

CREATING SPACE FOR MULTIPLE NARRATIVES

Policy Briefing

KEY POLICY FINDINGS

- 1** Use trauma-informed, racially literate approaches to exploring colonial history, centring multiple voices over singular narratives.
- 2** Resource public parks, libraries, and museums as essential belonging spaces for all.
- 3** Use inclusive, varied methods (e.g., tactile, visual) to make heritage engagement accessible to diverse communities.

The 1938 Empire Exhibition was one of Scotland's largest public events, yet its history is now largely absent from Glasgow's collective memory. For today's diverse communities, particularly people seeking asylum, migrants, people of colour, and young people, the legacies of empire continue to shape experiences of identity, representation, safety, and belonging. Understanding how people make sense of these narratives has clear implications for heritage, culture, equalities, integration, and anti-racism policy.

This document summarises a new understanding of how Scottish people interpret colonial history (specifically in Glasgow) and what this means for heritage, culture, equalities, and anti-racism policy. It will:

- 1)** Present clear accessible insights from research workshops in 2025.
- 2)** Highlight participants' voices, lived experiences, and emotional responses.
- 3)** Communicate 3 core themes relevant to heritage, anti-racism and equalities policy.

Growing Racial Literacy & Shifting Understanding

Healing, Safety, & Wellbeing

CORE THEMES

Belonging & Everyday Infrastructures

CONVERSATIONS ADDRESSING COLONIAL HISTORY CAN SUPPORT RACIAL LITERACY, WELLBEING, AND BELONGING IN GLASGOW TODAY

WHEN HANDLED CAREFULLY AND IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THOSE MOST AFFECTED.

This policy briefing draws on insights from "Decolonising the British Empire Exhibition of 1938 through Augmented Reality Narratives", a research project at The Glasgow School of Art, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Contact Dr Daisy Abbott at d.abbott@gsa.ac.uk or visit <https://sit.gsa.ac.uk/project/decolonising-augmented-reality> for more information.

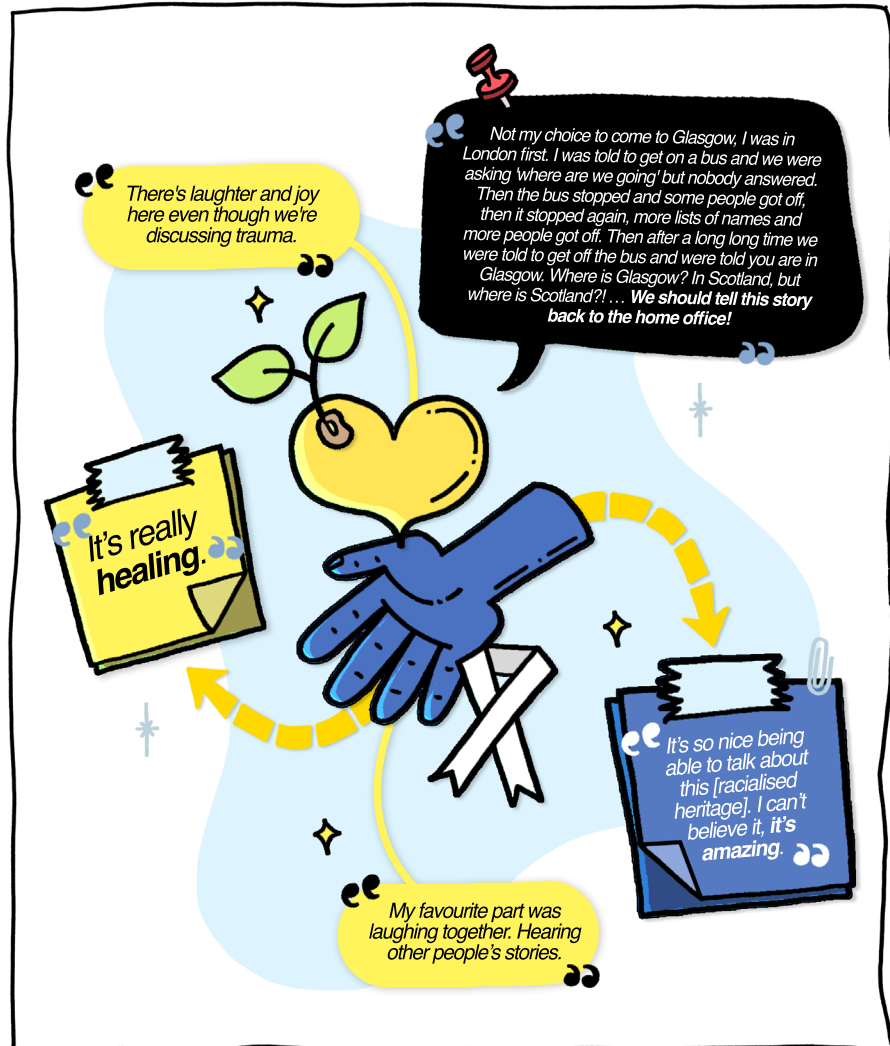


A workshop used the 1938 Empire Exhibition as a case study to investigate how Glaswegians (including those from racially minoritised communities) think about heritage and their place within it. Many described the process as **healing, illuminating, and confidence-building**, with shifts in how they viewed colonialism, Scottishness, and the narratives that shape public memory. Participants highlighted the importance of everyday infrastructures – parks, libraries, free museums, community groups, and walking routes – in supporting **wellbeing, orientation, and community connection** in Glasgow. For those living with restricted mobility, financial precarity, or digital exclusion, these infrastructures play a crucial role in enabling participation in cultural life and supporting a **sense of belonging**.

This deepens our understanding of how people interpret the Exhibition's legacies today and what this means for contemporary **policy and practice** for organisations working across heritage, culture, education, equalities, and anti-racism agendas.

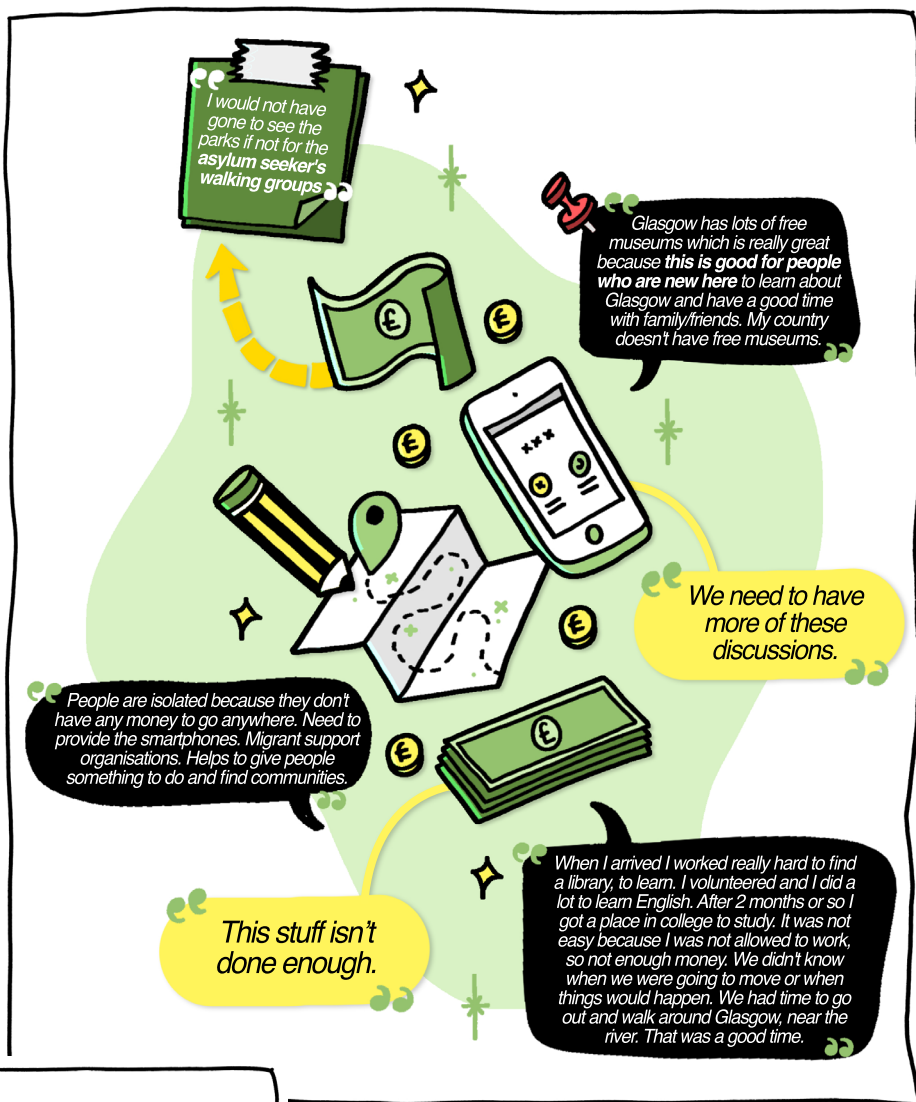
HEALING, SAFETY, AND WELLBEING

The workshops created an environment where people could explore racialised histories without pressure or judgement. Participants described the environment as supportive, non-interrogative, restorative, and enabling honest reflection. Across cohorts, people shared how the sessions allowed them to express feelings, navigate grief, enjoy humour together, and feel valued. This theme highlights that more carefully facilitated, racially literate spaces are need within heritage and cultural settings, particularly for people who may not otherwise feel safe engaging with colonial histories.



BELONGING & EVERYDAY INFRASTRUCTURES

Participants reflected on their experiences of living in Glasgow, highlighting how parks, libraries, free museums, walking groups, and community spaces support orientation, safety, and belonging. They also described material barriers such as housing precarity, digital exclusion, and limited mobility. The discussions revealed how public infrastructures shape people's everyday lives and their ability to participate in cultural life or engage with local heritage. This theme demonstrates the need for integrated cultural and equalities policies that recognise the role of accessible public spaces in fostering wellbeing and community connection.



GROWING RACIAL LITERACY & SHIFTING UNDERSTANDING

The workshops prompted meaningful shifts in how participants understood colonialism, propaganda, representation, and Scotland's role within empire. Many recognised gaps in their knowledge, questioned established narratives, and linked historical dynamics to contemporary racism and political manipulation. Through visual methods and collective discussion, participants deepened their understanding and critically reframed assumptions. This theme underscores the importance of accessible, dialogic approaches for building racial literacy across cultural, educational, and equalities contexts.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The insights shared through these workshops demonstrate how conversations around colonial history and its legacies can strengthen Scotland's commitments to racial literacy, cultural inclusion, and community wellbeing.

We wondered if something like this would be a good replacement for the Tower of Empire ... to show the variety and feeling of choice ...

DECOLONISATION IS NOT ABOUT CREATING AN ALTERNATE NARRATIVE BUT ABOUT CREATING A SPACE FOR MULTIPLE NARRATIVES..."



Participants emphasised the need for approaches that hold complexity while centring lived experience. Their reflections show that when people engage with difficult histories in safe, well-facilitated environments, and when cultural spaces are accessible, affordable, and welcoming, heritage becomes a site for connection rather than exclusion. These findings suggest practical ways in which cultural, equalities, and educational policy can support more inclusive public memory – through intentional facilitation, accessible interpretation, and infrastructures that enable belonging.

The following considerations outline how organisations and policymakers can build on what participants said matters most.

- PARTICIPANT WELLBEING** Invest in racially literature, trauma-informed facilitation to ensure that engagement with racialised or colonial histories happens in **safe**, non-interrogative, and **emotionally supportive** ways.
- QUESTION HISTORY** Embed local histories of empire into anti-racist and equalities work by using place-based **case studies** such as the 1938 Empire Exhibition to deepen **understanding** and **challenge gaps** in public memory.
- BELONGING & INFRASTRUCTURES** Recognise and resource everyday public infrastructures such as parks, libraries, free museums, and walking groups as **belonging spaces** that are essential for orientation, wellbeing, and community connection, particularly for people facing financial or mobility barriers.
- MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES** Support heritage practices that value **multiple perspectives**, challenge singular narratives, and enable communities to **contribute** to how histories are interpreted and retold.
- ACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATION** Adopt **accessible**, multimodal communication methods including image interpretation, artefact handling, and sensory storytelling that make heritage **easier to engage with** for diverse audiences.