

## **‘The Role of Cultural Facilities in Community Strengthening’.**

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1. The overall theme of the forum is: ‘The Role of Cultural Facilities in Community Strengthening’. This suggests we need first to look at some of the broader context issues before considering cultural issues specifically. For example:
  - (a) What is community strengthening? Why is the idea important? Why are communities weakening? What is a healthy or strong community?
  - (b) What is the role of measures: why do we measure community wellbeing?
  - (c) What are some of the problems and issues in measuring (democracy, transparency, values selected as well as technical issues re best measure, availability etc).
    - i) The chief value of community wellbeing indicators is democratic rather than technocratic: that is, they can provide a community-based and transparent way to identify the most important priorities and outcomes for a programmer or policy, or for the community as a whole. This is a more important goal ultimately for using indicators than the limited but still legitimate task of monitoring the performance of specific programs.
  - (d) An example of these issues: The Victorian Community Indicators Project: local wellbeing measures as a tool for citizen engagement. Developing a local ‘Community wellbeing framework’
2. Some specific ‘cultural wellbeing and community strengthening’ issues (not just ‘cultural facilities’)
  - (a) Where do measures of cultural wellbeing fit? How do culture and arts programs and facilities contribute to wellbeing and community strengthening?
  - (b) Issues and problems in measuring culture and arts impact on community strengthening and wellbeing/QoL
    - i) ‘We in the arts assume arts are good for people’
    - ii) Impact definitely there but how do we prove it?
    - iii) Many studies in past 10 yrs have shown social impact of cultural programs and activities but mostly measuring effect of specific

programs on wellbeing of specific groups (i.e. music program making programs on health of older people

- iv) Less often, but increasing now, cultural indicators included as part of broader framework of socio-economic indicators measuring wellbeing, quality of life or sustainability of community
  - v) Pressure for these from 3 directions:
    - (a) On government to provide evidence of effective investment
    - (b) On institutions, public bodies and local governments to evaluate progress towards policy goals
    - (c) To build an 'evidence base' for the benefits of cultural development for community as whole
3. There is general agreement that cultural activity impacts on a number of aspects of wellbeing (broadly defined):
- (a) Quality of life of individuals
    - i) Health
    - ii) Life experience
    - iii) Education, capacity building
  - (b) Quality and vitality of communities
    - i) Community interaction and activity
  - (c) The economy
    - i) Creating jobs and economic activity
    - ii) Creating infrastructure and support services
4. Depending on our perspective, there are many different ways to think about, and measure, the 'wellbeing' benefits that individuals and communities derive from arts and cultural activity, not just the crude consumption measure ('bums on seats'):
- (a) Craft and skill and passion
  - (b) Government services and programs in the arts etc
  - (c) Cultural facilities as part of communities (libraries, theatres, galleries)
  - (d) Culture as educational, transformative, enriching lives, not just filling idle time
  - (e) Entertainment (active or passive)

- (f) Part of the economy
  - (g) Ambitious or conflicting facets of ‘culture as part of broader debates about, i.e. multiculturalism, protecting indigenous culture etc.
  - (h) Harder questions about the negative role of ‘culture’ within an economy of consumption and materialism’
5. Difficulties of developing cultural wellbeing indicators:
- (a) Developing wellbeing indicators in the arts and culture is more difficult than many other fields, because of the different goals and perspectives on what culture is, how it should work in communities, ranging from a narrow service and facilities view through to an ‘enrichment of life’ and ‘community strengthening’ view and the broadest of all, that culture is the defining and overriding set of outlooks and practices that make a distinctive nation, community or group.
  - (b) Other difficulties:
    - i) Very few indicators
    - ii) Tend to be conservative, ‘available data’
    - iii) Harder aspirations and benefits of culture often missed (inspire, educate, uplift)
    - iv) Benefits for community assumed but difficult to prove ( i.e. a cultural centres as community meeting places; cultural programs as participatory and inclusive civic activity)
  - (c) Need for some theory
6. What are some ways to measure cultural wellbeing and the contribution of cultural programs and facilities to stronger and healthier communities? Applying the same approach general approach we used in the VCI project for other ‘pillars’ of community wellbeing (such as economic, social etc), we need to ask the normal ‘diagnostic’ questions that apply to developing wellbeing indicators in other areas:
- (a) What are the most important goals and principles of a healthy and progressive arts and culture policy?
  - (b) What are the most important and desirable outcomes, and in what fields or domains, that constitute the successful achievement of these values and goals?
  - (c) How can we best define and measure these outcomes?
7. In this process, it’s important to:
- (a) Not be tyrannised by ‘available data’

- (b) Involve the community itself in defining goals; and measures, and gathering data
  - (c) Mix objective and subjective (i.e. number of arts performances; how people enjoyed or learned from them)
  - (d) Put more emphasis on community and wellbeing outcomes, not managerial performance (this important too, but only once goals set)
  - (e) Be reflexive and iterative
  - (f) Build capacity. Use indicators to create debate, include and build capacity, don't impose from top as management 'control device'
8. **Possible indicators:** Some of the key 'desirable outcome areas' areas that do seem to be agreed:
- (a) Participation rates in arts and cultural activities.
  - (b) The availability of arts and cultural facilities and programs within communities.
  - (c) Equitable access to and participation in arts and cultural activities (participation and benefits fairly distributed across different socio-economic and ethnic groups, and by age, gender etc).
  - (d) The impact on individuals of arts and culture activities (health, wellbeing, enrichment, creativity, sociability and social inclusion, education etc)
  - (e) The impact on communities of arts and cultural activities (creativity, sense of community, networks, improved community facilities and amenities, heritage awareness and preservation, contribution to sense of place etc.)
  - (f) Effective administration of arts and culture facilities.
  - (g) Economic effects of cultural and arts activities (jobs, service and programs, events, facilities building and maintenance etc)
  - (h) Variety and diversity of arts and culture activities etc.
  - (i) Broader diversity of ethnicities and cultures within community
  - (j) Adoption of integrated arts and culture policies, strategies and progress measures by government.
9. Possible sources of data
- (a) ABS data
  - (b) Local and administrative data
  - (c) Community and participant surveys

(d) Data kept by cultural facilities and institutions

*Notes from two good reports:*

## **1. Links between arts/culture and community wellbeing: Australia**

“*Art and Wellbeing* assembles ideas and case study material which demonstrate connections between community cultural development and government 'wellbeing' initiatives.

Australian and overseas research shows that direct involvement by communities in arts activity can contribute significantly to individual and community wellbeing and can enhance the efforts of government agencies in realising their policies for community wellbeing and ecologically sustainable communities. The case studies presented here demonstrate that community-based creative processes, when embedded into an agency's policies and strategies, can be very powerful in strengthening the knowledge, engagement, social capital and leadership required to achieve policy objectives.

The case study material is grouped under seven themes, which represent key priorities for governments in Australia in achieving community wellbeing:

- Health
- Ecologically Sustainable Development
- Public Housing and Place
- Rural Revitalisation
- Community Strengthening
- Active Citizenship
- Social Inclusion and Cultural Diversity.

If governments wish to more effectively enhance community wellbeing, they need to recognise or incorporate the community's culture (and thus values) within government policies and strategies. They can do this through participatory creative processes. Community cultural development uses involvement in artistic and other creative processes as a way of exploring and expressing our cultures and the values underpinning these cultures and our society. Community cultural development processes can therefore play a vital role in helping people to think critically about their experiences.

The full potential of community cultural development is achieved when it is effectively integrated into the way in which an agency goes about its business. The case studies in *Art and Wellbeing* demonstrate how this is already happening. The book also provides a five stage scheme for integrating community cultural development and presents sample proposals suggesting how integration might be achieved in future programs.” (Comment: This is an excellent model, which could equally apply to community planning and broader citizen engagement for wellbeing at local government level.)

(Source: Australia Community Cultural Development Board, Australia Council for the Arts. 'Art and Wellbeing' report, 2004:  
[http://www.ozco.gov.au/arts\\_resources/publications/art\\_and\\_wellbeing/](http://www.ozco.gov.au/arts_resources/publications/art_and_wellbeing/) )

## 2. Overview of quality of cultural indicators in the UK

- There have been many studies in the past decades showing the social impact of cultural programs and activities. However for the most part these focused on the impact of specific programs on specific population groups (for example, the impact of music making programs on the wellbeing of older people).
- More recently, cultural indicators are being included as part of a broader framework of socio-economic indicators measuring the wellbeing, quality of life, and the sustainability of communities.
- Pressure for these indicators has come from three directions:
  - Pressure on governments to provide evidence of effective investment (in cultural programs and facilities)
  - Pressure on institutions, public bodies and local governments to evaluate progress towards policy goals
  - Pressure to build an 'evidence base' for the benefits of cultural development for communities
- We need now to develop a theoretical model of how the community arts and culture sector works and how it interacts with the broader community.

Clearly this starts off with identifying the key impacts of culture and the arts:

- On the quality of life of individuals (health and wellbeing, capacities, human development)
- On the quality and vitality of community life (community interaction and participation, community facilities and amenities, identity and environment)
- On the economy (creating jobs and services; buildings and facilities etc).

(Source: Scottish Executive Social Research, *Wellbeing and the Quality of Life: Measuring the benefits of culture and sport*, 2005).

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