



**City of Arcades
Cardiff**

July 2023

Case Study Information

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Organisation	FOR Cardiff
Place	Cardiff
Version	1

Basic Facts about the place

Description of the place

Cardiff is the capital city of Wales and a core UK city with a population of 480,000. The city is the economic hub of Wales with a younger, more diverse and affluent population than the wider nation but is also home to some of the most deprived communities in Wales.

The City of Arcades project focuses on the city's central business district which is the area that the FOR Cardiff business improvement district covers. Cardiff city centre is a compact, flat, and walkable area. The district is a multi-functional destination serving as a significant comparison-shopping centre, a major events destination including the 70,000+ capacity Principality Stadium, a night-life hub, a professional services district, and a district centre for the increasing volume of city centre residents including a high proportion of domestic and international university students.

Key opportunities/challenges

Beyond 'Capital of Wales' (status only granted to the city in 1955) and 'events destination', Cardiff does not have a particularly strong local identity. This is an issue raised by both businesses and residents. The issue has been exacerbated by post-industrial decline which hit the entire economy of South Wales in the 1980s and beyond. Cardiff has undergone dramatic redevelopment since this period and the city centre boasts a high-quality retail and hospitality environment, however this area is overwhelmingly dominated by budget to mid-range national brands and provides limited opportunities for unique local identity and luxury tier goods and experiences. Alongside this, most of the architecture and activity related to being a 'seat of government' happens in Cardiff Bay, an area around a mile from the city centre. The familiar elements of the Welsh Capital such as the Senedd (Welsh Parliament) building and Wales Millennium Centre are not directly related to the experience of the city centre and have not had a significant impact on strengthening local identity for the city centre business community.

Cardiff city centre is home to the longest stretch of Victorian and Edwardian arcades of any city in Europe – these seven covered shopping arcades directly surround the new modern shopping centre. These arcades are a feature consistently commented on by local people when FOR Cardiff have conducted research into place identity and connection. The emergent themes identified from this research suggest that the arcades are simultaneously the jewel in the city's crown and an under-utilised

and neglected asset. FOR Cardiff identified a key opportunity to build on the idea of the arcades to strengthen place identity for the city centre.

Vision/goals

FOR Cardiff has a vision for the city that has been articulated as, 'We view Cardiff as a modern European capital with a unique personality that we want to nurture. We want Cardiff to be a great place to come for business and for pleasure but also a place for locals to be proud of.' Operationally this will mean a city centre which is thriving both economically and culturally and is distinctly and uniquely Welsh.

Other specific project priorities involve helping businesses transition to a greener economy and centring equality, diversity, and inclusion in the public life of the city. Welsh places are also unique globally in being managed by public authorities which are bound by the requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act which requires public bodies to act in the interests of seven wellbeing goals many of which are specifically place based including a Wales of cohesive communities, a more equal Wales, and a Wales of thriving culture and Welsh language.

Description of the project/initiative

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City of Arcades began as a place branding and marketing exercise which focused specifically on independent businesses. The project has grown in scope to discuss the whole of Cardiff city centre and the urban life that unfolds here as existing within 'the City of Arcades'.

When the brand launched residents were immediately drawn into the campaign by being asked to cast their vote for their favourite business within Cardiff's arcades. These results provided a strong local story-telling platform to grow the brand around with a diverse range of businesses making the top 10 including Spillers "the oldest record shop in the world", Wally's an Austrian style deli and kaffeehaus, as well as a traditional greetings cards shop which performed well in the poll due to multi-generational ties to the site. The people focused campaign that was developed from the Top 10 told genuine stories of Cardiff to a local audience and visitors within a one-hour drive time such as Bristol and Bath.

The City of Arcades then developed as an event which first took place as 'City of Arcades Day' in 2019. This event saw a variety of in person activity delivered directly by FOR Cardiff such as live music and street theatre alongside events and promotions co-ordinated by 87 businesses from the arcades taking place both within their premises and spilling out into the public-private spaces within the arcades. An example of this was a fashion show led by a local designer who transformed an arcade into a runway.

63% of businesses who took part saw an increase in sales with 23% reporting an increase in customers. A Welsh cake shop in Castle Arcade reported 300-400 customers on the day of the event, whilst footfall counters recorded 206,000 visitors to the arcades on City of Arcades Day which saw a 6% increase year on year.

The City of Arcades brand maintained a social presence throughout lockdown to continue to support local businesses and passively encouraged footfall and engagement in 2021 through a public art project called The Art & Soul of Cardiff. Seven artists from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama were commissioned to create hanging art features for each of the seven arcades in Cardiff. The arcades were transformed into a public art gallery with each piece telling a story of Cardiff, showcasing talented young artists.

City of Arcades events returned to the city in 2022 with City of Arcades Week – seven days of discounts and experiential activity during October half-term. We worked in partnership with a local illustrator and author who was writing a children's book based on animal sculptures that line the walls of Cardiff Castle. Using his narrative and illustrations as inspiration we commissioned a sculpture artist to create 16 animal sculptures. The sculptures were placed around the city in hidden and unexpected areas from a balcony in an arcade to a clock tower in Cardiff Market. Families were invited to use an illustrated map to find the sculptures and follow the story of the 'Night of the Animal Wall'. The trail not only supported the launch of the book, but it also extended the awareness of City of Arcades to families across South Wales and England.

As well as the family focused sculpture trail, we created seven window displays showing pictures of 'Cardiff through the decades'. This installation formed an additional city-centre trail while also improving the appeal of empty units.

City of Arcades Week launched with a City of Arcades Day celebration focused on experiential activity. Visitors enjoyed live performances, guided walking tours, arts and crafts workshops and an open-mic poetry evening. The week gave residents and visitors the opportunity to experience hidden parts of the city and engage with businesses in a novel way. The Morgan Quarter opened their doors to the public to show them a Victorian oak dining room, a hidden chapel, and underground tunnels. Cardiff indoor market also opened their doors on a Friday evening for the first time, allowing customers to browse the stalls, enjoy street food and live entertainment.

Following the popularity of walking tours during City of Arcades Week, we are working with local tour guides and technology company 'Hello Lamp post' to develop a series of City of Arcades themed walking tours that will launch in summer 2023. The walking tours will include a guided historical walking tour, a food and drink tasting tour and an AI generated trail.

Working with Hello Lamp post, we will install floor stickers and signs across the city centre which visitors can scan and learn about the history of Cardiff. Using AI technology, users can ask questions, view multimedia, and start and stop the trail when and wherever they like. The trail will be free with options to select a family orientated trail and to do the trail in Welsh. The tours will be a new tourism product for the city which aims to attract visitors and offer local families a free attraction.

The brand is also able to lend itself to other projects, for example the Poetry in the Arcades project is co-branded with City of Arcades. It saw a variety of local poets, including Hanan Issa subsequently appointed as the National Poet of Wales, producing unique poems about Cardiff which are now on semi-permanent public display around the arcades. The City of Arcades brand was also used to promote a pop-up art gallery during the Covid-19 pandemic called Guerrilla Galleries. Cardiff arts organisation Pallet transformed empty shop windows into a gallery space to showcase new and emerging artists.

City of Arcades is evolving into an identity for the whole of the city centre. Cardiff *is* the City of Arcades whether your experience of the city takes place inside of outside of one of those arcades.

The team involved in the project/initiative

Project/initiative team

This project is led by FOR Cardiff, the BID for the city centre. However, it also works alongside local businesses both inside and outside of the arcades.

During the 'Top 10' campaign, case studies were conducted with 10 independent businesses and the business owners acted as champions for the arcades. Since then, 15 more small and independent businesses have been involved in telling their story through professional case studies.

Local businesses are instrumental in delivering City of Arcades Day events with many organising their own innovative events. In 2019, local designer Andrea's Closet transformed Duke Street Arcade into a runway to launch her winter collection. And in 2022, LGBTQ+ store, the Queer Emporium, transformed Royal Arcade into a stage and hosted a drag night for new drag artists. FOR Cardiff's business engagement team work closely with businesses to suggest events and experiential activity often connecting artists and performers with venues and encouraging collaboration. In 2022, 81 businesses ran an offer or event for City of Arcades Week with many running several events and offers.

The managing agents of the arcades are also key players in the success of the project. In 2019, the Morgan Quarter launched a historical walking tour allowing small groups access to restricted areas

behind the arcades. The team got into the spirit of the event and dressed up in Victorian clothing. The tours were so successful they returned in 2022 and the management is looking into making them a regular attraction.

Collaboration has been essential, for example, the curation of the 'Cardiff through the decades' window vinyl trail involved working with managing agents, private businesses, and public organisations. We sourced imagery from the Castle Quarter managing agent, Centre Manager of the Capitol Centre, Cathays Library and Wally's Deli which spanned from the 1800s – 2010s.

Many local artists and arts organisations have been involved in City of Arcades campaigns. In 2019, we commissioned Welsh music label PYST to curate live performances inside the arcades for City of Arcades Day. We have used the arcades as a platform for local artists through the Poetry in the Arcades, Pallet, and Art & Soul of Cardiff projects. For City of Arcades Week, we worked closely with author and illustrator Jack Skivens and sculptor artist Daniel J. Lane to create the Night of the Animal Wall Trail. We also commissioned street performers, poets, a classical guitarist, and a string duo to create an atmosphere of carnival.

We engage with local authorities, working with the tourist department of Cardiff Council, Visit Cardiff, to promote the City of Arcades campaign and include the brand within their wider marketing plan. They often provide in-kind support by offering advertising space.

The City of Arcades website and social media channels are managed in-house by FOR Cardiff's marketing team. The website has a list of each business in the arcades along with stall holders in Cardiff market and independents in the city centre. It displays stories of local businesses, news, and blogs about the city. City of Arcades promotes local businesses and raises the profile of Cardiff through Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and most recently TikTok. It has a total of 14,393 followers across each channel. FOR Cardiff has an influencer budget for City of Arcades to create ongoing promotion often focused on key seasonal periods like St David's Day, Mother's Day, Easter, and Christmas.

FOR Cardiff work with a Cardiff communications agency Cowshed which has helped the brand reach millions of people and secure national press coverage for the brand.

Impact or outcomes

Short-term outcomes/impact

The first phase of the City of Arcades campaign, the 'Top 10' saw:

- 9,500 members of the public vote for their favourite business
- 17 million impressions through ATL
- 16 pieces of media coverage including BBC and Vice
- 19.5 million social reach, 3,148 social mentions
- SWYD tattoo and barbers said: "Since the campaign started, we've had some of our busiest weekends and we'd like to thank FOR Cardiff for starting this. We love being in the arcades and our future is definitely here as we continue to grow our business."

The launch of City of Arcades Day in 2019 saw:

- 6% increase in footfall with an estimated 206,000 visitors on a single day
- 5.5 million campaign reach
- 18 pieces of coverage including BBC and Cardiff Life
- 4,448,513 opportunities to see
- 87 businesses engaged
- 63% of businesses reported an increase in sales
- A Welsh cake shop saw an increase of 300-400 customers which they attributed directly to the event.
- Jian Chen's FINE ART said: "We can't speak for the other city arcades (we were kept too busy to wander), but there was most certainly a massive increase in footfall in Duke St and High Street arcades - which was reflected in an excellent day for sales for us."

2022's City of Arcades Week saw:

- 107 offers and events engaging 81 businesses
- 11% increase in footfall compared to same week in 2019
- 3,337 people attended the Night Market event at Cardiff Market, a 33% increase on the previous event
- 46% of businesses reporting an increase in sales
- 21 pieces of coverage generating 45.2 million OTS
- 940K social media impressions

Eat the Bird Cardiff said "What an amazing time! It gave us footfall from customers, who may not have seen us before. City of Arcades really helped our new business to flourish. Loads of new customers and loads of great times."

Long-term outcomes/achievements

Although, currently ongoing, the long-term aim of this project is to help shape and solidify a sense of identity for Cardiff city centre. This is a necessarily difficult to measure concept particularly when it comes to attribution however anecdotally the concept of the City of Arcades is gaining increasing traction among locals and tourists. There was a strong focus on returning to the arcades and supporting arcade businesses as the local spirit of Cardiff when lockdown restrictions were eased.

Cardiff receives around 40 million visitors a year, which in large part is due to the events offering. The hope is that by boosting the cities historical and cultural offering via the City of Arcades brand that Cardiff will be seen as one of the go to areas in the South West. Being able to compete with the likes of Bath and Bristol that enjoy a much higher spend per visitor than Cardiff and longer average night stay, resulting in a large boost to the city's economy.

One of the main arcade developments is undergoing a re-development to provide a strengthened leisure and entertainment offer and the other is currently experiencing particularly strong occupancy rates. The future of Cardiff's arcades, and the wider city centre of the City of Arcades is promising.



Castle Arcade, Cardiff, 2022



Tourists enjoying High Street Arcade in 2022





Top 10 Businesses Reveal – 2018 Morgan Quarter guided tour – City of Arcades Day 2019



Fashion show in Duke Street Arcade – City of Arcades Day 2019



Art & Soul of Cardiff exhibition 2021



Night of the Animal Wall Trail – City of Arcades Week 2022



City of Arcades Day 2022 – street performers



City of Arcades Day 2022 – open mic poetry in Waterloo Tea



City of Arcades Week – Cardiff through the decades window vinyl trail



City of Arcades Week – Cardiff Night Market

Advice for members and the wider placemaking community

This section should list the key information that you think other IPM members or the wider placemaking community would find relevant and should be aware of before they develop a similar initiative. This information is likely to be unique to your own experiences, but could include:

- Highs and lows experienced during the process of developing this initiative
- Timeframe involved
- Funds required
- Relationships and contributions the initiative required from key stakeholders
- If the same initiative were to be implemented again elsewhere, what would you do differently?
- What is the main 'takeaway' you want people to learn from your experience

Advice/key learning

This project has been necessarily iterative – shaped by the business, locals, and cultural organisations that the BID has worked with as it has developed. We knew when we launched the initial top 10 campaign that City of Arcades was likely to develop significantly beyond what that piece of work was, but we did not have a long term delivery plan in mind because we wanted to be guided by where the project took us.

As a BID we're privileged to have much larger budgets than the majority of our contemporaries so a lot of the working hours on the set up of this project were outsourced to our PR agency but even so running City of Arcades events is a huge staff time commitment and takes over our lives a little even as a team of 12+ Managing expectation of what these events and campaigns can deliver and what we expect other partners to do for themselves by picking up the concept and running with it is absolutely key, otherwise we'd be overwhelmed by small tasks that other partners would be better to deliver. A lot of our role as the brand develops is generating ideas and putting them on the table.

We launched in 2018 and had the first City of Arcades Day in 2019 so an un-surprising low was over-seeing the city centre navigate the Covid-19 pandemic and losing some businesses along the way but the passion that the community showed in returning to these much-loved businesses when they were able to was hugely positive.

Contact for case study queries

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Please provide details for a relevant point of contact that can assist with any queries from the IPM team during the publication process and subsequently. We may need to clarify some aspects of your submission or seek further information or visuals.. The contact details you provide will not be shared externally and will be retained securely by the Institute of Place Management, based at Manchester Metropolitan University (acting as Data Controller).

Further details

If there are relevant further reading resources or background information, please provide the most relevant link(s) below.

This may include, for example, links to the website of your place-based organization, or links to an expanded case study or project information. There is no obligation to provide this information, but it may assist others to further explore the themes within your case study, or help to create links with your own organization.

Any links provided will be published with the case study..

Please only include email or other contact details of people who are willing to be contacted about the project and their role.

Further details
https://thecityofarcades.com/