

The Cultural Value Project

Exploring how we think about the value of arts and culture to individuals and society



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

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Culture matters. We all participate in cultural activities and, in most cases, find these experiences meaningful and personally rewarding. Culture has a wide-ranging impact on how we live, the choices we make, the attitudes we adopt. Although we know that the consequences of cultural engagement need not always be positive, we do have a strong sense that culture can above all be a force for social good.

There have in recent years been various attempts to capture that value, not least in order to make the case to governments for public funding. These attempts have not commanded widespread confidence and the value of culture seems for many to remain elusive when approached through existing methods of evaluation. There is a growing recognition, in both the cultural sector and universities, that a change of approach is needed.



Introduction

In launching this two-year Cultural Value Project, the AHRC seeks to make a major contribution to how we think about the value of arts and culture to individuals and to society. The Project will establish a framework that will advance the ways in which we define and think about the value of cultural engagement as well as the methods by which we evaluate it. The framework

will, on the one hand, be an examination of the cultural experience itself, its impact on individuals and its benefit to society; and, on the other, articulate a set of evaluative approaches and methodologies appropriate to the different ways in which cultural value is manifested. This means that qualitative methodologies and case studies will sit alongside quantitative approaches.



“I find that while we might feel we instinctively understand the value of culture and its importance to our lives, defining and expressing that value is surprisingly difficult, let alone the challenge of persuading others of its importance. But it is vital for us all, and for the future, that we do. What this project will bring is therefore of the utmost importance. We look

forward eagerly to its findings which will emerge from a mix of short and longer-term studies.”

PROFESSOR RICK RYLANCE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE AHRC



The focus

We need to begin by looking at the actual experience of culture and the arts rather than their ancillary effects. The value begins there, with something fundamental and irreducible and, in giving priority to the cultural experience itself, the Cultural Value Project will take the lead in developing a rigorous approach to what many see as the most important aspect of art and culture. We currently call this 'the reflective individual and the engaged citizen'. The ancillary effects follow and will also be explored in the project, such issues as the benefits to cities and communities, to health, to the economy, to innovative societies and places, to how a country is seen in the world and much more.

The project will also broaden our focus beyond publicly-funded arts and culture, to embrace all activities including those in the commercial and third sectors as well as informal and improvisatory practice. Not just a concert at the Royal Festival Hall, an exhibition at Imperial War Museum North or the experience of a major heritage site, but also young people who get together in a band to make music for themselves, amateur choirs, local arts clubs, reading groups and so on. If we wish to understand the value of cultural activity then we must cast our net wide.



“The Cultural Value Project is welcomed by Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) because it will look at culture in its entirety. MGS has long been conscious of the importance of both the tangible and intangible aspects of culture, and the broad framework looking at the components of cultural value, and what engagement with cultural activity does for people, will be of particular interest. This research into the evaluation of arts and culture will assist in making the benefits of culture more visible to a wider audience.”



The project will embrace a wide range of academic disciplines. Economics, which has tended to dominate previous efforts in this area, will remain relevant. The breadth of our approach, however, means that so too must be the range of our disciplinary approaches, spanning the arts and humanities, social science, cognitive

psychology, neuroscience, medicine and health. Finally, while the Cultural Value Project does, of course, wish in the medium term to influence decisions on public policy and funding, its priority lies in developing a much better understanding of arts and culture across the diverse ways that it is organised and experienced.



“There is wide agreement with the principle that the arts and culture bring a huge benefit to society: this is often asserted, but much less often analysed. This new initiative is such an important project because it will help us to understand why these activities are of value. Complementing current work on the measurables of their economic impact, it will explore ways to talk about and advocate the less measurable but even more vital social and cultural impacts the arts and culture make. As a major arts centre, we have a clear self-interest in this work: it may demonstrate why what we do is so worthwhile!”

SIR NICHOLAS KENYON MANAGING DIRECTOR, BARBICAN CENTRE

The research

The Cultural Value Project will fund awards to researchers in higher education institutions and approved independent research organisations, as well as organising workshops and seminars, and building international collaborations. The first funding call was issued in February 2013, and further calls for proposals will follow.

The Cultural Value Project team



The Director of the Cultural Value Project is Professor Geoffrey Crossick, Distinguished Professor of the Humanities in the School of Advanced Study, University of London, having previously been Warden of Goldsmiths and Vice-Chancellor of the University of London.

The Project Researcher is Dr Patricia Kaszynska.

They are supported by an Advisory Group drawn from the higher education and cultural sectors.

For further information, please go to: www.ahrc.ac.uk



“We live in disruptive times. Funding models in art, culture, media and entertainment are challenged as never before by a combination of the digital shift, global competition and the politics of austerity. In the emerging mixed economy of culture, everyone is looking for innovative forms of cultural investment and imaginative ways of working together. Whether you are in the public or private sector

or, as will increasingly be the case, navigating between the two spheres, you’ll need to understand more deeply what is valued in our culture and how this may be changing. In this world of multiple partnerships and changing business models we need more finely-tuned understandings of cultural value.”

PATRICK MCKENNA FOUNDER & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF INGENIOUS MEDIA

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