

Telling the Untold Story:
Image, Representation and
Cultural Regeneration in Paisley

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This report was produced by Dr Conor Wilson from the University of the West of Scotland to share the findings from his PhD research entitled 'Telling *the Untold Story*: Discourses, Cultural Regeneration and the Hybridity of Cultural Regeneration in Paisley' undertaken between 2019 and 2022.

(Paisley is) a town that punches well above its weight, an ambitious underdog determined to take its place at the table and unapologetically show off its best bits
(The Independent, 20 June 2019)

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1.0 Executive Summary

Culture and creativity have long been associated with debates about urban regeneration. Beyond the immediate economic impacts, culture is often used a way of transforming area reputations. However, there is also substantial critique of some forms of 'culture-led' regeneration. Additionally, there has been little research that considers how smaller urban places might utilise the positive effects of culture without the harmful impacts of gentrification.

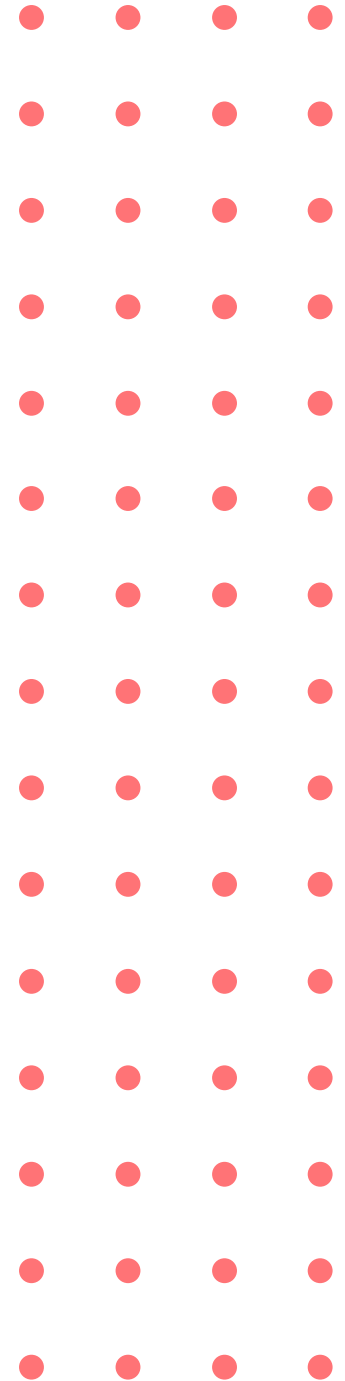
This report outlines the key findings and insights from PhD research carried out between 2019 and 2020. This research explored how Paisley's image and reputation was constructed, and how this relates to changing ideas about cultural regeneration within the town. This research utilised a variety of different methods such as: newspaper analysis, documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews and online workshops to explore how representations of Paisley, culture and regeneration changed between 2014 and 2020.

Findings from this research suggest that cultural regeneration activities have been successfully generated newspaper reporting about Paisley. Interviews with key personnel involved cultural regeneration shows that particular 'key messages' about Paisley have been successfully reflected in the newspaper reporting about the town. In addition to this, online workshops held with local stakeholders suggest that cultural regeneration activities have had a more mixed impact at local level. Local residents were broadly supportive of cultural regeneration activities, though some work is required to raise awareness.

Based on these findings, a number of key insights have emerged. To begin, there has been some shift in how the approach underpinning Paisley's cultural regeneration has been represented. There emerges a more 'holistic' approach to cultural regeneration as opposed to an approach that is solely culture-led. However, this research suggests that there is a consistent focus on large-scale, flagship projects and their associated economic impacts.

In addition to this, newspaper representations of Paisley consistently link the town with 'industrial decline' and the emergence of the 'post-industrial society'. This creates a risk of reinforcing negative stereotypes about Paisley, even when discussed within the context of 'regeneration'. This suggests that further research is needed to explore the link between Paisley's image, cultural regeneration and broader ideas around 'territorial stigma'.

This report is split into three sections. The first (2.0) will contextualise the study by giving an overview of debates about culture-led regeneration, cultural regeneration and creative placemaking. The second section (3.0) will outline the research methods that were used and give an overview of the key findings from this research. The third (4.0), discusses the key insights that have emerged from this study in more depth. Finally, the conclusion summarises the report and pulls together key recommendations from this research.



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2.0 Section 1: Background & Methods

2.1 Background: Cultural Regeneration

Culture and creativity have long been viewed as a cure for the ills of the contemporary urban condition. Culture and creativity, it is argued, can provide an economic and reputation boost to towns and cities but improve their image, developing their economies and attracting inward investment. However, there have also been various criticisms that have been made of 'culture-led' regeneration. Common criticisms include 'gentrification', in which culture is used to displace local residents, as well as exacerbating other urban inequalities.

This research adopted a more nuanced understanding of cultural regeneration, arguing that there are various different forms of culturally informed regeneration. More specifically, this study proposed that there have been three main types of cultural regeneration: culture-led (and creative city) strategies, creative placemaking and cultural regeneration.

In an approach which is solely culture-led, culture is leveraged, principally, to secure economic transformation. One of the most prominent versions of culture-led regeneration are 'Creative City' approaches, which suggest that cities must compete to attract and retain a 'creative class' of residents by become bohemian, trendy places (Florida, 2004). There are a number of problems with this approach. Advocating for the migration of the 'creative class' into disinvested urban areas creates the immediate problem of gentrification and risks exacerbating urban inequalities. There has been, therefore, a large volume of criticism aimed at the 'Creative City' approach to cultural regeneration.


Beyond the 'Creative City', there are a number of other approaches that might be called 'culture-led' regeneration'. For example, bidding for cultural events and festivals, as well as building flagship 'cultural facilities', such as museums and other cultural landmarks have often—though not exclusively—fallen under the umbrella of 'culture-led' regeneration (Richards and Wilson, 2006; Comunian and Mould, 2014).

These approaches have followed from the apparent success of other cities. For example, Glasgow's year as European Capital of Culture (ECOC) is said to have developed the 'Glasgow model' of using cultural events to leverage economic and physical regeneration goals (Garcia, 2005). Similarly, the 'Bilbao effect' emerged in the construction of the Guggenheim Museum within the city which is said to have provided a 'blueprint' for using cultural facilities to regenerate 'run-down' areas (Mould, 2018).

However, the speed at which culture-led regeneration strategies have proliferated creates the problem of 'serial reproduction'. Serial reproduction, according to Richards and Wilson (2006), undermines the uniqueness of culture-led regeneration as the strategy of—for example—hosting cultural events or building cultural landmarks—is replicated by other cities hopeful of replicating the success of the initial project.

In addition to this, other approaches to 'culture-led' regeneration have attracted similar criticism to Florida's 'Creative City'. From this perspective, both event-bids and flagship cultural projects have a similar competitive logic that foregrounds economic regeneration. This means that the problem of gentrification, and an approach that is too 'top-down' and focused on economic and physical regeneration remain under an approach that is wholly culture-led. However, this does not mean that a more holistic form of cultural regeneration cannot exist. Since 2010, literature has begun to emerge on a more 'bottom-up' alternative called creative placemaking.





Creative placemaking, it is argued, can harness the positive effects of cultural without the harmful effects of more top-down approaches (Oakley, 2015). In doing so, we might go beyond criticisms of top-down culture-led regeneration without disregarding them entirely. From this perspective, creative placemaking might provide a more holistic vision for cultural regeneration that goes beyond a narrow focus on economic (re)development.

Creative placemaking refers to a 'process whereby partners shape the physical and social character of a neighbourhood, town, city or region around arts and cultural activities' (Markusen, 2013: 292). Oakley (2015) has argued that this involves small-scale cultural investment at a neighbourhood level, as well as an approach that is less principally concerned with economic development objectives. Taken together, creative placemaking amounts to an approach to cultural regeneration that foregrounds local community voice and participation, co-production and small-scale cultural investment in hopes of developing a more holistic version of cultural regeneration.

Despite the proliferation of generally positive scholarship, there remains some scepticism towards creative placemaking. Critics maintain that the differences between creative placemaking and other, more 'top-down' iterations of culture-led regeneration are over- stated. Furthermore, some critics have maintained that creative placemaking can be linked to issues of gentrification. There has been some concern expressed that creative placemaking while focusing on liveability can—paradoxically—exclude the most marginalised members of society from cities by contributing to rising living costs (Pritchard, 2016; Mould, 2018).

However, this research argued that focusing too heavily on issues of gentrification—which is largely limited to larger cities—doesn't account for the experiences of smaller urban places seeking to leverage the benefits of culture. As a result, this research aimed to understand Paisley's journey between 2014-2020, to explore how ideas about cultural regeneration grew and changed over this time, and how they were represented in newspaper representations.

Now that this report has provided an overview of the debates surrounding cultural regeneration, this report will briefly provide an overview of Paisley's changing approach to cultural regeneration during the research period.

2.2 Background: Paisley's Approach

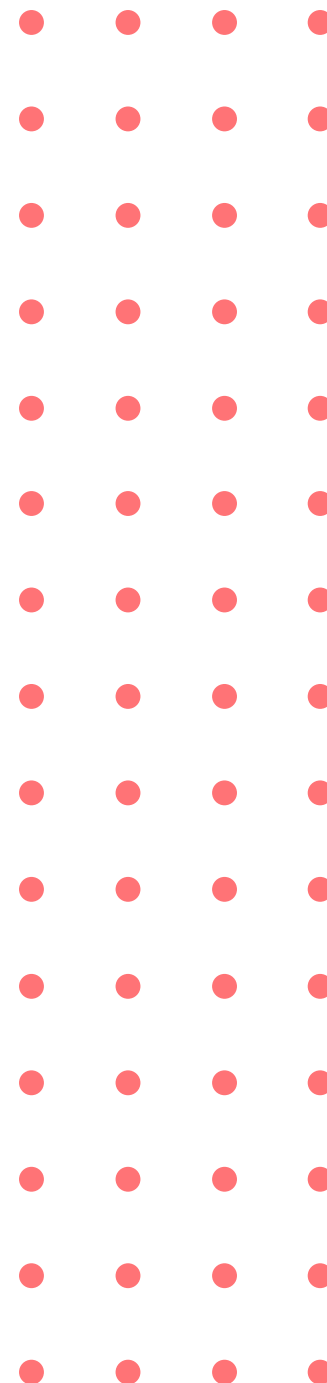
Prior to 2014, Paisley has historically been the focus of many urban regeneration policies. For example, Ferguslie Park was one of twelve community development projects in the UK in 1979. The area was also targeted under the 'New Life for Urban Scotland' initiative which ran specifically in Scotland. More recently, Paisley has turned towards culture, heritage and events as a means of regenerating the town. This report will briefly consider three main periods in which Paisley's approach to cultural regeneration has developed: the publication of *Paisley: The Untold Story*, bidding to become the 2021 UK City of Culture (UKCoC), and the development of Future Paisley.

2.2.1 Paisley: The Untold Story

In 2014, Renfrewshire council published a set of plans to use Paisley's culture and heritage offer to redevelop the town and transform the town's reputation. The report outlined the 'under-exploited' cultural and heritage 'assets' that could be used as a foundation for the broader economic and physical regeneration of the town. The report outlined the potential redevelopment of Paisley town hall and Paisley Museum, and the potential UKCoC bid. Throughout *The Untold Story* the approach to regeneration is referred to as 'heritage-led'. This is a process whereby the local authority—and partners—utilise culture and heritage assets (both existing and future) to develop the town's economic and physical infrastructure. More generally, the *Untold Story* is similar to other 'culture regeneration approaches' in which culture and heritage 'assets' are used principally to secure the physical and economic transformation of 'run down' or 'declining' spaces, such as Paisley town centre.

2.2.2 Paisley 2021: Bidding for UKCoC

Following *the Untold Story*, it was announced in 2015 that Paisley would bid to become UKCoC. Paisley ultimately lost the bid to Coventry. However, it was the first town to be shortlisted despite not having city status. Following the bid campaign, there was a renewed commitment by key partners to ensure the bid had an enduring cultural, social and economic impact. The regeneration approach adopted during the bid was similar to the culture-led approach that emerged from *the Untold Story*. For example, the UKCoC bid focused on the use of a large-scale cultural event as a catalyst for broader economic and physical regeneration. This is not a unique feature of event bids, particularly as bidding teams have to adapt to the top-down demands of the bidding process (Cunningham and Platt, 2018). From this perspective, perhaps, not winning the bid can present an opportunity to develop a more holistic and unique approach to cultural regeneration.





2.2.3 Future Paisley

Following the 2021 UKCoC bid campaign, Renfrewshire council and partners launched *Future Paisley* to oversee cultural regeneration activities taking place within the town. In the post-bid period, there has been a shift in both language and approach to cultural regeneration in Paisley. There has been a shift away from the culture-led approach outlined in *the Untold Story* towards a more 'holistic' cultural regeneration strategy. This new approach is described as an integrated process in which culture can both lead and support a broader economic, social and physical transformation of the town.

However, it remains unclear how much this approach differs from other more culture-led approaches. A large part of activities carried out under Future Paisley remain dependent on major cultural investments—such as the multi-million-pound refurbishment of Paisley Museum and Paisley town hall. This suggests that there is still an element of culture-led regeneration in that developing the leveraging culture for physical and economic transformation is still at the heart of Paisley's approach.

Despite *some* continuity with culture-led regeneration, Paisley's model of cultural regeneration also more closely resembles creative placemaking. This can be seen in the language of a more 'holistic' approach that centres the local community voice, and the 'social' alongside economic and physical transformation.

2.2.4 Research Aims and Objectives

This research had the following aims and objectives:

- Explore how Paisley's decline and regeneration are represented in newspaper reporting between 2014-2020.
- To understand the conditions of possibility that enable or constrain discourses of cultural regeneration in Paisley.
- Critically analyse how representations of Paisley reflect discursive shifts in cultural regeneration strategy and the extent to which this reflects a changing relationship between culture, place and regeneration in Paisley.

Having outlined both debates about culture-led regeneration and creative placemaking, as well as the development of cultural regeneration in Paisley, section two will now outline the research methods that were used to conduct this research.

2.3 Section 2: Methods & Findings

2.3.1 Research Methods

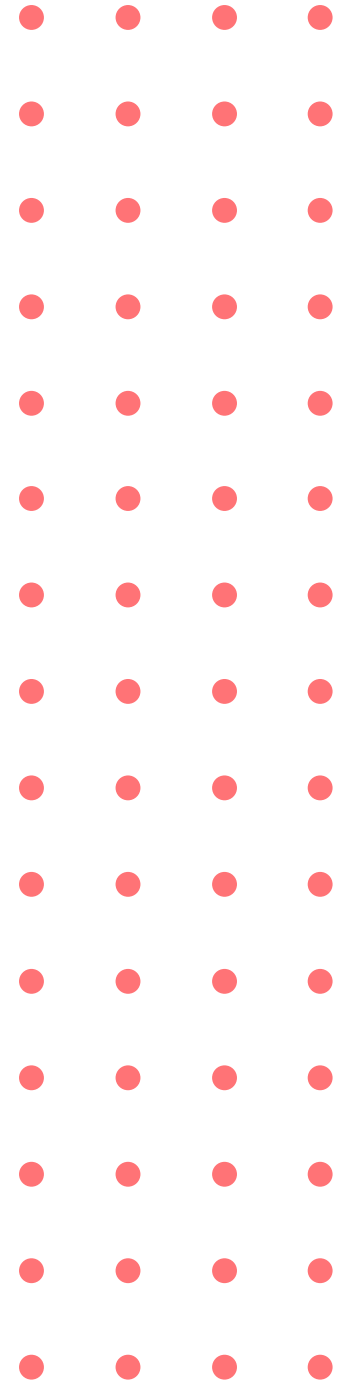
This section will give an overview of the research methods that were used to conduct the PhD research presented in this report. To begin, this report will discuss the use of newspaper and documentary data. It will then discuss the primary data collection carried out for this study, including 'elite' interviews carried out with key stakeholders and decision makers, as well as online workshops held with local residents in Paisley.

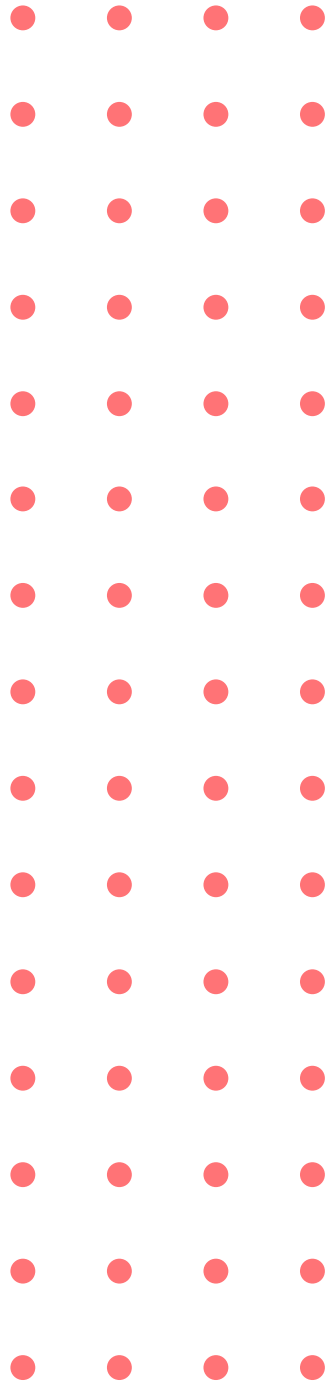
2.3.2 Newspaper data

A total of 150 newspaper articles were collected and analysed for this study. Newspaper articles were identified using the 'Gale: OneFile' data base, with supplementary articles being identified via google searches. Articles collected were focused specifically on cultural regeneration in Paisley and were categorised both by their general sentiment, and the time of publication. The aim of collecting newspaper articles was to identify how cultural regeneration in Paisley has been discussed in the media between 2014-2020 and to track any changes in how this representing has changed.

2.3.3 Documentary data

In addition to newspaper articles, other documentary sources were also collected and analysed as part of this research. Documents included in this research include policy documents produced by Renfrewshire council, Centre for Culture, Sport and Events (CCSE) and Future Paisley. Additionally, reports such as *the Untold Story, Paisley Town Centre: 2030* and the 2021 Bid document were included in this research. Documentary data enabled this research to examine the 'official' narratives, ideas and discourses around cultural regeneration as they developed. As with newspaper reporting, placing documentary data in chronological order enabled this research to examine how Paisley's approach to cultural regeneration changes over time.





2.3.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

A total of 16 semi-structured interviews were carried out during 2020 and 2021. Interviews were held with key stakeholders within Renfrewshire council, third-sector agencies, the formed UKCoC bid team and within Future Paisley more generally. Interviews explored how decisions about cultural regeneration, and Paisley's representation, were made before, during and after the 2021 UKCoC bid. Additionally, interviews allowed this research to examine the debates, tensions and discussions that were had about cultural regeneration at an 'elite' level within the local authority and key partners.

2.3.5 Online Workshops

Finally, online workshops were held with local residents in Paisley. Workshops were held to ensure a greater range of perspectives were included in this research. Additionally, workshops allowed this research to explore how local voices can challenge, or reflect, the dominant narratives and ideas used to represent Paisley and cultural regeneration during the research period. Three workshops were scheduled, however only two took place due to low attendance. Workshop attendance was generally poor, reflecting the difficulty of recruiting participants for online workshops, particularly within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health measures.

3.0 Findings & Analysis

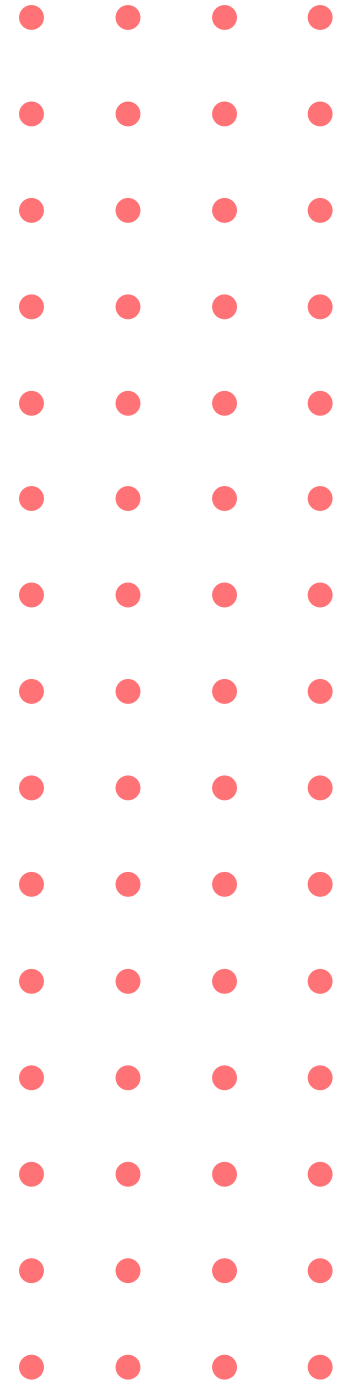
The following trio of subsections present the findings from this research. This report will first discuss the findings from newspaper and documentary data. Subsection 3.2 will discuss interviews with 'elite' actors in Paisley. Finally, subsection 3.3 will discuss online workshops held with local residents.


3.1 Newspaper reporting

A total of 150 newspaper articles were included in this study. Local, national and international newspapers were included within the 150 articles. However, the majority (57%) of them were from 'local' sources such as the Paisley Daily Express. Beyond the local press, (32%) were from Scottish national newspapers, 9% were from UK-wide newspapers and only 2% were from international newspapers. This suggests that representation, and discussion, of cultural regeneration in Paisley has been most prominent locally and within the Scottish national context, with a comparative lack of representation in the UK and international press.

Beyond the *volume* of newspaper coverage, it is important that some attempt is made to gauge the *sentiment* of newspaper reporting. In general, newspaper reporting of cultural regeneration in Paisley was positive—78% of the articles included in this study adopted a generally positive tone, whereas as only 14% was categorised as 'negative'. This is consistent with previous research which illustrates that bidding for cultural events can be leverage positive newspaper and/or other media coverage.

Finally, in relations to newspaper reporting, this research tracked how the volume of newspaper reporting changes between 2014-2020. In so doing, this research found that newspaper reporting on cultural regeneration in Paisley spiked significantly during the UKCoC bid period. However, there was also a large spike in newspaper reporting after the UKCoC bid with the launch of Future Paisley, and the *Paisley Town Centre 2030* vision strategy launch. This underlines that event bids can be leveraged to secure increased, largely positive newspaper reporting. However, it also suggests that other cultural regeneration activities can generate similar levels of newspaper reporting.





Focusing on the content of newspaper reporting, three main themes emerged from qualitative analysis: Paisley town centre, the 'international significance' of Paisley's cultural offer and the heritage assets outlined in the Untold Story. Paisley town centre was the focus of much newspaper reporting on cultural regeneration. The town centre was invoked as both a justification for regeneration but also as a target of it. Newspaper reporting emphasised the impacts of changing consumer habits that have resulted in painful town centre decline. This decline was used to justify a culture-led strategy that could reorientate the town centre around the needs of a post-industrial economy. This is reflected in the nature of cultural regeneration itself, of which the economic and physical regeneration of Paisley town centre is a major facet.

Newspaper reporting also highlighted the 'international significance' of Paisley's culture and heritage offer. This focused on selling the quality of Paisley's cultural assets, such as Paisley Abbey and Paisley Town Hall thereby underlining that Paisley was a 'cultural' town. This is perhaps unsurprising during a competitive bidding process for a large-scale cultural even. Nonetheless, the 'international' significance of Paisley's cultural offer was also used to position Paisley as an 'underdog', undeserving of its fate as the poster-boy for post-industrial decline. The 'underdog' narrative positions Paisley as a small town that has made a substantial and unusually large contribution to the world, particularly in relation to other towns and cities of a similar size. This combines with a need to put Paisley 'back on the map' by increasing awareness of the town's culture and heritage offer.

It follows, therefore, that some discussion of *how* Paisley's culture and heritage assets were represented beyond their 'international significance'. All of the 'heritage assets' outlined in *the Untold Story* are discussed, to some extent, in newspaper reporting about cultural regeneration. Most prominently, newspaper reporting frequently discussed the redevelopment of Paisley Museum and Paisley town hall. More specifically, the flagship capital projects were represented as a way stimulating economic regeneration and growing the visitor economy.

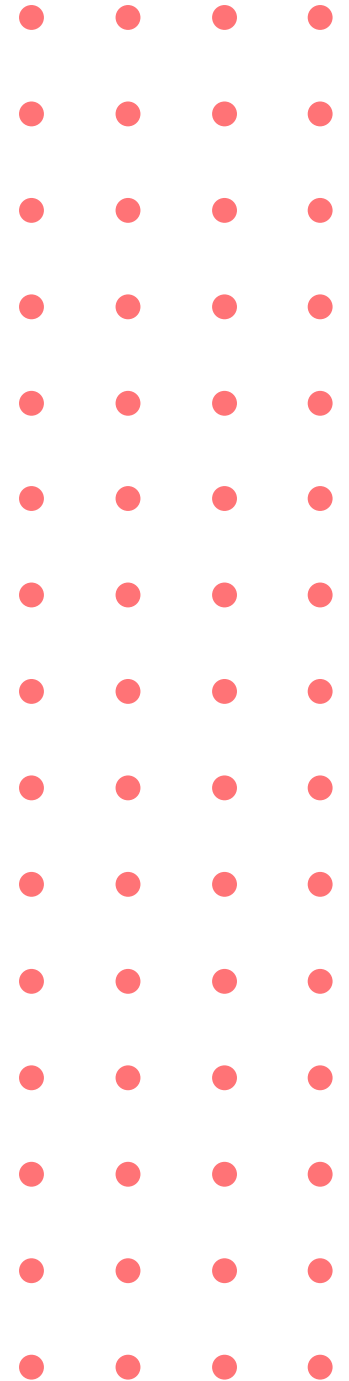
When taken together, representation of Paisley's culture and heritage offer represent some continuation of culture-led regeneration in that they are focused on 'selling' Paisley's offer, developing flagship cultural projects and leveraging an enhanced external image. While this is not, in itself, problematic it does appear somewhat at odds with the more holistic values of creative placemaking practice. This tension was explored further in semi-structured interviews with decision makers and those involved with cultural regeneration in Paisley.


3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews with 'elite' actors within Paisley revealed that cultural regeneration within the town was framed as a response to the pressures of industrial decline. More specifically, respondents emphasised that they believed that Paisley suffered from a poor external area reputation. Notwithstanding particularly disadvantaged areas of the town—such as Ferguslie Park—the decline of Paisley town centre was believed to have (reinforced negative perceptions about Paisley and has cemented Paisley as a 'poster child' for industrial decline and poverty. In sum, perceptions of town centre decline were—at least in part—the basis through which cultural regeneration projects were legitimised in Paisley.

Beyond its decline, Paisley town centre was also central to discussions about cultural regeneration, both in the concrete projects being launched but also in more general visions about a 'regenerated' Paisley. As previously discussed, investment in Paisley Museum and Paisley town centre was at the forefront of the town's economic and physical regeneration. However, interviews are revealed that such redevelopment sits within a broader reimagining of the town centre space. In an era of retail decline and low occupancy rates, respondents imagined a vibrant town centre populated with independent boutiques and a 'coffee shop culture'.

The vision of a vibrant town centre ushered in by flagship cultural facilities appears to reflect previous models of culture-led regeneration and the creative city. This reflects some of the tensions that emerged in discussions about the development of Paisley's approach cultural regeneration. Respondents who were involved in both earlier iterations of Paisley's approach (such as *the Untold Story* and during the UKCoC bid tended to foreground the economic and physical impacts of cultural regeneration. However, respondents who came into post following the bid, or those who remained in post-bid tended to stress the need for a more 'holistic' approach that accounted for Paisley's economic, physical and social transformation.



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The contrast between these responses can perhaps illustrate the difference between culture-led and cultural regeneration. From this perspective, cultural regeneration more closely resembles the values of creative placemaking by championing a more holistic approach. However, this does not mean that an element of culture-led regeneration is not implicit in Paisley's approach. The consistent emphasis in interviews about 'flagship' projects and economic regeneration suggest that there has been some continuation with the previous, more culture-led approach.

In sum, interviews with key stakeholders revealed that Paisley was understood as having a poor external image and reputation. Respondents emphasised the role of town centre decline in contributing to this reputation which, in turn, legitimises the cultural regeneration strategies that have emerged since the launch of *the Untold Story* in 2014. However, Paisley's approach to cultural regeneration has changed between 2014-2020 driven, in part, by changing personnel with different ideas about what cultural regeneration should look like.

3.3 Online Workshops

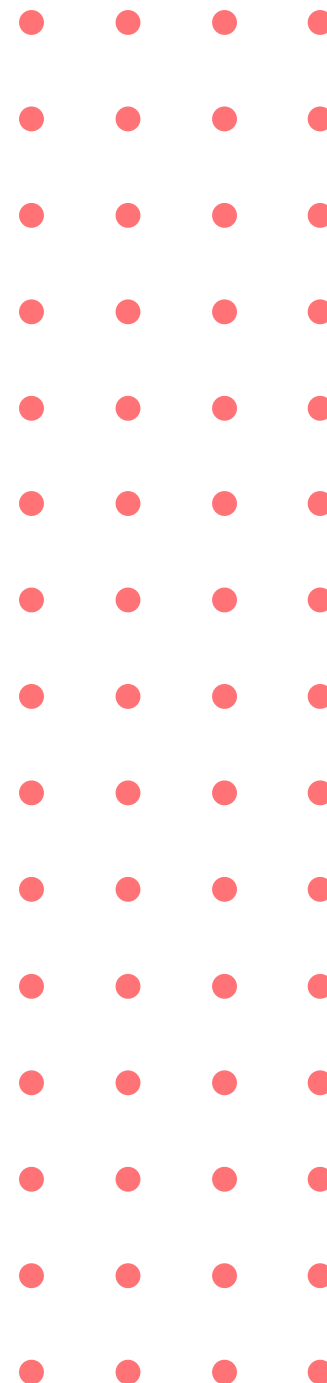
Finally, this section will conclude by discussion the findings some interviews held with local residents. Prior to this, however, the low attendance at both workshops means that there is a need for some caution about the findings presented. Low attendance is not inherently problematic in qualitative research, which is focused more on personal experience than trying to uncover more generalisable 'facts'. Nonetheless, this report does not seek to represent the findings from workshops as 'generalisable' to the whole population of Paisley.

Local residents in both workshops reflected the views expressed in interviews with elite stakeholders, in that there was a consensus that Paisley suffered from a poor area reputation. Additionally, this was exacerbated by issues of town centre decline and the number of vacant units on Paisley high street. Local residents also expressed that negative newspaper representation (both locally and nationally) created a false representation of Paisley as being more dangerous and violent than they believed it to be. Interestingly, respondents also tended to emphasize more positive aspects of Paisley they would like to see represented by discussing the heritage assets outlined in *the Untold Story* such as Paisley abbey and Paisley town hall, as well as other cultural events hosted in the town—such as Sma' shot day and the Halloween festival. In this respect, there is a clear similarity between how cultural regeneration was represented in newspapers and how local residents conceived of positive aspects of the town.

In addition to this, local residents were also broadly supportive of cultural regeneration. In particular, local communities were supportive of anything perceived to

held 'regenerate' Paisley town centre. However, some caution is needed given that many local respondents weren't fully aware of the extent of the cultural regeneration projects that were currently taking place in the town. Indeed, some local respondents didn't recall the UKCoC bid taking place. While this may raise some questions about the long-term legacy of event bids, it doesn't necessarily undermine the positive impact of the bid itself. Indeed, local respondents spoke positively about seeing more positive representations of the town, and about 'flagship' projects aimed at transforming the town centre.

In sum, workshops with local residents follow similar trajectories as interviews held with 'elite' actors. To begin, there was a consensus across both interviews and workshops that Paisley had a negative area reputation. This has been exacerbated by town centre decline and creates a need to regenerate Paisley high street. Furthermore, local residents were broadly supportive of cultural regeneration, in principle at least. However, local residents were not necessarily aware of the nuances of a shift from a more culture-led approach to cultural regeneration.



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3.4 Conclusions

Overall, the above has given an overview of both the methods used to conduct this study by discussing the use of newspaper and documentary data, semi-structured interviews and online workshops. Building on this, this section has given a brief overview of the key findings from this research.

It is clear that cultural regeneration in Paisley has had some impact on the way in which the town has been represented—both the UKCoC bid and other large-scale capital projects have resulted in consistent newspaper reporting about cultural regeneration. However, the consistent focus on economic regeneration raises questions about how successful the shift from culture-led regeneration to a more holistic cultural regeneration has translated to newspaper reporting.

The final sections of this report will discuss the key policy insights from this research. I will outline three main insights: First, I will discuss the importance of key personnel in shaping cultural regeneration strategies, I will then discuss the issues that arise when using images of decline to legitimise cultural regeneration more generally, finally I will outline the difficulties that arise when trying to (re)develop and reshape approaches to cultural regeneration.

4.0 Section 3: Policy Insights & Conclusions

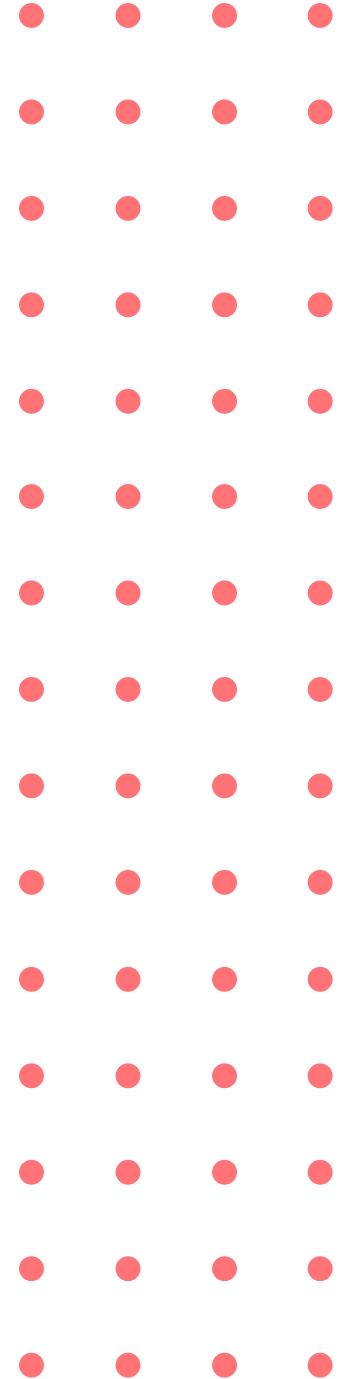
4.1 Policy Insights

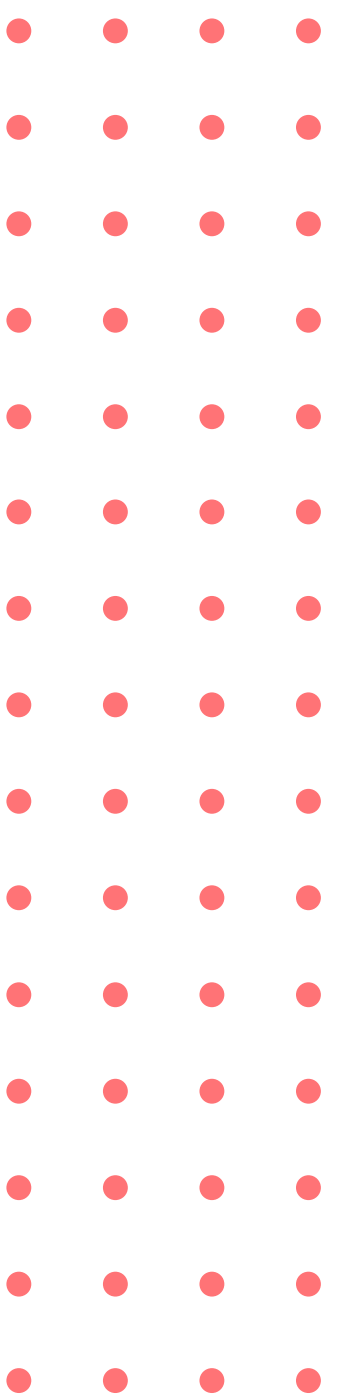
The next three subsections will present the key policy insights emerging from this PhD research study. I will first discuss the role of key personnel in shaping approaches to cultural regeneration. I will then discuss the role 'town centre' decline in representations of Paisley, and how emphasising town centre decline might reinforce the town's negative area reputation. Finally, I will discuss how best to understand Paisley's approach to cultural regeneration—as a hybrid approach that incorporates elements of both culture-led and cultural regeneration.

4.1.1 Insight 1: People, Policy and Cultural Regeneration

As indicated by interviews held with 'elite' personnel, there were a plethora of different ideas about what cultural regeneration meant. While Paisley's strategy has been fairly uniform and consistent both in internal documentation and in newspaper reporting, different actors and decision makers had different ideas about cultural regeneration, and this has changed over time.

As indicated by newspaper reporting, documentary data and interviews, the initial period of cultural regeneration (between 2014- 2017) is reflective of an approach which is more culture-led. In this period, much of the focus is directed towards leveraging culture as a means of securing economic and physical transformation. In this sense, many of the criticisms of culture-led regeneration outlined in section one could be applied to Paisley's approach in that it focused too heavily on top- down economic outcomes. However, there is a clear shift towards a more holistic approach that more closely reflects creative placemaking after the bid period ended in 2017.





This change in approach was, in some ways, necessitated by not securing the UKCoC title. However, this was also necessitated by the recruitment of staff who were experienced within Scotland's cultural sector, who brought a fresh perspective to debates about culture-led regeneration in Paisley. This can be seen with the recruitment of the strategic lead for cultural regeneration and a cultural regeneration officer to oversee the post-bid legacy and transition into what became Future Paisley. In this period, Paisley's approach—while retaining an element of culture-led regeneration—becomes more aligned with the values of creative placemaking.

In sum, this suggests that it is important to ensure personnel involved in key decisions about cultural regeneration are grounded in the debates that exist about culture-led regeneration, creative cities and creative placemaking. In being aware of these debates, key personnel were able to move Paisley's approach towards best practice as identified in the literature.

4.2.1 Insight 2: Post-Industrial Paisley: Town centre decline and regeneration

From this research it is clear that respondents felt that Paisley had a negative area reputation. At the heart of this were persistent discussions about town centre decline, which were frequently referenced in newspaper articles about Paisley and cultural regeneration. This suggests that the consistent focus on the decline of Paisley town centre have contributed to the construction of Paisley's negative area reputation. Despite this, images of town centre decline were used to justify and legitimise cultural regeneration itself.

Foregrounding 'post-industrial' decline to demonstrate the need for regeneration in Paisley town centre suggests the priority should be stimulating the town's struggling economy and achieving physical transformation, as opposed to more holistic strategies. This is evidenced by the prominence of newspaper reporting on Paisley Museum and Paisley town centre, and the use of these 'assets' to develop the visitor economy and regenerate the town centre. In sum, leveraging town centre decline creates a tendency towards more culture-led approaches and makes it more difficult to fully embed an approach grounded in the more holistic values of creative placemaking.

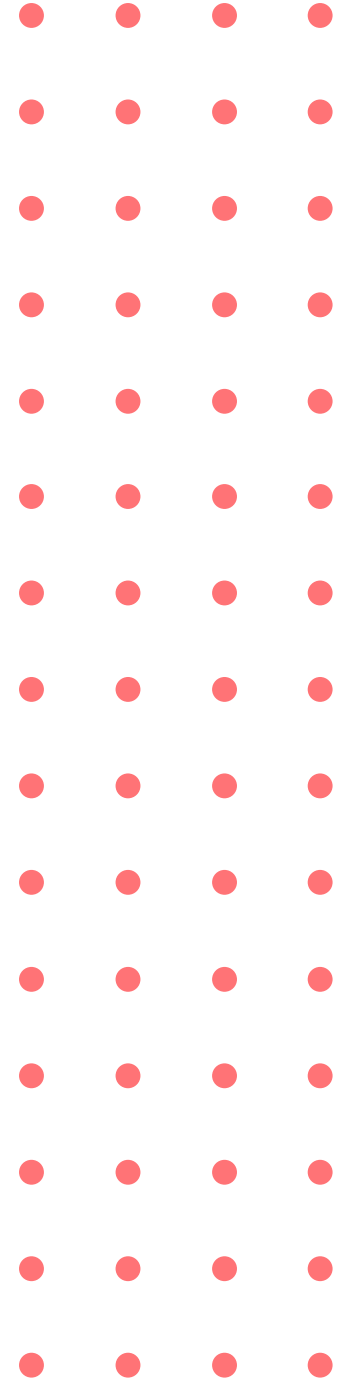
I propose the concept of 'post-industrial Paisley' to understand the tendency to rely upon narratives of post-industrial (and town centre) decline to legitimise cultural regeneration. As a policy insight, this study stresses the need for some caution in this area, particularly as this relates to trying shift toward a less culture-led approach. With this in mind, the final policy insight will situate Paisley's approach to cultural regeneration, and discuss how leaders in Paisley have been enabled and constrained in departing from a purely culture-led approach.

4.1.3 Insight 3: Cultural Regeneration: A hybrid approach

Finally, this PhD research proposed the concept of hybridised placemaking to describe Paisley's approach to cultural regeneration.

Hybridised placemaking proposes that Paisley's approach cannot be reduced to either culture-led regeneration and or creative placemaking. Rather, Paisley's approach incorporates both the top-down logic of culture-led regeneration alongside the more bottom-up ethos of creative placemaking. This suggests that decision makers are often constrained by previous policy that creates a degree of path-dependence that is not easy to change. Additionally, national and international influences constrain how it is possible to think about cultural regeneration more generally.

Hybridised placemaking, therefore, reflects the locally specific particularities of Paisley's approach—incorporating a significant focus on town centre regeneration that is suggestive of a more culture-led approach, while pivoting toward a more holistic version of cultural regeneration that is rooted in values of social justice. As a policy insight, this report does not suggest that it is impossible to change strategy. Rather, this suggests that there is a need for a degree of caution when representing what cultural regeneration can achieve at a local level—particularly given the plurality of significant challenges facing towns such as Paisley.



A decorative graphic on the left side of the page consisting of a grid of red dots. The dots are arranged in 15 rows and 4 columns, with a small gap between the grid and the main content area.

5.0 Recommendations

Based on the three police insights from this PhD research, I will conclude by sharing three recommendations for policy makers responsible for cultural regeneration in Paisley:

- Ensure personnel with expertise in the cultural sector and cultural policy continue to be at the forefront of discussions about cultural regeneration in Paisley.
- To embed the language of cultural regeneration in external communications and, in doing so, reduce the reliance on large-scale cultural facilities to promote cultural regeneration in Paisley.
- Based on workshops with local residents, ensure local communities are engaged and aware of the activities taking place under the banner of Future Paisley.

6.0 Conclusion

Overall, this report has summarized PhD research conducted between 2019 and 2022. In doing so, I have demonstrated the key policy insights that have emerged from this research.

This research has demonstrated that there is a considerable literature that has amassed around the topic of culture-led regeneration and, more recently, creative placemaking. More specifically, there has been a large amount of criticism aimed at *culture-led* ideas that—it is argued—focus too heavily on physical and economic transformation. However, the emergence of creative placemaking has raised some questions about the possibility of a more holistic approach that goes beyond the well-worn criticisms of the creative city and culture-led regeneration.

Building on this, this report has given an overview of the development of Paisley's cultural regeneration strategy between 2014 and 2020. This report outlined the baseline document *the Untold Story* as the starting point for all future cultural regeneration activities within the town. Additionally, it also discussed the UKCoC bid which occurred between 2015 and 2017, in which Paisley was the first town to be shortlisted without having city status. Finally, this report also discussed the development of Future Paisley and the shift towards the language of a more holistic approach to cultural regeneration.

This report also briefly discussed the methods that were used to conduct this study. It has outlined a qualitative study that utilised various methods to collect and analyse data—such as newspaper and documentary data, semi-structured 'elite' interviews and online workshops with local residents. Additionally, this report also provides a brief overview of the key findings from the research. In doing so, this study has shown that cultural regeneration in Paisley has received generally positive newspaper reporting, with a persistent focus on 'flagship' cultural projects and economic regeneration. Further, this shows that respondents had a unanimous view that Paisley had a negative area reputation, but that there were tensions and differences in how cultural regeneration was understood.

Finally, I have given the main policy insights based on the findings and analysis presented during this research. The report has highlighted the importance of key personnel in shaping the initial period of culture-led regeneration and later in reorienting towards a more holistic cultural regeneration. I have also suggested that newspaper reporting, and broader discussions, which frame cultural regeneration purely as a response to town centre decline limit focus towards economic and physical transformation, inhibit a shift away from culture-led regeneration. Lastly, this report outlined Paisley's hybrid approach—which incorporates both creative placemaking and culture-led regeneration.





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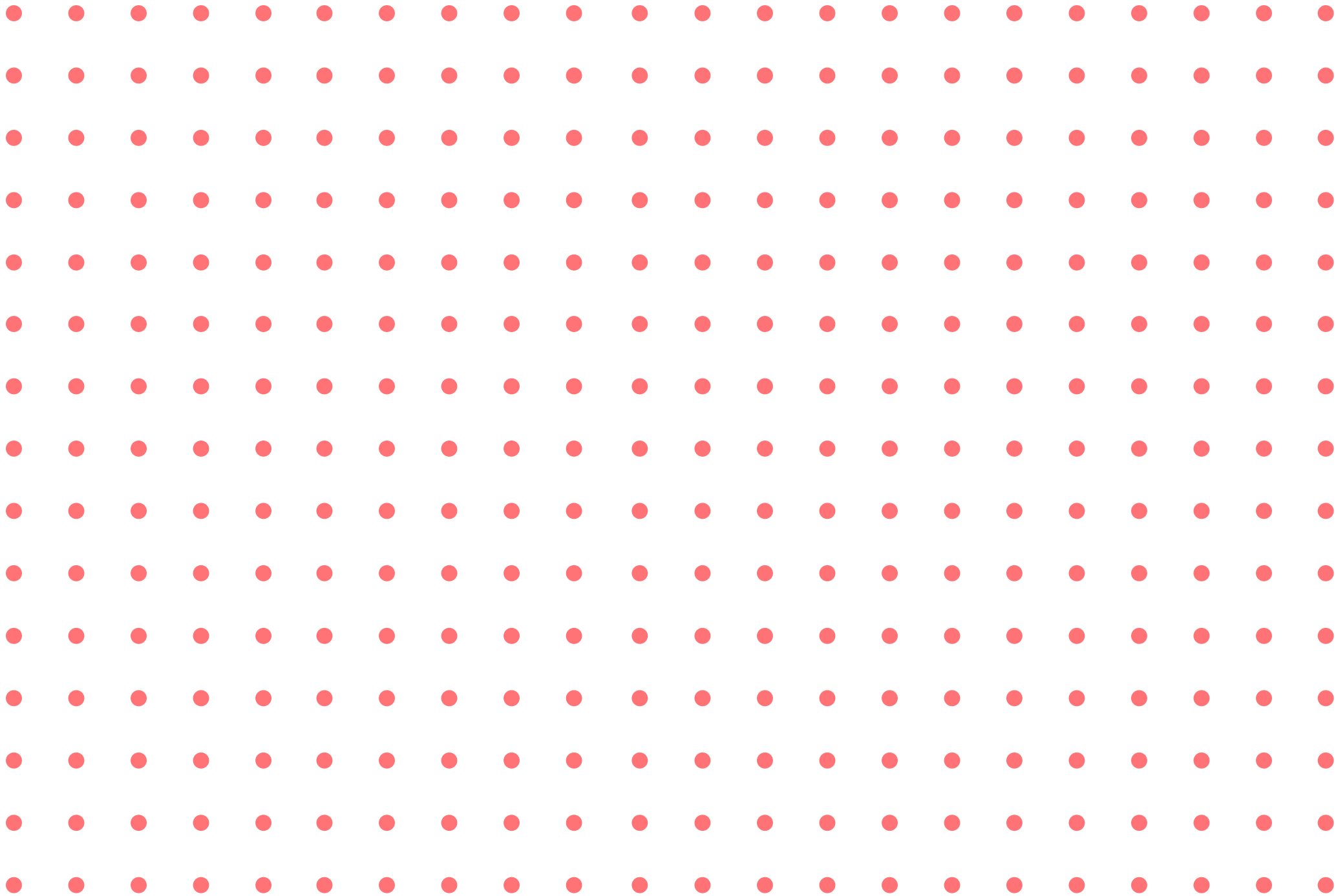
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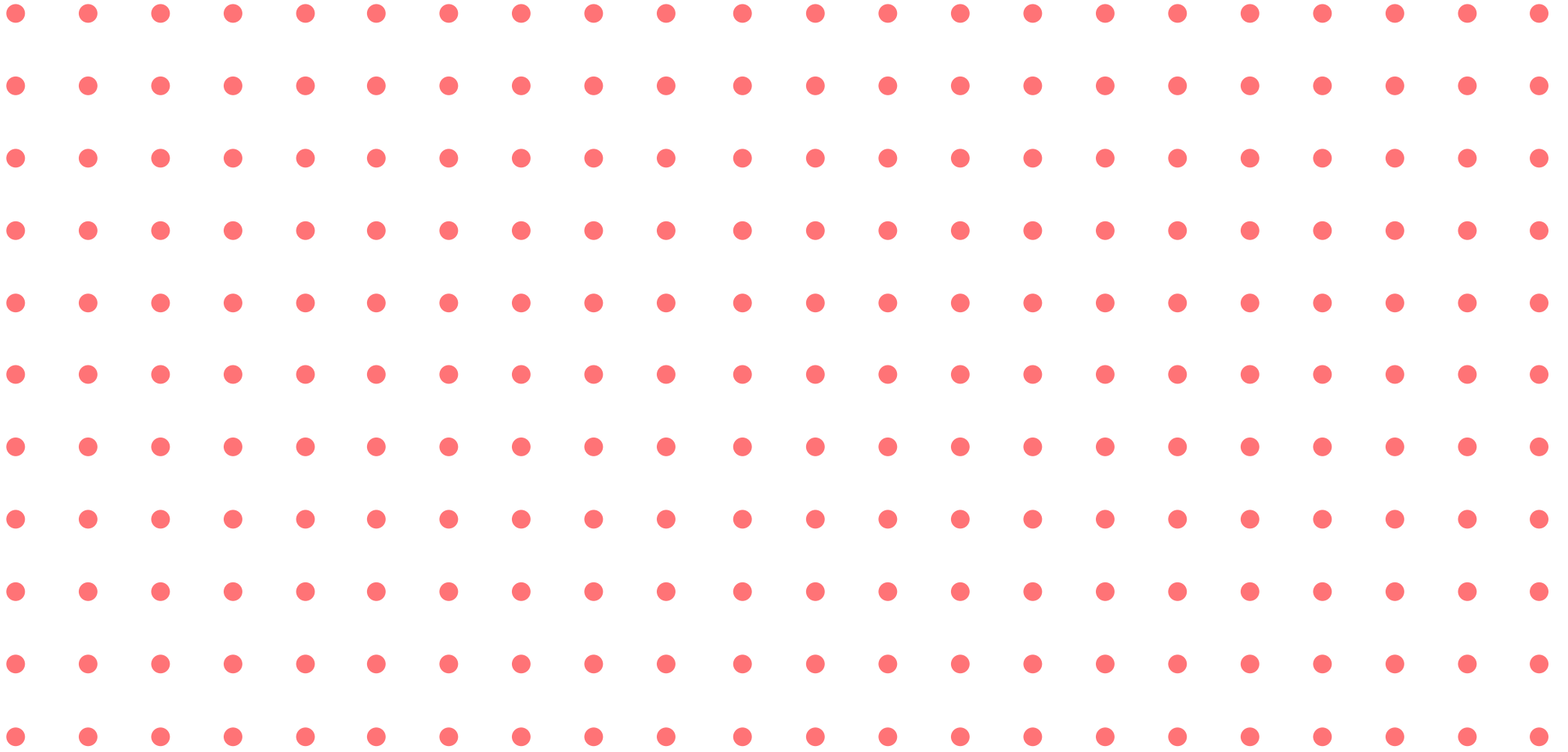
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