studies Council Scotland, and Glasgow City Council Educational Services

Leading innovation with criminal justice

Taking place in the heart of Glasgow, at the Old Hairdressers, this session provided an exploration into and debate over the various approaches to instigating and enabling change in individuals, cultures and systems within the field of criminal justice.

Session partners: SIX, Vox Liminis, Positive Prisons? Positive Futures, and the Wise Group
Every festival that SIX has organised has taken on it's own unique shape and identity, and the festival in Northern Ireland was no different. Like Glasgow, due to the size of the place, many of the key actors already had relationships, so reframing of these ties was a key part of the festival experience. This was largely achieved through SIX bringing in, outside perspectives from countries like Kenya, Greece and South Africa.

The Unusual Suspects Festival in Northern Ireland also served as a platform for the launching of Social Innovation NI, a cross-sector collaboration that aims to make it easier for those with innovative solutions to social challenges to access the support they need. The festival provided a space in which brilliant innovation work that was taking place already in Northern Ireland to be shared and spread to a wider audience, as well as to other organisations in NI.

Session Highlights

What tomorrow’s Derry looks like?
Evening Reception

Young participants from both sides of the city’s division spoke directly and openly with the audience (including the Mayor of Derry) about what they wanted future of Derry to look like — a city of potential, culture, hope, energy, a creative spirit and self-determination of what it wants to be.

Session partners: Derry City and Strabane District Council, range of young participants from different communities in Derry

Public Property: How can we transform communities through unused space?

Taking place in Hydebank College, a college for young offenders, this session examined the way in which unused or underutilised space can be transformed into spaces that can benefit and engage the local community, and how these transformations related to the creeping influence of gentrification

Session partners: Hydebank College, Barras Art and Design (BAaD)
Empowerment, identity and belonging

There was a palpable sense of frustration and powerlessness within the city, and it was something that arguably unites all Londoners. It was therefore important to bring The Unusual Suspects Festival back to London in 2017.

Through this edition, we wanted to show that there is more that connects us as human beings, than there is that divides us. We promoted stories of resilience and hope amongst each other in the turbulent and dark times London had faced post-tragic events.

The festival provided an opportunity to share our lived experiences with each other, debate, question and challenge ourselves to think and act differently. We invited old and new friends to talk about what makes us feel at home, wherever and whatever home is, exploring identity, language and culture.

Session Highlights

How can we better understand the lived experiences of others? A psycho-geographic walk in Elephant and Castle

A walkshop that examined how different places make us feel, and whether collectively sharing our sometimes divergent experiences of a place can help us feel more connected to it.

Session partners: Social Life, The Urban Realities Laboratory

SIX Supper Club: Conversations that matter

A powerful evening of storytelling and conversations over dinner at our office in King’s Cross. We wanted to create an informal space where you can reflect on the assumptions we make, our beliefs and values and share our experiences that have shaped who we are with others

Session partners: SIX, Alternative UK, Richard DeDomenici (artist), Ella Saltmarshe (The Comms Lab)
A PLATFORM FOR COLLABORATION

74% Of participants met someone who they will pursue future collaboration with at The Unusual Suspects Festival.

Stories of Collaboration
Young Foundation and R.O.C.K.S!

Seoul City and the Unusual Suspects

Seoul Metropolitan Government came to the Unusual Suspects Festival 2014 and co-hosted a session with SPREAD-i, a collaborative team working to connect community of innovators, practitioners and policymakers in the social and civic sector in Asia and Europe. The session explored how governments can better engage with citizens during decision-making.

Following the Festival in 2014, SPREAD-i has started a documentary project called The Mutual Future (supported by Seoul City and Seoul Economy Centre), which explores cooperative ways of working, specifically looking at co-operative education and housing in the UK.

SIX has also maintained close collaboration with Seoul City and have continued secondment and learning exchange programmes with Seoul Metropolitan Government, which enabled social economy and social innovation policies to spread across borders and different contexts.

Ororde Faka from Roehampton R.O.C.K.S! International Arts and Louise Foreman from Young Foundation met at the Ideas Exchange session, a pre-festival session designed to refine, develop and shape session ideas with other hosts and partners and to explore potential synergies and collaboration opportunities.

Ororde and Louise co-designed an interactive session at Unusual Suspects Festival 2017 in London, exploring how grassroots, community-led initiatives can use in-depth, participatory research practices to explore the hopes and values that they share, and how these insights can pave the way for collective action in
Of participants thought that The Unusual Suspects Festival is a useful platform for creating social change.

Legacy Case Study
A New Festival in Northern Ireland

The Unusual Suspects Festival in Northern Ireland served as a platform for the launching of Social Innovation NI, a cross-sector collaboration that aims to make it easier for those with innovative solutions to social challenges to access the support they need.

The Festival partners in Northern Ireland have taken inspiration from Unusual Suspects and has built on its legacy. This year, the NI partners will be organising a 2-day social innovation festival called FusionFest in 2 cities, Derry~Londonderry and Belfast.

Demain - Post-Festival Events

Following the Unusual Suspects Festival 2017 in London, we collaborated with Impact Hub Islington and Alternative UK to host an exclusive screening of critically acclaimed French documentary, Demain (Tomorrow). The documentary explores how people all over world are re-inventing agriculture, energy, economy, democracy and education.

The purpose of the film night was to provide a space where we can continue the discussions and relationships built during the Festival in June. Currently, we are working closely with Alternative UK to re-imagine the Unusual Suspects as a platform for an alternative political space.

“The Festival made me realise the capacity I have and it gave me the confidence to step out of my comfort zone.”

- Orode Fake, Roehampton R.O.C.K.S!
94% of attendees want to see more regular Unusual Suspects events and activities.

Building on the 4 years of running The Unusual Suspects Festival, our ambition is to covert The Unusual Suspects into a more permanent model where we continuously identify, empower and mobilise the unusual suspects.

Through the Unusual Suspects as a platform, our objective is to:

- **Build a community** of “unusual suspects” and a close network of partners and collaborators through series of events (both self-organised by the unusual suspects or curated by SIX)
- **Share insights and practice** by continuously document the learnings from the unusual suspects
- **Enable other cities** and neighbourhoods to organise The Unusual Suspects Festival
Building a Community of “Unusual Suspects”

Our aim is to find, empower, and mobilise the unusual suspects, and build a community of collaborators, who will support each other and grow together.

SIX will curate regular events to bring together like-minded partners to build a movement, drawing on what Unger calls our ‘inexhaustible reservoir of vision and of contrariness”. The unusual suspect partners and collaborators will engage actively, self-organise gatherings and events and sharing learnings throughout the year.

**Expected Outputs**
- Regular event series curated by SIX (themed events, workshops, etc.)
- Informal gatherings curated by SIX (supper clubs, walks, etc.)
- Regular gathering/events curated by partners

Co-creating Insights and Sharing Practice

We will re-build a website that will function as a media platform to facilitate the continuous documentation of the stories and voices of the unusual suspects, through audio visual and written content. We will use “documentary” as a social research tool, identifying the core values and skills that emerge from stories of unusual suspects.

The website will be a vibrant online space where the Unusual Suspect community will highlight people, insights, case studies of collaboration. The website will also enable unusual suspects to self-organise and curate own gatherings and events.

**Expected Outputs**
- Documentary and interview series
- Website as a space to document audio, visual, and written stories
- Website as a platform for active engagement and proposals for new ideas and collaborations

Spreading the Festival model

The Unusual Suspects Festival has always moved other cities (Glasgow and Northern Ireland) out of request from people and organisations who have attended the previous Festivals. And cities such as Montreal, Medellin, Seoul City have shown interest in the Festival model following The Unusual Suspects Festival 2017 in London.

In order to spread the Festival model and values more widely, we will develop an open source Unusual Suspects toolkit, with guidelines and lessons capturing the core elements of the Festival we experienced the past 4 years. We will reflect on our model (both strengths and weaknesses), analyse them and distill our learnings into a toolkit. The toolkit will provide a recipe for designing a good Unusual Suspects Festival, both from an organisational and capacity perspective.

**Expected Output**
- The Unusual Suspects Festival toolkit: How to organise your own
OUR LEARNINGS

Power and dynamics
When working with diverse people and perspectives, we must understand and adapt to different dynamics and levels of power. To effectively collaborate, we must trust each other and begin to relinquish our own power.

It's a skill, not a hobby
As sectors, organisations and individuals, we need to acknowledge that there are specific skill sets and competencies that are needed to effectively collaborate. We must invest time and resources to building collaboration readiness.

Mobilising hidden collaborators
If we want to catalyse inclusive approaches to complex problems, we need to ensure voices that matter are heard. We must find, empower, and mobilise the unusual suspects.

Creating accessible platforms
Platforms enable and invite co-production and reduce dependency. We need to actively curate more platforms for action and act as facilitators rather than directors — it is then that new models and innovations can launch.

Leadership and resilience
Collaboration requires a more distributed and less hierarchical form of leadership. We must reconfigure who and what a leader should be, and support individuals as a community of collaborators.

Scaling great collaboration
Good collaboration should be scalable and sustainable. We need to rethink impact in terms of success of our collaborations and not just our organisations.

“\nIn spite of current ads and slogans, the world doesn't change one person at a time. It changes as networks of relationships form among people who discover they share a common cause and vision of what's possible."

- Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze
(Using Emergence to scale Social Innovation, 2006)