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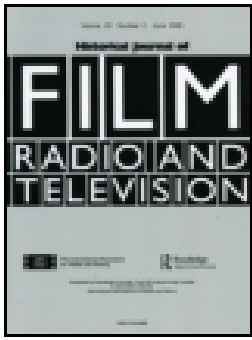
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 OPEN ACCESS

# URBAN REGENERATION AND STAKEHOLDER DYNAMICS IN THE FORMATION, GROWTH AND MAINTENANCE OF THE SHEFFIELD INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL IN THE 1990S

James Fenwick

*This article presents a case study of the formation and growth of the Sheffield International Documentary Festival (SIDF)—later renamed Sheffield Doc/Fest—in the 1990s. It uses archival sources to understand a crucial question: why was the festival located in a post-industrial city like Sheffield? By the end of the 1980s, the city was undergoing economic transformation, from ‘steel city’ to ‘post-steel city’, in the process suffering an identity crisis given its decades of dependence on its former steel industry. With a focus on the motivations of the political, industrial, cultural, and academic stakeholders that were central to the festival’s formation and growth, the article demonstrates how an exploration of festival formation in a post-industrial city, using a political economic approach, can allow for a fuller understanding of the formation, growth, and maintenance of festivals in a post-industrial context.*

Across the three decades of its existence, the Sheffield International Documentary Festival (SIDF)—or Sheffield Doc/Fest as it was renamed in 2006<sup>1</sup>—has had a conflicting relationship with its host city of Sheffield. Together, the city and the festival have grown, developing a cultural and economic confidence by the late

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1990s. But the relationship between the two has never been easy, with a tension between the city's understanding of the festival (some members of the SIDF committee and the city council were not entirely convinced of the economic merits of the festival in its early years) and the festival's understanding of the city (there continues to be a disparity in the programming, between offering something for industry delegates versus local audiences, in particular local audiences from more deprived socio-economic backgrounds). But an examination of the origins, formation and growth of the festival provides an insight into the local politics and culture of Sheffield in the 1980s and 1990s and wider policies of urban regeneration, as well as the competing stakeholder dynamics and vested industrial interests that led to the unlikely of cities (a post-industrial, predominantly working-class Yorkshire city) becoming the established host for an annual global media event.

This article uses archival sources from the Sheffield City Archives, including the business papers and correspondence of the International Documentary Festival Sheffield Ltd (the official title of the festival's subsidiary company, incorporated in 1993) and the Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre (SMEC), and policy documents written by academics seconded to the Sheffield City Council's Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). It also draws upon interviews conducted with board members and former festival directors. In taking this archival approach, it reconstructs the early history of the festival to understand why a northern city like Sheffield became the host for the festival as opposed to the original envisaged plan of Bristol. The festival's identity, and its relationship with Sheffield, offers an insightful case study into issues of power dynamics of various stakeholders – political, industrial, and cultural. As Dina Iordanova has argued, film festival studies as a discipline does not necessarily exist in the form we assume. For what is being studied is not the films themselves, but rather the cultures that exist in the formation, development, and maintenance of film festivals. In other words, the study of film festivals should prioritise the vested political or industrial stakeholders that inform, curate, or even lead film festivals.<sup>2</sup> Iordanova's political economic framework of festivals is, I would suggest, key to undertaking a case study of the evolution of a film festival like the SIDF, its relationship to its host city of Sheffield, and to the shifting power dynamics that operate the festival. This framework is comprised of what Iordanova calls domains, these being: historical studies; origins of a festival; and politics of festival evolution. The domains are largely self-explanatory, with historical studies requiring the contextualisation of a festival through the use of a range of artefacts as evidence to understand them, from archival sources to interviews. This immediately links to the second domain, origins, with motivations (and potential failures, as was the case with the SIDF in its earliest years) being of vital importance, as well as the rationale for the choice of location. The third domain, the politics of festival evolution, is the most complex and relates to the producers, sponsors, patrons, administrators, board directors, cultural managers, distributors, and political stakeholders that drive a festival and what happens at the festival. The vested interests and dynamics of each of these stakeholders, and the relationships, conflict, and mutual motivation between each of them is central to how a festival evolves.

The article will focus on the early years of SIDF in the 1990s, given the importance of these years in considering stakeholder dynamics, urban regeneration,

and local politics in Sheffield. It will place the festival's establishment and growth within the wider context of Sheffield's urban renewal in the 1990s, including the creation of a new media centre in the city's Cultural Industries Quarter (CIQ). Originally called the Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre, it was eventually opened as the Showroom Cinema and Workstation—the latter a complex of creative office spaces and conferencing facilities—in 1995 after several years of struggle to complete the project. The Media Centre was partially envisaged as an exhibition site for alternative film and media following the closure of the city's Anvil Cinema in 1990, a municipal arthouse cinema. But the Media Centre was also a development with a much wider and more ambitious brief set by the Sheffield City Council. This included an attempt to attract production investment into the city by designing the Media Centre as a site not only for the exhibition of films, but also for education, research, development, production, and post production. It was imagined that the Media Centre would act as a catalyst for the CIQ, generating interest, attracting a new middle-class professional workforce, and ultimately driving the growth of creative and cultural businesses in the city. In the end, however, the original utopian vision for the Media Centre failed, opening instead as a more traditional arthouse cinema that eventually served as the host architectural space for the SIDF.<sup>3</sup>

Questions of why the SIDF came into existence are not as important, I would argue, as why the festival came to exist in a northern English city like Sheffield. The aim to understand the cultural, political, and industrial networks that were necessary to form a major festival in Sheffield, as well as the ongoing tensions within these networks in order to maintain a festival in the city, also situates this article within the frameworks of the new cinema history and the burgeoning field of urban media. The political economic framework set out by Iordanova can be seen to link to the new cinema history in its bid to move away from the 'cinophile turn' that influences some of the material that has emerged on the study of film festivals. In their survey of the literature on film festivals, Marijke de Valck and Skadi Loist set out the main approaches taken to date, with 'film as the focus lens'.<sup>4</sup> And while they set out a range of other approaches, it is not surprising that films remain a core aspect of the study of film festivals. After all, a key purpose of a film festival is to screen films. But the historical, cultural, and political economic analysis of film festivals, as well as their relationship to urban space, is growing.<sup>5</sup> As Ruby Cheung argues in her study of the political economy of the Hong Kong Film Festival, 'in foregrounding the functions of film festivals, many existing studies often overlook, or do not bother to delve deeply into, a fundamental issue: why these film festivals are there in the first place. This omission indicates a possible research "blind spot"'.<sup>6</sup> In short, what is needed is an understanding of the cultures of film festivals. The new cinema history's focus on the cultures of cinema, bridging 'the disciplinary compass, including history, geography, cultural studies, economics, sociology, and anthropology, as well as film and media studies' thereby allows for a greater understanding of the political, cultural and industrial motivations in the formation of the SIDF.<sup>7</sup> This is particularly important in that the festival was linked to issues of exhibition and consumption of alternative media in Sheffield in the 1980s and 1990s.

This article also intersects with urban media studies through its focus on the role of Sheffield City Council's DEED, urban regeneration, and the exploration of Sheffield's cultural infrastructure. Urban media studies and the idea of the humanisation of urban life<sup>8</sup>—making urban spaces more culturally accessible and liveable—is central to understanding the modern city and the burgeoning of film festivals across the world. As Julian Singer has argued, 'fixing the regional characteristics of festivals through their identification with particular cities requires a consideration of the links they forge between local councils, businesses, governments, and communities'.<sup>9</sup> The formation of the SIDF was part of a much wider cultural plan for Sheffield's urban renewal by the city's Labour controlled council in the 1980s and 1990s. Sheffield was redeveloping and rebuilding both its physical geography and infrastructure, as well as transitioning to a new image and identity: a post-steel city. The integration of the cultural and media industries was central to this vision, with the aim of bridging the urban life of the city with the dynamics of the local and national film and media cultures of the UK in a bid to rejuvenate and diversify its economy. An analysis, therefore, not only of the SIDF, but also of local politics, urban renewal, town planning and the council's cultural plan brings to light a case study of post-industrial transitioning in a northern city and the limits of the media industries in contributing to urban renewal and growth.

### **Towards urban renewal and economic diversification**

By the end of the 1980s, Sheffield had undergone seismic transformations in its industrial base, with the long-standing steel industry that provided much of the city's employment—and contributed heavily to its local and global identity, not least the world-famous monikers of 'steel city' and 'Made in Sheffield'—having migrated overseas. The decline of the steel industry in the city had been an ongoing trend since the early 1970s. Sheffield was economically dependent on highly specialised industrial and manufacturing jobs, higher than the national average by the end of the 1970s, standing at 44 percent in contrast to the UK average of 32 percent.<sup>10</sup> The resultant impact of the transition from industrial to post-industrial city—from steel city to post-steel city—brought about rapid job losses, with a decline in steel industry employment in Sheffield of close to 50 percent between 1978 and 1984 and the loss of approximately 59,000 jobs.<sup>11</sup> By 1993, the total Sheffield workforce employed by the steel industry stood at little over two percent.<sup>12</sup> It was a decline brought to international prominence through its portrayal in *The Full Monty* (1997), a film which opens with footage from the council-sponsored promotional film *Sheffield: City on the Move* (1972), which shows Sheffield as a city filled with confidence, optimism, and full employment in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Just as abruptly, the film cuts to thirty years later and an abandoned steel factory; it is rusting, derelict, a vision of a city and its once dominant economic base in crumbling decay by the 1990s.

The economic dependency on the steel industry left Sheffield at a disadvantage by the 1980s in comparison to other major cities in the UK. As one report on the state of the city's cultural industries, commissioned for Sheffield City Council in 1992, noted, '[Sheffield] continues to have a number of "missing pieces" in its

broader identity of a kind which we would associate with a fully modern city'.<sup>13</sup> The report claimed that Sheffield suffered from 'stalled or incomplete modernisation', with a lack of a major media production infrastructure being a vital clue in this regards, putting the city at a disadvantage in terms of audio-visual and media provision. But the cultural industries had become an increasing priority for city councils and town planners in the UK by the 1980s as a means of generating economic activity, fostering urban renewal, promoting tourism, and in creating a new 'image' for a city.<sup>14</sup> Councils in cities such as Birmingham, Bristol, Newcastle, Nottingham and Norwich were looking to the media industries as part of an integrated economic approach to urban renewal.<sup>15</sup> Bristol, for example, had initiated a series of urban planning projects for new arts and media complexes based around the former docks, leading to the creation of the Arnolfini and the Watershed, becoming one of the UK's 'best regional cinemas' at the time.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Sheffield City Council commissioned research and established new departments and working groups with a remit to investigate new avenues of economic potential involving the cultural industries.

In 1981, the Sheffield City Council established the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), tasked with developing a strategy to, 'develop local cultural and media industries'.<sup>17</sup> Led by future Labour MP Helen Jackson, DEED seconded a range of cultural, media, and academic figures from within Sheffield, including academic Sylvia Harvey, recognised by that point for her work on film culture, television and broadcasting regulation;<sup>18</sup> former manager at the Anvil Cinema, Ian Wild, who became DEED's Cultural Industries Development Officer and later appointed chief executive of the Showroom Cinema; and Paul Skelton, DEED's Cultural Industries Team Leader. The team was required to think about how to develop a new identity for Sheffield and to look for, 'new ways forward, a new sense of itself and of its possible future'.<sup>19</sup> Sheffield was, by the end of the 1980s, in the depths of an identity crisis that extended across its cultural, social, and industrial infrastructure. DEED considered thirty potential areas for economic intervention, including sports, arts, and culture, as a means of redeveloping the city's image, confidence, and economic base. While the 'sports city' became a major focus for DEED, culminating in the staging of the 1991 World Student Games in the city, it was underpinned by a broader cultural strategy. This was reflected in the parallel Cultural Festival held throughout the World Student Games.<sup>20</sup> Figures at DEED, including Skelton, Harvey and Wild, championed the cultural sector, specifically music, film, and broadcasting, as a means of revitalising Sheffield's image. But the move to diversify Sheffield's cultural identity would prove a challenge, with research repeatedly pointing to the long-standing structural weaknesses in the city's cultural and media identity. As one report from February 1988 noted,

At the present time, Sheffield probably has less cultural provision at all levels than any comparable city in the UK. Sheffield is the fourth largest city in England and yet there are:

1. No arts festival of any significance
2. No cinemas outside the city centre<sup>21</sup>

3. No touring venue for middle-scale performance
4. No building of major architectural significance.<sup>22</sup>

The list of deficiencies in the city's cultural identity went on, a condemning summation of the infrastructural challenges facing DEED, which was replicated in other reports. The same report went so far as to claim that the lack of cultural diversity and infrastructure contributed to the isolation of Sheffield's citizens from, 'national mainstream culture in the fields of visual arts and live performance'.<sup>23</sup> The city's nightlife economy was similarly lacking, with a shortage of bar, restaurants and hotels, while its consumer demand was marked by the predominance of, 'market-trading, discount stores, and a somewhat limited standard mix of chain suppliers'.<sup>24</sup> The city centre was generally, by the mid-1980s, composed of numerous derelict sites and wastelands of former industry and cutlery works. The imperative was clear: the city centre was in urgent need of urban renewal, with new forms of economic activity required, otherwise, 'the heart of the city dies, leaving a black hole, with all the life on the periphery'.<sup>25</sup> DEED and those conducting research for the council at the time concluded that culture, 'in its broadest sense will be crucial in combating the further decline of the city centre over the next decade'.<sup>26</sup>

Given the bleak assessment of Sheffield's cultural infrastructure and its decades-long economic monoculture of the steel industry, it is reasonable to question why DEED turned towards a plan for the city centre's economic diversification focused, in large part, on the cultural and media industries. It was most likely a result of a variety of factors, not least of which was the political programme of the Labour controlled council, influenced by wider trends across the USA and Europe towards investment in the cultural industries to promote city tourism and image in the 1980s. Christened the economics of amenity in the USA, the aim of civic leaders was to link quality-of-life and economic development objectives, demonstrating that urban renewal through arts and culture could lead to greater economic prosperity overall, as well as city centre beautification and increased land and property value.<sup>27</sup> DEED's plan was to implement its own economics of amenity by establishing a Cultural Industries Quarter within the south-east of the city centre, an area of approximately 59 acres and comprising a number of derelict warehouses, former little mester cutlery workshops, and listed buildings, many of which were council-owned properties. There was also a series of existing cultural bodies within the district, including the Leadmill, a music and arts centre that was established in 1982 as a radical response to the growing unemployment in the city, and the Yorkshire Art Space Society in the Sydney Works building, populated by artists, photographers, and printers.<sup>28</sup> DEED believed there was further opportunity to ignite a catalytic effect in the urban and economic renewal of Sheffield more widely. If the CIQ could be developed, and further cultural and media organisations encouraged to relocate, it was hoped that, just like other post-industrial cities, Sheffield could change its image and incite, 'strategic partnerships between the public and private sectors'.<sup>29</sup>

DEED's ambitious plan for the CIQ was composed of four stages of implementation from between 1983 to 1998. Stage one, 'Local', aimed to consolidate



existing cultural facilities and businesses and to relocate arts organisations from outside of the city centre, such as the Untitled Photographic Gallery (later the Site Gallery) based in the suburb of Walkley. Stage two, 'Regional', aimed to develop an infrastructure for the cultural and media industries in the city, including through collaboration with Sheffield City Polytechnic (which became Sheffield Hallam University in 1992), the university's Northern Media School, which was relocated to the CIQ, and the creation of the Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre. The latter project led to the formation of a new company, Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre Ltd. (SMEC), chaired by Colin Pons. SMEC was tasked by the Sheffield City Council to redevelop the former Kennings Garage into a new media complex consisting of cinema screens, production facilities, and office space for creative businesses. By 1988, at least thirty cultural and media organisations had expressed an interest in occupying space within the new complex.<sup>30</sup> The third and fourth stages, 'National' and 'International', looked towards the idea that by the close of the 1990s Sheffield would be a leading centre of cultural and media production and consumption and, as a result, a major tourist destination in the north of England, becoming what Paul Skelton called, 'the Covent Garden of the North'.<sup>31</sup>

The envisaged growth and sustainability of the CIQ was underpinned by wider media industry developments, both regionally and nationally. This included the 1990 Broadcasting Act, which allowed for the creation of a fifth analogue terrestrial television channel, Channel 5, with a call for bids for the location of its headquarters. The Act also required the outsourcing of 25 percent of the BBC's production to independent producers.<sup>32</sup> DEED led a bid for Sheffield to host the new Channel 5 headquarters. The presence of independent producers in the city, supported through Sheffield Independent Film (SIF) and DEED's Media Development Fund, was seen as essential to a successful bid for Channel 5 and for any production contracts with the BBC. It is clear how DEED's strategies for urban renewal, at least with regards to the CIQ, were based on the economics of amenities, with schemes such as the Sheffield Media Exhibition Centre designed to lead to the, 'enhanced profile and practical boost to Sheffield businesses, stimulating employment in the cultural industries sector'.<sup>33</sup> But a key factor to ensure the success of DEED's strategy would be the regional and national cultural networks of key stakeholders involved in SMEC, the CIQ and other cultural and educational organisations in the city.

### **The formation of the Sheffield International Documentary Festival**

The range of stakeholders involved in the formation of the SIDF included politicians, academics, media practitioners, broadcasters, producers, and industry figures, both at a regional and national level. The scholarly focus on festival stakeholders allows for the foregrounding of what Ragan Rhyne calls the 'material practices of cultural policy' that drive the formation, growth, and maintenance of film festivals.<sup>34</sup> This is particularly important in the case of the SIDF and its location in Sheffield, given the socio-political circumstances described above, which

**TABLE 1.** International Documentary Festival National Committee, 1992.<sup>102</sup>

Name	Company / Organisation
Michael Blakstad	Workhouse Productions
Kim Peat	Assistant Editor Factual Programmes, Channel 4
Peter Symes	Executive Producer, BBC South TV Features
Frank Wintle	Head of Documentaries, TSW (Television South West)
Julian Ware	Executive Producer, Central TV
Joyce Taylor	Chief Executive Officer, United Artists Programming
David Pearson	Executive Producer, BBC Documentary Department
Michael Grigsby	Middlemarch Films
Mike Fentiman	BBC Community Programme Unit
Chris Haws	InCA Productions
Hugh Thomson	Producer, TV Features

immediately brings us back to the most crucial question: why was Sheffield chosen as the host of the SIDF? I would suggest that it was the combined cultural networks of stakeholders in the city and the radicalism of DEED that allowed for the conditions to emerge for the festival to be held, however temporarily at the time, in Sheffield. It was these conditions that meant it had to be Sheffield and not any other city in the UK. For the formation of the SIDF depended on much more than just money; it also depended on the radical cultural policies of local councils, alongside the cultural and industrial networks of DEED's cultural managers.

But before we can address the question of why the SIDF was hosted in Sheffield, we need to ask why it was *not* held in Bristol, the city in which it was originally envisaged the festival would be staged. Peter Symes, executive producer of TV features at BBC South, had originated the plans for a European documentary film festival to be held in Bristol in the early 1990s. The motivation was in part brought about in the wake of the 1990 Broadcasting Act and the fear of the impact on the documentary form, particularly documentary produced through public service broadcasters such as the BBC and the impact of the outsourcing of commissions to independent producers. Together with co-ordinator Stephanie Brammer (director of the Watershed, 1989–1991), Symes brought together a national committee (see Table 1) to develop a proposal in order to seek funding for the festival, but by 1992 this had failed.<sup>35</sup> The festival was to have been based in the Watershed cultural complex, but the organisation was in severe financial difficulties by the end of the 1980s, with the local council, facing pressure from central government cuts, demanding that the organisation repay its debts. Meanwhile, the building itself was in 'urgent need of repair', as outlined by Steve Presence in his history of the organisation:<sup>36</sup>

Watershed's filmmaking equipment had deteriorated to such an extent that it could no longer run production courses, and several admin, finance and kitchen staff had left. [...] By the start of the 1990s it was facing bankruptcy.<sup>37</sup>

In short, Bristol's Watershed was in no state to focus on the formation and growth of a new internationally orientated documentary festival. Still, Symes and

Brammer had been successful in forging a committee of national industrial stakeholders that would be vital to the staging of any festival, wherever it was located. These were exclusively producers and executives based in the south and south-west of the UK (see Table 1), making it clear that the impetus for any festival—indeed, the focal point of the media industry—remained in London and at a far remove from a northern, post-industrial city like Sheffield.

The lack of Bristol City Council's support, which was instead focused on the repayment of debt by the Watershed, left Symes and his national committee looking to other viable host cities for the festival. In contrast to the situation in Bristol, the Sheffield City Council was very much behind supporting festivals as a means of promotion and city branding at that period of time. Reports commissioned by DEED had frequently cited that a key means of overcoming Sheffield's image problem was a national festival of some kind; several reports noted the, 'absence of an artistic or cultural festival of even regional let alone national significance'.<sup>38</sup> A feasibility study commissioned for the development of the Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre had stated that any festival, whatever its format, had to showcase Sheffield as a 'major force in popular culture',<sup>39</sup> and create a 'livelier city that will boost Sheffield's image, attract investment and accelerate the regeneration of the city centre'.<sup>40</sup>

The Sheffield City Council had a long-standing commitment to cultural diversity and to promoting a range of alternative media for its citizens. Between 1986 and 1994, there was a series of festival initiatives designed to increase citizen access to media and culture and to work towards the image building of Sheffield.<sup>41</sup> This included the Sheffield International Film Festival (SIFF), which commenced in 1990 to, 'accommodate those people in Sheffield who have a desire to view non-mainstream films, particularly films produced outside the USA and UK. It was also organised to underscore the council's commitment to varied film exhibition in the city'.<sup>42</sup> The SIFF was a collaboration between the political, educational, and industrial stakeholders from across the city. While organisation was principally overseen by the council's Performing and Community Arts sub-department, there was joint working between public and private organisations, including Sheffield Independent Film (SIF), Sheffield Hallam University, the British Film Institute (BFI), and DEED, as well as venues such as the Sheffield City Hall. This cross-collaboration enabled what the organisers of the SIFF called a 'wider view' in terms of the programming of the festival, and created, 'channels of opportunity in terms of funding and resources'.<sup>43</sup>

The overall success of the SIFF, including the curatorial collaboration (33 films from nine countries), the attendance (total audience of 5,453), and the profit it made (gross box office of £14,089), indicated the potential for a further, more fully established festival to become a permanent fixture within the city.<sup>44</sup> It also indicated the level of wider institutional support available, with £3,000 in external funding received from a combination of the Yorkshire and Humberside Arts (YHA), Sheffield Hallam University's School of Cultural Studies, the Swedish Embassy, and SMEC. Crucially, it was the positive feedback received from audiences at the 1992 festival that led the organisers to claim the, 'demand indicates the need for future film exhibition of this nature':<sup>45</sup>

**TABLE 2.** International Documentary Festival Sheffield Committee, 1995.

Name	Company / Organisation
Sylvia Harvey	Sheffield Hallam University
Jane Mills	Northern Media School
Julie Muscroft	Solicitor
Colin Pons	Sheffield Independent Film
Chrissie Stansfield	Independent producer
Jessica York	Steelbank Films

The establishment of the SIDF in Sheffield was also motivated and influenced by stakeholders in the city who themselves had a prevailing interest in alternative media and film exhibition. These stakeholders—including Sylvia Harvey (School of Cultural Studies/DEED), Ian Wild (Anvil Cinema/DEED), Colin Pons (Sheffield Independent Film/Chair of SMEC), and Matthew Conduit (Director of the Untitled Gallery)—were, by 1992, heavily involved in the development of Sheffield's CIQ and the Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre, and were members of the board of SMEC. The combined cultural networks and motivations of these individuals, along with the urban regeneration projects with which they were involved, most likely led them to believe that Sheffield was the ideal host for an international documentary festival.

The first contact between the Bristol based originators of the documentary festival and the network of Sheffield based stakeholders took place sometime in 1992. Alex Osborne, a Sheffield-based filmmaker, met the Watershed's Steph Brammer at the Sunny Side of the Doc Festival, Marseille, in June 1992, where the two discussed the problems that Peter Symes was having in establishing a documentary festival in Bristol.<sup>46</sup> SMEC Board minutes suggest that Matthew Conduit was later approached by the Bristol group in early July 1992 about a proposal for a, 'major documentary film festival'.<sup>47</sup> By the summer of 1992, the documentary festival had become a standing item on the agenda of the monthly SMEC Board meetings. While the meetings were primarily about the development of the Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre, the prospect of hosting an international documentary festival soon became an overriding concern and was seen as, 'an ideal promotion' for the new media centre.<sup>48</sup>

In August 1992, a meeting took place between the Bristol group and Sheffield representatives, including Harvey and Pons (representing DEED and SMEC, respectively) and Bill Paton (Sheffield City Council).<sup>49</sup> The meeting led to a revised festival proposal, with the aim of staging the festival in Sheffield by spring 1994. But in order for the festival to proceed, £10,000 in development financing was required to hire a development worker, who in turn would work on obtaining the funding to stage the festival. Sheffield City Council was prepared to provide £3,000 and the YHA a further £3,300, but both organisations required that a legitimate company be formed in order to release the financing. Harvey and Pons proposed that the festival should be run as a wholly owned distributing subsidiary company of SMEC.<sup>50</sup> There would be a Sheffield committee, chaired by Harvey, alongside a national committee, chaired by Symes, bringing together local and national cultural and industrial stakeholders (Table 2).

However, the real motivation in creating a subsidiary company of SMEC was to legally bind the festival to Sheffield and to prevent the national committee, composed as it was of a number of leading broadcast and industry representatives, relocating it elsewhere in later years. By creating a subsidiary company, SMEC had the legal power to fire all the board directors if it wanted and, in turn, provided the legal power to keep the festival in Sheffield. For Symes and Harvey, the task was to merge the various stakeholder motivations into one company with one goal: 'to get a festival going!'<sup>51</sup> However, taken together, there was clearly a conflict of stakeholder interest developing. While Symes and his national committee had been motivated by industrial concerns over the future of the documentary form brought about by the 1990 Broadcasting Act, along with a commitment to potential broadcast sponsors, the Sheffield group was motivated by a combination of a commitment to an alternative art and cultural programme for Sheffield's citizens (Harvey/Wild) and the promotional opportunities for the city and the CIQ (DEED/SMEC). These stakeholder tensions would soon come to dominate the early years of the SIDF.

### The first festival

By September 1992, the wider SMEC Board expressed reservations about hosting the documentary festival. Anxiety centred on the fact that the festival had failed in Bristol. This led some board members to speculate as to why it wouldn't similarly fail in Sheffield. Ian Wild admitted that, 'although the financial benefit to Sheffield would be minimal, we have a cultural and social responsibility to hold the Festival'.<sup>52</sup> Wild's comment was ambiguous. Did he mean a responsibility to the people of Sheffield, or was it a responsibility to the wider industry? Arguably, Wild most likely meant the former, given his connection to cultural networks in Sheffield. The anxieties expressed by SMEC Board members overlooked, however, the cultural, political, and industrial networks that were now coalescing in Sheffield and beyond to bring the festival to fruition; these networks were vital to the festival's success and were what had been missing in Bristol. When a rival documentary festival was rumoured to be taking place in Perth, Scotland, fears grew in SMEC that it would bring to an end the plans for the Sheffield festival. But the Perth festival did not have industrial support from national broadcasters, as the Sheffield festival did, making it clear that it was the three nodes of cultural, industrial, and political networks that were essential ingredients to the realisation of an international documentary festival in the UK. Similarly, Plymouth also proposed hosting an international documentary festival, what was described as 'the same festival', but abandoned its plans by December 1992 upon hearing that Sheffield had received intensified support from the SIDF national committee and backing from the BFI.<sup>53</sup>

A sense of urgency about the SIDF had developed amongst SMEC Board members by the end of 1992, with the festival seen as the key to the development of the Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre, a project that had been substantially delayed and faced increasingly difficult financial challenges to its successful completion.<sup>54</sup> The fact that it was SMEC that had taken on the festival

project meant that the fate of the festival and the development of the Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre were inexplicably bound together. As an immediate priority, SMEC set about hiring a festival co-ordinator (or, as it was originally advertised, part time Project Development Consultant).<sup>55</sup> The hiring of the co-ordinator was overseen by the Sheffield committee, but the national committee still wanted, 'a say in the role', as well as in the 'general content' of the festival programme.<sup>56</sup> As Symes made clear to Harvey, 'They [the national committee] would remain your eyes and ears, and your path to the industry in the UK and beyond'.<sup>57</sup> The successful candidate for the festival co-ordinator role would have to manage the political tension among the various stakeholders of the SIDF and what it was they hoped the festival would become. However, despite the national committee wanting a say in the process, interviews for the festival co-ordinator role were conducted exclusively by the Sheffield committee in December 1992. The absence of industrial stakeholders from the national committee perhaps explains why the role was offered to Midge Mackenzie. The SMEC Board was told by the Sheffield committee that Mackenzie had been chosen because she was a 'documentary film maker who has worked a lot in the United States. She has, in the past, organised two documentary festivals in Boston'.<sup>58</sup> Mackenzie had an academic and artistic background, which arguably influenced her eventual approach to the first iteration of the SIDF. She had been a research fellow and lecturer at Harvard University, followed by a stint as a research fellow at the University of California. As one profile piece from 1994 argued, Mackenzie's background was, 'a blend of film scholarship and film-making, which, she believes, is what qualifies her to run the festival'.<sup>59</sup> She was also a dedicated social activist and feminist, committed to struggles for human rights and anti-war campaigns, clear in her work such as *Shoulder to Shoulder* (BBC, 1974), a mini-series she scripted and co-produced about the suffragette movement, and *The Sky: A Silent Witness* (1996), a film she directed for Amnesty International about women's rights across the world.

With Mackenzie in place, attention turned to potential funders for the festival. The national committee acted as conduits to media organisations like the BBC and Channel 4, both of which became the biggest sponsors of the SIDF. By February 1994, £78,000 had been raised, with further sponsorship from the Discovery Channel, Rank, Kodak, the Sheffield City Council, BBC North, the Sheffield Development Corporation, Yorkshire Television, and YHA, though this still left a budget deficit of approximately £5,000.<sup>60</sup> Sponsorship covered costs such as guest speaker fees, wine receptions, and the cost of hiring press officers. Further funding was requested from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) of £20,000 to establish a functioning festival office. Until then, Mackenzie was using office space provided free of charge by SMEC.<sup>61</sup> The ERDF provided a £19,000 grant, but it could only be spent on a pound-for-pound matching basis and included the condition that the festival purchase a computer and an industrial standard video projector. The SMEC Board was asked to provide the match funds given the equipment was also needed for the Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre.

DEED and Sheffield Hallam University both seconded staff to support the administration of the festival. This included academic Jay Arnold, seconded from

the School of Cultural Studies to assist on programming.<sup>62</sup> But there was now a multitude of disparate voices and perspectives wanting input into the formation of the first festival programme (see Figure 1), leading to a chaotic programming process, with no one really knowing who had responsibility. From major broadcasting sponsors, such as the BBC, which was keen to ensure the presence of its own content, to the YHA and SMEC, which lobbied for local content, through to the SIDF national committee's remit of staging an international festival, there was a line of tension that needed balancing. This should have been a process negotiated by Mackenzie, but she had her own overriding interests of developing an anti-war strand to the festival, leading to a vacuum in the programming coordination that was soon filled by others, including Jay Arnold, Paul Hamann (Head of Documentaries, BBC), and Will Wyatt (Managing Director, BBC Television).

The first SIDF took place between March 23–30, 1994. Despite SMEC's hope to host it at the Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre, the development had been further delayed, meaning that the event had to take place in alternative venues across Sheffield, including the Odeon cinema on Arundel Gate and Sheffield Hallam University's Pennine Lecture Theatre. The organisation of the festival was somewhat of an amateur affair in places. Colin Pons remembers having to improvise some of the screening rooms, including placing bin bags over the windows in one makeshift theatre to block out the light. But this seemed only to endear the festival and its organisers to the giants of documentary in attendance, such as D. A. Pennebaker, who Pons recalls as being impressed with the improvisatory skills of the festival team.<sup>64</sup>

The festival commenced with a delegate weekend, which was open to invited industry figures to debate the future of documentary, followed by a public screening programme. The programme was centred around historical themes, including *cinéma vérité*, which featured 'a retrospective of the films of Drew Associates' (*Primary* [1960], *Crisis* [1963], *Mooney v Fowle* [1961]); a D. A. Pennebaker retrospective (*Don't Look Back* [1967], *Monterrey Pop* [1968], and his latest films *The War Room* [1993] and *Keep On Rockin'* [1994]); and 'Under Fire', a theme curated by Mackenzie that served as a, 'tribute to filmmakers working in combat conditions in World War II'.<sup>65</sup> The 'Under Fire' strand featured excerpts of an interview Mackenzie had conducted with director John Huston, later released as *War Stories* (1999), and a screening of *Desert Victory* (1943), 'shown as a tribute to all camera crew and directors who had filmed in combat conditions during wartime'.<sup>66</sup> The historical identity of the festival was emphasised by the first film screening, Humphrey Jennings's *A Diary for Timothy* (1945). Also in attendance was Marcel Ophuls, Richard Leacock, and Albert Maysles, while there were dedications to Robert Flaherty, William Wyler, and John Huston. This was very much a festival about the heritage of documentary, or about documentary as history. Even the local strand of the festival was dedicated to screenings of archival footage selected from the Sheffield Archives.

But the festival lacked diversity, both in gender profile and the international reach of the programme. Of the 47 films screened, 35 were from the USA and four from the UK. Of the non-English language films, four were French—three directed by Richard Leacock and Valerie Lalonde (*Les Oeufs a la Coque* [1991], *Les*

*Vacances de M* [1992], *Gott sei Dank!* [1993]) and one by Ophuls (*The War Correspondent* [1994]) — one was from Russia—*Homeland* (Podnieks, 1990) —one from the Netherlands— *Romance de Valentia* (Dolz, 1993) —and one from Poland (*Birthplace* [Lozinski, 1992]). Curiously, despite Mackenzie’s feminist background and her involvement in the pressure group Women in Media, she decided against advocating for a section devoted to films by women. Asked why she had made this choice in an interview, Mackenzie replied, ‘We’re in the main programme now’.<sup>67</sup> Yet only three films in the programme were solely directed by women and 13 co-directed by women.

But the main driving force behind the 1994 festival was the BBC’s Paul Hamann, who had commissioned or partially funded several of the documentaries in the programme. This included *The Time of Our Lives* (Grigsby, 1994), *The War Room* (Hegedus and Pennebaker, 1993), and Ophuls’ *The Trouble We’ve Seen* (1994). The presence of such highly esteemed filmmakers at the festival was a direct result of Hamann, who had made it part of his remit at the BBC to fund what he called, ‘authored documentaries’, directed by people he termed ‘exceptional talent in the field’.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps conscious of how this meant he was primarily commissioning white, western men, Hamann put it down to a shortage of talent within the industry and the need to train a new generation of documentary filmmakers steeped in the traditions of the form.<sup>69</sup> These were concerns echoed by other leading broadcast figures throughout the festival and picked up in interviews with trade journals and newspapers. But the issues being discussed—the existential crisis in terms of funding, anxieties about the future of documentary on public service broadcasters, and the talent and quality of future filmmakers<sup>70</sup>—indicated a wider fault line in the identity of the festival. Was the SIDF a film festival or a television broadcast festival? Was it about documentary as film, aimed at a cinephile audience, or documentary as television, aimed at an industry crowd? This was an issue of identity that would not be solved in the short term and, in fact, has continued to dominate the politics of the festival’s organisation ever since.

Still, despite the obvious problems with the programme, the first edition of the festival was an overall success. The fees from the 200 industry delegates in attendance—over £10,000—combined with general box office ticket sales formed the, ‘basis of an appointment’ to run the festival again in 1995.<sup>71</sup> But SMEC Board members agreed that any future iteration needed to diversify the identity of the festival to make it a truly international event, one that would attract large audiences, allow it to remain in Sheffield, and bring attention to the city as a tourist destination.

## Diversifying the festival

Reflecting on the first edition of the festival, the SMEC Board concluded that, ‘future programming policies need to take into account more input of ethnic and local interest films’.<sup>72</sup> The number of stakeholders involved in the makeup and identity of the first festival (see Figure 1) had resulted in a festival programme conflicted between catering to the broadcast sponsors (the BBC, Channel 4) or to academic tastes (the input of SHU’s School of Cultural Studies and Mackenzie’s



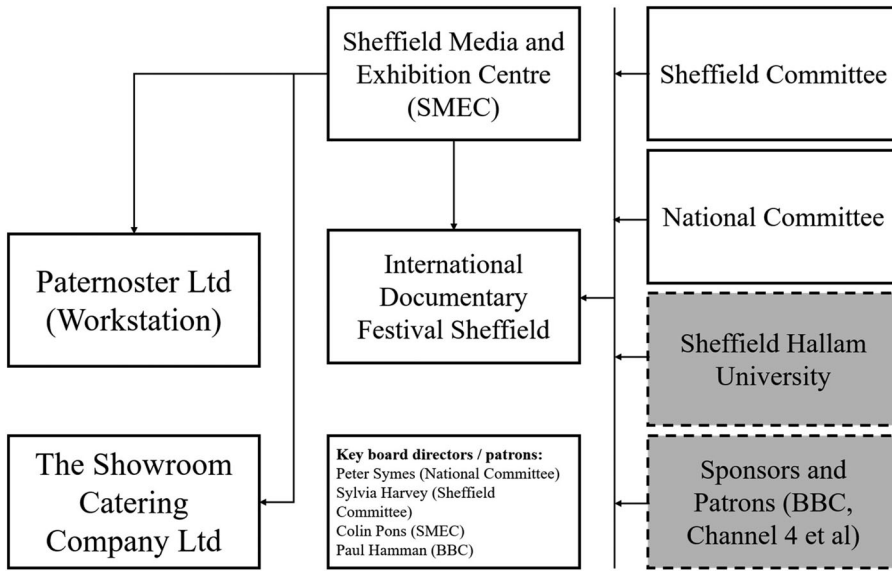


Figure 1. The organisational structure of the first Sheffield International Documentary Festival, 1994.<sup>63</sup>

own academic background). The SMEC Board instructed the Sheffield committee to professionalise the festival ahead of its second iteration in 1995. As such, a number of changes and review processes were implemented. Mackenzie left her role as the festival coordinator and a search began for the newly retitled role of festival director. The committee also wanted to recruit a festival administrator. Research was conducted by Colin Pons, Ian Wild and Sylvia Harvey about how other established festivals from around the UK were run. This included a meeting with the organisers of the Edinburgh International Television Festival, perhaps indicating how the SIDF organisers sensed that the festival's growth and maintenance depended on its support from national broadcasters.<sup>73</sup> Meetings were also held with festivals from around the EU, such as in Dublin, to initiate talks about a potential 'micro distribution network' for the Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre, and how this could be linked to exchanges of packages of films from the festival via the European RECITE programme (Regions and Cities for Europe).<sup>74</sup>

By July 1994, Paula Shirley had been appointed as the new Festival Director.<sup>75</sup> With a background in cultural management of arts organisations, including at Sheffield's Crucible Theatre, Shirley was thought to possess the organisational and administrative skills that Mackenzie had lacked. Along with Shirley's appointment, the local and national committees implemented a new programming process, splitting it between a local volunteer programme co-ordinator, Angela Martin (Senior Lecturer in Film Practice and Studies at Sheffield Hallam University)<sup>76</sup>, two guest directors, Sergio Goldenberg (documentary director and producer, including *Sem Camisinha Naoda*, 1992) and François Niney (a documentary producer, film journalist, and programmer for the European Documentary Biennale 1989–91), and a showcase director, John Marshall (Secretary General of Creative Documentary, one of the sponsors of the 1995 festival). The aim was for the guest directors to internationalise the festival's identity, overcoming the errors

of the first programme's heavily male and American profile. Yet, despite claims to the SMEC Board that the new programming procedures and new festival team were 'proving to be effective', the programme had expanded by over 50 per cent,<sup>77</sup> Over 100 films were to be screened across a limited venue exhibition infrastructure. The Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre, renamed the Showroom cinema, finally opened by 1995 in time for the second festival, but with a greatly reduced audience capacity than had been originally planned for, opening with only two screens instead of four. The festival also had use of the Odeon cinema, but was only allowed two of its seven screens. The exponential rise in films being screened had not been the intention of the local committee given the ongoing lack of resources available to the festival. There was also a lack of administrative resources to adequately plan for this ambitious programme, resulting in a lack of coordination for hastily arranged additional screening spaces with other external venues, such as the Crucible Theatre and Sheffield Hallam University. As the SIDF Sheffield committee admitted in a debrief to the SMEC Board, 'Lack of adequate consultation as well as late changes in the programme put an unwelcome strain on our relationship with the venues [the Odeon, Sheffield Hallam University, the Crucible Theatre] and made local publicity and ticket sales difficult'.<sup>78</sup>

The problems arose from the fact that the new staffing structure was overly complicated, along with a lack of central coordination from Paula Shirley, leading to an out-of-control programme.<sup>79</sup> The two guest directors, Goldenberg and Niney, were often remiss in the programming process, a result of their geographical remove, located in Brazil and France respectively. As such, more programming choices were put forward by the national committee, while a programming sub-committee that had also been established further confused the organisation of the festival programme.<sup>80</sup> It was Angela Martin that undertook much of the programming organisation, including locating films and arranging for their transport to Sheffield. She also curated a section of the festival titled 'The Women Pioneers of Documentary Film', featuring titles such as *The Aphis* (Field, 1930), *Clotheslines* (Cantouw, 1982) and *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (Shub, 1927). Her selection of films reflected, just as it did with Mackenzie, her scholarly background as a film historian, but also her background in the Sheffield Women's Filmmaker's Co-Op. What resulted with the 1995 programme was, rather than a contemporary forward-looking documentary festival, something more akin to an academic conference, in which stakeholders from Sheffield Hallam University and the SIDF Sheffield committee were more prone to exploring documentary aesthetics, theory, and history. Indeed, Martin's editorial for the 1995 programme suggests how she viewed the festival as a site for progressive education, bringing to attention under-represented, even neglected female documentary filmmakers from throughout film history.

The multitude of stakeholder voices and the confused administration of the 1995 festival led to poor overall attendance. The festival and its programme did not appeal to a public audience, with ticket sales struggling. The Sheffield committee concluded that the 1995 festival was, 'less successful' than the 1994 festival. In contrast, the delegate weekend, featuring select screenings and masterclass sessions with the likes of broadcaster Jonathan Dimbleby, who delivered the festival

keynote, and academic Brian Winston, who explored the concept of realism in documentary, had been a relative success. The Sheffield committee admitted that there was 'pressure' from sponsors to deliver an excellent delegate weekend, which ultimately impacted on the quality and care afforded to the public programme, including the publicity and resources needed to attract a local audience.<sup>81</sup> The Sheffield committee concluded that the festival's reliance on sponsorship from broadcasters, rather than the public or cultural sector, 'could pose problems for us in respect of the independence of our programming relative to the demands of sponsors'.<sup>82</sup> There was also a tension between the ambition of the national committee and corporate sponsors and the logistical resources and infrastructure available to the festival in Sheffield. The festival organisers could not cope with an inflated programme, in which broadcast sponsors were requesting ever more films to be screened or requesting changes to the programme at short notice. This led to what was labelled as a 'snowball effect', in which publicity had to be altered or abandoned and venues left in the dark about altered screening times.<sup>83</sup> The poor performance of the festival even led to the SMEC Board suggesting that the Sheffield committee should cut the public programme back in future editions, confining it to one cinema screen given the 'limited audience' appeal of the festival, instead focusing on the delegate weekend.<sup>84</sup>

Following the 1995 edition of the festival, its fate overall was now uncertain, particularly as to whether it would go ahead again in Sheffield. A study of the minutes of the SMEC Board meetings in the weeks after the 1995 festival show that local cultural stakeholders were forging a plan based on asserting their independence and, in effect, positioning blame for the ongoing identity crisis with the national committee. The appointment of Paula Shirley and the new staffing structure had largely been influenced by the national committee. But Shirley had left a vacuum in the coordination that allowed various vested interests to push their own respective agendas on the programme. Shirley's absence led to a confused identity for the festival, one caught between attempting to be local, international, and industry focused. However, the lack of organisation, and the reliance on academic stakeholders, led to a festival that was academically focused and a far remove from acting as a catalyst to rejuvenate Sheffield. What was needed was a festival director with a vision and the ability to manage the competing stakeholder interests, generating a discernible identity for the festival that would be mappable across each annual edition, and which also resonated with the local population, not just industry delegates. What was also needed was greater independence from the national committee and a period of stability after two years of changing structures and coordinators. SMEC seemed to be losing out to other stakeholder interests, primarily the national committee and broadcast sponsors, but also to academic interests from Sheffield Hallam University. In short, the 'local' had been pushed out and Sheffield sent to the margins of the festival's identity.

The SMEC Board described the relationship between the local and national committees of SIDF as being 'rather ad hoc'.<sup>85</sup> This was a result of a tension that had developed between the various stakeholders in the way the festival was managed. SMEC and the Sheffield committee wanted to strengthen the ties of the festival to Sheffield and local audiences, whereas the national committee seemed more

inclined to work with broadcast sponsors and industry delegates. SMEC and the Sheffield committee agreed that ‘greater delineation’ was needed in the relationship between the local and national committees.<sup>86</sup> This included a review of all roles and responsibilities, with the need for ‘clearer lines of accountability and responsibility to the Board and to the Festival Director’.<sup>87</sup> It was also felt that the membership of the Sheffield committee needed widening from nine to sixteen in order to ‘strengthen and consolidate’ the representation of Sheffield.<sup>88 89</sup>

In a bid to reach a consensus, and to be able to secure Sheffield as the host city going forward, a meeting was held with key figures from both the national and Sheffield committees, including Colin Pons, Sylvia Harvey, Chrissie Stansfield, and Peter Symes. The meeting had four aims:

1. To establish clear communication and rebuild trust between the two committees.
2. To discuss the proposed reforms to the Board, and the reorganisation of the festival.
3. To propose a timetable for same, and have this ready to present to the national committee.
4. To communicate clearly the Board reservations about the outgoing Director.<sup>90</sup>

The meeting led to the implementation of a new festival constitution, with a reorganised Festival Board that merged the local and national committees into one committee. Under this new governance structure, members from each committee would be elected to the Festival Board, with those not elected being allowed to attend meetings—in particular, meetings focused on programme selection—in an advisory capacity. Both Sylvia Harvey and Peter Symes were to stand down as chairs of the local and national committees, and a new chair from the national committee and a new deputy chair from the Sheffield committee were to be elected to the Board. It was hoped that this reorganisation would lead to increased communication and a stronger working relationship, as well as contribute to the growth of the festival in Sheffield over the ensuing years, increase attendance from local audiences, and establish a firm identity for the festival within the city. It was also hoped that it would break the close involvement of sponsors in the programme selection and events. This would be achieved by taking the focus away from the delegate weekend and shortening the festival to a four-day event, with the constant presence of a ‘public element running throughout the weekend’ and allowing public audiences to attend masterclass sessions and keynotes.<sup>91</sup>

As for the role of the festival director, it was agreed that, while programme selection would remain the role of the Festival Board, the new director would have to be heavily involved in programme coordination and organisation with, ‘the ability and enough intellectual input to be able to interpret and guide the selection decisions of the Board and the Advisors’.<sup>92</sup> What was required was someone with the combination of strategic management and person-management skills to navigate the limited resources of the festival in order to realise a successful and visionary programme that would appeal to local audiences. The Board’s choice, recommended by Alan Fountain (commissioning editor for the Channel 4 workshops between 1981 and 1994 and later the Head of the Northern Media School at Sheffield Hallam University), was Kathy Loizou, who would remain in the role for the next five years.

Loizou, alongside the new festival publicist, Brent Woods, immediately began to advise the Festival Board about the need for commercial programming, even

recommending music documentaries that could be screened in key weekday evening slots to attract a large, public audience. Such films would also appeal to a student crowd, which would be arriving in the city for the start of the new academic year in October. As a result, the festival was moved to the autumn. Loizou and Woods also looked to mimic high-profile festivals, such as the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), by moving away from the need for premieres and instead showing all of the 'best films from previous film festivals'.<sup>93</sup> The aim was to allow space for more niche programming, while convincing the Board to also select more commercially orientated films. The dense, often academic language of the first two programmes was replaced with much more accessible text, as indicated by the opening editorial to the 1996 programme: 'Whatever your taste, there is a film in the festival for you'.<sup>94</sup> Meanwhile the tendency to programme arthouse or obscure historical documentaries in the first two editions of the festival was dropped for the 1996 edition, which instead favoured films that were thought to be quirky, funny, and commercially viable. Take the opening night film of the 1996 festival, *Project Grizzly* (Lynch, 1996), marketed in the programme as, 'our hilarious Gala Film hot from the Toronto International Film Festival'.<sup>95</sup> The festival was also keen to stress its link to Sheffield through a recurring local strand, with each edition, with each edition of the festival going forward proclaiming, 'local filmmakers also have their place firmly established in the festival.'<sup>96</sup> Loizou's approach, along with that of the newly reorganised Festival Board, allowed the festival a degree of stability to establish a firm reputation on the wider festival circuit. It also allowed Sheffield to become an integral part of the festival's identity. The new constitution stipulated that there would no longer be national press launches, but instead a ground-up approach to publicity, with local responsibility being taken on by the Showroom and Brent Woods. This included developing campaigns around specific films rather than the festival as a whole. Woods would even undertake postcode campaigns, creating mailouts to specific demographics within areas of the city that would be most likely to attend a particular film screening. There was also greater involvement of Destination Sheffield, the council's tourist-based initiative to attract visitors to the city.

While the constitutional reforms to the festival had overcome tensions in the governance of the SIDF, tensions still persisted with external stakeholders, particularly broadcast sponsors such as the BBC, Sky, and Discovery, each of which continued to push for the festival to focus on industry delegates over a public programme. Throughout Loizou's tenure, delegate attendance remained consistent, at between 500 and 700 per festival. This was partially a result of the limited hotel infrastructure in Sheffield, something that would change by the mid-2000s. But it was also a conscious decision of Loizou's vision for the festival. She wanted to develop a more personal festival, one in which everyone could potentially meet each other and have a more relaxed encounter. This in turn led to the increase in the reputation of Sheffield with filmmakers. While distributors did not necessarily pay attention to the festival given its small scale, filmmakers would request their films to screen, or even premiere, at Sheffield because of the culture of personalisation. It was becoming 'the filmmaker's festival, not the distributor's festival'.<sup>97</sup> It was developing an identity.

## Conclusion

This case study of the formation of the SIDF, of the stakeholders involved, and of Sheffield's urban regeneration, works towards the political economic framework outlined in the introduction. Starting with the historical context, we can see how industrial transformations in Sheffield, from steel city to post-steel city, were central to the second and third contexts of the framework: festival origins and political evolution of festivals. Sheffield was, by the end of the 1980s, facing not only industrial decline, but an existential crisis. The city's entire identity, its economic, cultural, social, and political infrastructure, was centred around its steel industry. But with the rapid decrease in industrial employment and the associated rise in unemployment, along with an increasingly derelict urban centre, Sheffield and its citizens were confronted with stark questions about its future: what happens when the city's core industry fades? What replaces it? And what is the new narrative for a post-steel city? These were questions that were ultimately answered by stakeholders from across culture, academia, politics, and industry, who somewhat nobly constructed a vision of urban renewal based on the 'moral and cultural obligation' to provide access for its citizens to a range of alternative media.

The approach taken by this article also hints towards the ways in which post-industrial urban regeneration has been influenced by wider industrial forces engaging with cultural management. Ragan Rhyne argues for the need to examine, 'the distinct roles that festivals play in achieving the goals of various stakeholders'.<sup>98</sup> In doing so, it is possible to begin to understand the, 'unique position of the third sector as a mediator between the state and the market'.<sup>99</sup> By the early 1990s, DEED's aim was to initiate a catalytic effect, by bringing together private and public sectors in a bid to diversify Sheffield's economy. But as Rhyne has argued, this approach allows, 'corporate interests to capitalise on festival events with a minimum of investment, all the while creating a network of organisations that manage themselves through a competition for resources and prestige.'<sup>100</sup>

The unlikelihood of Sheffield becoming the host for what has since developed into one of the most important documentary festivals in the world, both culturally and financially, is clear. But it was the radical political vision of cultural and political stakeholders in Sheffield, the strategic direction of DEED, and the cultural networks of these stakeholders which convinced leading national media figures and broadcast sponsors to take a risk on basing an international festival in the city. Sensing that the city council, and figures like Sylvia Harvey, Ian Wild and Colin Pons, were committed to media and culture as the basis for urban regeneration arguably persuaded the SIDF national committee to locate the festival in Sheffield. There was also the prospect of a natural architectural media space being developed, the new Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre. As such, various stakeholders—cultural, industrial, and political—were coalescing at the heart of Sheffield's regeneration, making it an organic host for an international documentary festival.

But ultimately there was a clash in stakeholder dynamics, with a range of vested interests and agendas wanting to contribute to the management, identity,

and participants of the festival. From council town planners and cultural policy stakeholders, to academics, to the SMEC Board interested in the successful completion and promotion of the Showroom, to the national committee wanting to investigate the craft of documentary-making, to the broadcast sponsors wanting to promote their latest films, everyone seemed to have a slightly different take on what the documentary festival was for and how it should develop. For some, Sheffield needed to be at the heart of the festival, while for others, it was pushed to the margins. These conflicted dynamics initially proved fruitful in forming the festival, allowing for a range of ideas to flourish. But by the second edition, the dynamics were working against the maintenance of the festival and brought it perilously close to shutting down, or at least moving out of Sheffield. What this article has shown is how local stakeholders were absolutely reliant on national stakeholders in order to establish the festival, mainly through the way the latter was able to convince the industry and broadcasters to sponsor the event. But in order for the festival to grow, and for it to contribute to the genuine urban regeneration of Sheffield – albeit primarily cultural regeneration – the local stakeholders assessed that they had to assert their independence. So, by mid-1995, they pushed for constitutional reforms that placed the local at the centre of the festival's branded identity, while allowing it to remain a space for the industry to convene.

Despite the presence of the SIDF in the city, the planned vision for Sheffield's economic urban renewal through the media industries largely failed, with the centre of media industrial focus by the twenty-first century turning to other major northern cities, such as Leeds and Manchester. These cities became the key hubs for the relocation of national broadcasters like the BBC (Salford's MediaCityUK) and Channel 4 (Leeds). But the SIDF, and later Sheffield Doc/Fest, has become a central component of the council's branding of Sheffield, contributing to its overall tourism strategy, as was noted at the cabinet meeting of 18 September 2019 to renew its sponsorship of the festival. Losing the festival would lead to a loss of nearly £2 million delegate spend per year and would reduce, 'the city's profile and reputation within the creative community inside and outside of Sheffield. As the conference is the city's largest conference, maintaining presence and scale is important for PR purposes'.<sup>101</sup> Sheffield's identity on a national and international level, and the development of its creative economy, is interwoven with that of the festival, and its future prospects as a city able to offer alternative media provision depends on the festival's future, ongoing success.

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## Disclosure statement

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## Notes

1. The article will refer to the festival as SIDF in relation to its existence up to 2006 and as Doc/Fest from 2006 onwards.
2. Dina Iordanova, 'The Corrective Role of Film Festivals', *Reframing Film Festivals: Histories, Economies, Cultures*, conference paper, Università Ca' Foscari, February 11, 2020.
3. For more on the history of the Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre, what became the Showroom and Workstation, see James Fenwick, 'Tracing the Origins, Evolution, and Failure of the Cultural Vision for the Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre (1988–1995) Through Archival Research', *Screen* (forthcoming).
4. Marijke de Valck and Skadi Loist, 'Film Festival Studies: An Overview of a Burgeoning Field', in *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit*, ed. Dina Iordanova with Ragan Rhyne (St Andrews Film Studies: St Andrews, 2009), 180.
5. See, for example, Julian Stringer, 'Global Cities and the International Film Festival Economy', in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, ed. Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 134–44.
6. Ruby Cheung, 'Ever-Changing Readjustments: The Political Economy of the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF)', *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 14, no. 1 (2016): 61.
7. Richard Maltby, 'New Cinema Histories', in *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*, ed. Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst, and Philippe Meers (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 3.
8. See Marshall McLuhan's idea that 'the work of cities is the translation of people to a more suitable form than of his ancestors' quoted in Michael Darroch, 'Bridging Urban and Media Studies: Jaqueline Tyrwhitt and the Explorations Group, 1951–1957', *Canadian Journal of Communication* 33, no. 2 (2008): 147.
9. Stringer, 'Global Cities', 141.
10. H. D. Watts, 'Plant Closures, Multilocational Firms, and the Urban Economy: Sheffield, UK', *Environment and Planning*, no. 23 (1991): 43.
11. See Watts, 'Plant Closures', 43–4.
12. Ian Taylor, Karen Evans and Penny Fraser, *A Tale of Two Cities Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England: A Study in Manchester and Sheffield* (London: Routledge, 1996), 64.
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14. Sylvia Harvey, *Cultural Industries Interim Report No. 1: A Report to Sheffield City Council from the Centre for Popular Culture* (Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University, 1988), 26.
15. *Ibid.*, 26–29.
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27. Robert McNulty, Dorothy Jacobson and Leo Penne, *The Economics of Amenity: Community Futures and Quality of Life; A Policy Guide to Urban Economic Development* (Washington, DC: Partners for Liveable Communities, 1984), xv.
28. For more on the development of the Leadmill, see Sarah Kenny, 'A "Radical Project": Youth Culture, Leisure, and Politics in 1980s Sheffield', *Twentieth Century British History* 30, no. 4 (2019): 557–84.
29. Paul Skelton, 'The Evolution of Sheffield's Cultural Industries Quarter', n.d., Box 4, 2015/69, Sheffield Media and Exhibition Centre Business Papers (SMEC), Sheffield City Archives (SCA).
30. Harvey, Cultural Industries, 8.
31. Skelton, 'Sheffield's Cultural Industries'.
32. *Broadcasting Act 1990*, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 28, 186. See also Richard Dunn, 'The 1990 Broadcasting Act: A Benefit or Disaster?', *RSA Journal* 143, no. 5457 (March 1995): 49–60; and Michael Darlow, *Independents Struggle: The Programme Makers Who Took on the TV Establishment* (London: Quartet, 2004), 492–3.
33. Harvey, Cultural Industries, 8.
34. Ragan Rhyne, 'Film Festival Circuits and Stakeholders', in *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit*, ed. Dina Iordanova with Ragan Rhyne (St Andrews Film Studies: St Andrews, 2009), 18.
35. 'Documentary Film Festival Report to the Board Meeting', August 19, 1992, 2015/69, Box 4, SMEC, SCA.
36. Steve Presence, '"Britain's First Media Centre": A History of Bristol's Watershed Cinema, 1964–1998', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 39, no. 4 (2019): 822–3.

37. Ibid., 823.
38. Developing the Cultural Industries, 16.
39. Ibid.
40. Skelton, 'Sheffield's Cultural Industries'.
41. Festivals included the Sheffield Festival in 1986 and, in 1991, parallel to the XVI Summer Universiade (World Student Games), the city staged the Sheffield Cultural Festival, as part of which the restored Lyceum Theatre was reopened.
42. Sheffield International Film Festival Report to SMEC Board Meeting, April 1992, 2015/69, Box 4, SMEC, SCA.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Interview with Sylvia Harvey, February 17, 2020.
47. Minutes of the Board Meeting, July 15, 1992, 2015/69, Box 4, SMEC, SCA.
48. Ibid.
49. Documentary Film Festival Report to the Board Meeting, August 19, 1992, 2015/69, Box 4, SMEC, SCA.
50. An 'off-the-shelf' non-profit company, International Documentary Festival Sheffield Ltd, was registered in November 1993 with the support of DEED ('Special Resolution', November 29, 1993, Companies House Records). The first board meeting took place on December 8, 1993.
51. Letter from Symes to Harvey.
52. Minutes of the Board Meeting, September 16, 1992, 2015/69, Box 4, SMEC, SCA.
53. Minutes of the Board Meeting, December 16, 1992, 2015/69, Box 3, SMEC, SCA.
54. Minutes of the Board Meeting, November 18, 1992, 2015/69, Box 3, SMEC, SCA; see also Fenwick, 'Tracing the Origins'.
55. 'Display Ad 137', *The Guardian*, November 16, 1992, A22.
56. Letter from Symes to Harvey.
57. Ibid.
58. Minutes of the Board Meeting, December 16, 1992.
59. Sue Summers, 'A woman with so many true stories to tell', *The Independent*, March 9, 1994, n.p.
60. Minutes of the Board Meeting, February 16, 1994, 2015/69, Box 2, SMEC, SCA.
61. Minutes of the Board Meeting, September 1, 1993, 2015/69, Box 3, SMEC, SCA.
62. Minutes of the Board Meeting, December 15, 1993, Box 3, 2015/69, SMEC, SCA.
63. Figure based on research conducted by the author and compiled from sources including the SMEC business papers (SCA) and the Sheffield Local Studies Library.
64. Interview with Colin Pons, November 2, 2019.
65. Alexandra Frean, 'War Stories', *The Times*, March 23, 1994, n.p.

66. Ibid.
67. Summers, 'A woman with so many true stories to tell'.
68. Kevin Jackson, 'Film', *The Independent*, March 29, 1994, n.p.
69. Ibid.
70. See Holly Aylett, 'Form under fire', *The Guardian*, April 4, 1994, p. A15; Andy Fry, 'Serious fact finders get zero cash rating', *Broadcast*, April 1, 1994, p. 13.
71. Minutes of the Board Meeting, April 28, 1994, 2015/69, Box 2, SMEC, SCA.
72. Minutes of the Board Meeting, February 16, 1994, 2015/69, Box 2, SMEC, SCA.
73. Minutes of the Board Meeting, May 26, 1994, 2015/69, Box 2, SMEC, SCA.
74. Minutes of the Board Meeting, July 26, 1994, 2015/69, Box 2, SMEC, SCA; see also Fenwick, 'Tracing the Origins'.
75. Ibid.
76. Angela Martin was a film and video editor at Channel 4, working on films such as *Coal Not Dole* (1984). She is also the author of academic works such as *African Films: The Context of Production* (London: BFI, 1982). She previously was a film programmer in the 1970s for the National Film Theatre.
77. Minutes of the Board Meeting, September 22, 1994, 2015/69, Box 2, SMEC, SCA.
78. Preliminary Report on the 1995 Festival, April 10, 1995, 2015/69, Box 2, SMEC, SCA, 4.
79. Ibid., 1–2.
80. Ibid., 2.
81. Preliminary Report, 4.
82. Ibid., 3.
83. Ibid., 4.
84. Minutes of the Board Meeting, April 27, 1995, 2015/69, Box 2, SMEC, SCA.
85. Preliminary Report, 4.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid.
88. Minutes of the Board Meeting, June 22, 1995, 2015/69, Box 2, SMEC, SCA. The need to broaden the membership of the Sheffield committee was exacerbated by Manchester lobbying to host the festival in 1996, a bid that proved unsuccessful.
89. Ibid.
90. Notes from the meeting held at BBC Bristol, June 2, 1995, 2015/69, Box 2, SMEC, SCA.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. Interview with Brent Woods, February 7, 2020.
94. SIDF 1996 Programme, 791.43 SSTQ, Sheffield Local Studies Library.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid.
97. Interview with Woods.
98. Rhyne, 'Stakeholders', 20.

99. Ibid.
100. Ibid.
101. Meeting of the Cabinet, Wednesday 18 September, 2019, Item 9, Sheffield City Council Archives.
102. Data compiled by author and based on information in the SMEC business papers, SCA.

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**Notes on contributor**

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