

DEMOS

Think Piece

Valuing Culture in the South
East

10 August 2005

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Valuing Culture in the South East

An apology to the reader. There is as little jargon as possible in this paper. But the use of acronyms is unavoidable.

CCIs	Cultural and Creative Industries
DCMS	Department for Culture Media and Sport
DPA	David Powell Associates
NESTA	National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts
SEEC	South East England Cultural Consortium (now Culture South East)
SEEDA	South East England Development Agency
SEERA	South East England Regional Assembly
RES	Regional Economic Strategy

1. Introduction

Regional Development Agencies are charged with improving regional economic performance and identifying strategies for achieving that aim. In the context of this paper SEEDA's question must therefore be: how can culture contribute to improving regional economic performance?

In one way, the answer is straightforward:

- Culture, and the creative industries into which culture elides, itself forms a sector that generates economic returns;
- Cultural activity stimulates economic activity in other sectors; and
- Culture produces a wide range of social effects that in turn contribute to economic activity, and are beneficial for other reasons.

So far, so easy. But things are never that simple. These bald assertions need to be backed up by evidence and argument if they are to be convincing, so we need to know what evidence exists and how reliable it is. In other words, we need to know how far to trust the data, and then, where evidence is deficient or lacking, where to trust to judgement. The famous McKinsey Mantra of the 1980s, "everything can be measured, and what gets measured gets managed" was in fact one easy step away from the conclusion "if you can't measure it, it's not relevant." In the real world we have to acknowledge that we often face situations where historic measurements fail to tell us anything useful. Culture is one of those areas where we have a lot of trouble not only measuring the value of culture, but also articulating what we mean by cultural value in the first place.

That said, we can construct an understanding of culture and its role in people's lives that acknowledges all the values of culture, and then enables us to act: after all, the art of government and administration lies in making good decisions, in difficult circumstances, based on inadequate information.

In the specific context of economic development and at this moment in time, all this might be rephrased by asking the questions:

- How does culture 'fit' within a structure that is predicated on the primacy of economics, when, as the economist David Throsby has written "artistic and cultural value is...elusive and wide-ranging, relating to individual and collective experiences ... that cannot be meaningfully reduced to financial terms"? (Throsby 2005)

- How can the structural pieces of the jigsaw be made to fit together, and how can partnerships work to best effect among the various interested parties in the region, such as Local Authorities, SEEDA, the cultural agencies and the Learning and Skills Agency? How can agendas, strategies and reporting requirements at local, regional and central levels be meshed together?
- How can the region's resources (which include knowledge, networks, influence and power as well as money) best be used to nurture culture in the region in the pursuit of SEEDA's aims?
- Are there particular opportunities for the region stemming from the success of London's bid for the Olympics in 2012? Clearly, the Games will act as a stimulus for sport, culture (in its narrower sense) and tourism, but how should the region position itself?

2. Grasping the nettles

In trying to understand the role of culture in the regional economy and in people's lives we face a series of intellectual problems because we are dealing with multiple slippery things:

- We have no easy definition of culture, nor of the 'cultural and creative industries'. The DCMS website clearly states that "There is no official government definition of 'culture'". In practice definitions are used by policymakers such as DCMS and SEEDA, but the definitions flow from administrative convenience and do not accord with an everyday understanding and experience of the term. For example DPA's comprehensive study of the economic impact of the creative and cultural industries for South East England acknowledges that "the definition of CCIs used for this study is exceptionally broad" including, as it does, "Advertising; architecture; archives; the arts and antiques market; countryside recreation; crafts; design; designer fashion; digital media; film and video; historic sites, buildings and houses; interactive leisure software; libraries, information and knowledge management; museums; music; performing arts; publishing; software and computer services; sports; tourism; television and radio." (DPA 2002.8) This particular definition leaves out faith, which the DCMS on the other hand says is one of the things that culture is 'about'.

Who on the High Street or in Tesco would think that sport or tourism came under the heading 'culture', or that antique dealing was a 'creative industry'? Efforts have begun at various levels, from UNESCO, to the European Union, to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to tackle this issue, and progress is being made, but as the DCMS's Evidence Toolkit insists: "There are no shared definitions, systems and methodologies" (DCMS 2004.1).

In this paper I shall, of course, have in mind the definition used in the last RES, and my use of the word 'culture' should be taken to include sport and tourism.

- There is another intellectual muddle, the absence of a match between those whom we think of as creative people and the official definition of the creative industries. Individual working artists are excluded from the creative industries (they are too difficult to count, therefore they don't count), whereas everyone working at Microsoft in Reading is, apparently, creative. And when we get to the American economist Richard Florida's notion of 'the creative class' we find it includes lawyers, scientists and other people doing 'brainwork', because of course creativity is found

everywhere, and innovation is a driver throughout the whole economy and not just in ‘the cultural and creative industries’ (Florida 2002).

- The evidence for decision-making is problematic, inadequate, insufficient, and incapable of expressing the many dimensions of culture. One issue is that, as the DCMS acknowledges, “ The complex, fragmented and fluid nature of this sector make them (sic) difficult to measure using conventional statistical sources and techniques” (DCMS 2004.1). Another is that, as Kate Oakley’s 2004 report for SEEDA pointed out, “ much research work is thinly-disguised advocacy and lacks the rigour that is necessary for evidence-based policy making. This is not to say that claims made are untrue, simply that they are not supported by sufficient evidence” (Oakley 2004. 2). The cultural statistician Professor Sara Selwood goes further and states that “ Until the collection and analysis is carried out more accurately and objectively, and until the evidence gathered is used more constructively, it could be argued that much data gathering in the cultural sector has been a spurious exercise” (Selwood 2002).
- A note of caution should be sounded here. Although the evidence about culture and its effects is far from perfect, we should not set the bar too high. It has to be acknowledged that in all areas of policymaking, decisions are based on poor evidence. How else to explain that project cost overruns in the Ministry of Defence are more than seven times the annual grant to the Arts Council?
- At the same time as having difficulty in establishing the validity of the evidence, we also have to recognise that the language used where culture and social policy meet is maddeningly obscure, riddled with jargon, not understood by some of the people who use it, and not understood by the public at all. Terms such as social inclusion, diversity, quality of life, health, well-being and community safety sometimes have technical meanings, sometimes not, but in any event the meanings are not widely shared. There is a huge disconnect between the public’s idea of culture and what it is for, and the way that government talks about it.

We have to recognise these issues as realities that cannot be solved in advance of decision-making about where to invest our energies and where to target public money – it will take time to create a coherent system of definition and measurement, and to reconnect the language of administration with

the experience of everyday life. But when we speak of culture, are we not also speaking of everyday life?

So much for the problems. There are things that we do know, that provide us with an adequate basis for decisions; and there are areas where reasonable inferences can be made. We have to be pragmatic and, in fact, SEEDA has taken an approach that should be applauded, when it recognises that the cultural sector, including the creative industries, in many ways forms a continuum – not least in the flow of ideas and inspiration from the art and heritage areas into industry supply chains – and that the distinction between them is somewhat arbitrary.

This paper will set out where the region's economic objectives and culture's strengths cohere, and then suggest where and how the review of the RES can best interact with culture. But before addressing those issues, it will be helpful if we have a shared conceptual framework that both illuminates the value and utility of culture, and explains the context in which culture operates.

3. Cultural Value: a simple conceptual framework

Cultural value consists of three elements:

3.1 Instrumental Values

Instrumental values relate to the “knock-on” effects of culture. Instrumental value might, for example, be reflected in the amount of local employment created by tourist visits to a newly constructed gallery - such as the Turner Centre in Margate - or in declining rates of obesity due to active engagement in sport, or the exam results of pupils participating in an educational music project.

This kind of value tends to be captured in “impact” or “outcome” studies that document the economic and/or social significance of investing in culture, and is often, but not always, expressed in figures. Since 1979, when Margaret Thatcher asserted that culture should be the handmaiden of the economy, through to the social agenda of New Labour, instrumental values have overwhelmingly dominated the cultural funding system. Local Authorities are particularly keen on justifying cultural spending by referring solely to culture’s instrumental effects – an important fact for SEEDA. Indeed, the document that explains how Arts Council England and Local Authorities will work together says that they will have four priorities:

- 1) The creative economy
- 2) Healthy communities
- 3) Vital neighbourhoods (which means regeneration)
- 4) Engaging Young people (which means learning and the curriculum)

Note the absence of any reference to art or culture.

3.2 Intrinsic Value

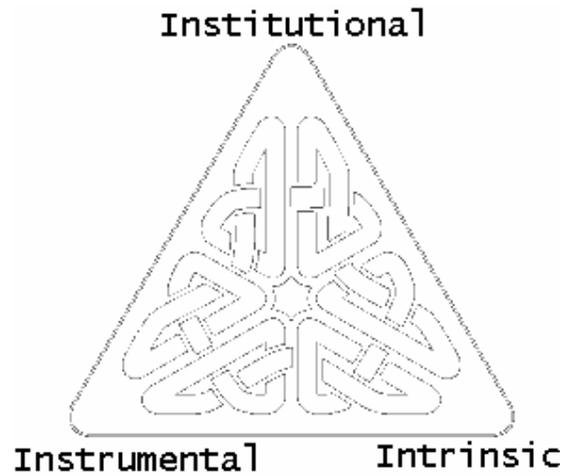
Intrinsic values are the set of values that relate to the subjective experience of culture intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. They apply as much to sport as to the arts. It is this value that people refer to when they say “I like this. It makes me feel good”, or “ This tells me who I am”.

These kinds of values can be captured in personal testimony, qualitative assessments, anecdotes, case studies and critical reviews. In the past twenty-five years we have found it difficult to talk about these values without embarrassment. Aesthetic questions have become confused with issues of class, privilege and power. Assertions about beauty and truth for example, immediately beg the question ‘who is to say what’s beautiful?’ Even uttering the word ‘culture’ prompts the response ‘whose culture?’ Not surprisingly, given the difficulties imposed by post-modern relativism and media accusations of elitism, intrinsic values have been driven underground in politics - that is until recently. In her 2004 essay *Government and the Value of Culture*, the Secretary of State for Culture Tessa Jowell made a plea to reassert the value that culture has ‘in and of itself’, and the discussion of intrinsic values is now being taken seriously again (see Holden 2004, and Rand 2005).

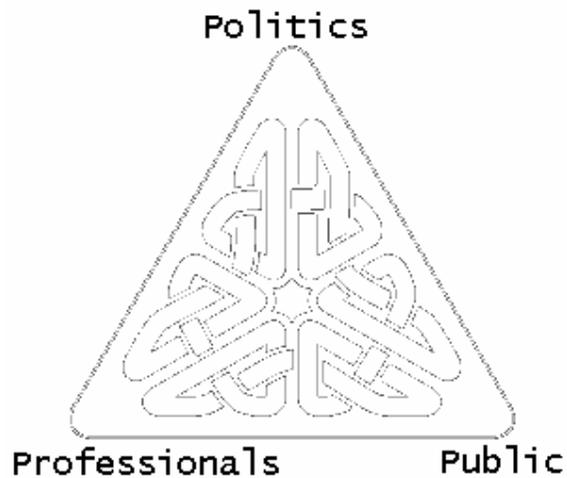
3.3 Institutional Value

Institutional value relates to the processes and actions that cultural organisations adopt when they interact with the public. Institutional value is created (or destroyed) by how these organisations engage with their public and indeed with their own employees; it flows from their working practices and attitudes, and is rooted in their moral values. This concern for the public - putting the public first - goes beyond ideas of customer care and marketing, because it is not motivated simply by profit. Institutional value manifests itself in the generation of social capital by creating trust in the public realm, safety in public spaces (physical and conceptual), and sociability among citizens. Institutional value is evidenced in feedback from the public, partners and people working closely with the organisations in question. The idea of institutional value is relatively new. It relates to, but is not the same as, the notion of Public Value adopted by the BBC.

This first triangle, then, shows the three ways in which Cultural Value is generated:



A second triangle sets out the relationship of the three parties involved in the cultural cycle:



The settlement about funded culture, put simply, operates like this:

- The public vote for politicians;
- The politicians decide the legal and policy framework in which culture operates, and, crucially, determine the financial resources that they are prepared to commit;
- The professionals (on both sides of the funding equation, either as administrators or on the front line) do their work, which culminates in an offer to the public for consumption.

This model worked well when people voted for Harold Macmillan, he gave money to the National Gallery, and Kenneth Clark was on hand to tell the nation which pictures were beautiful. But that no longer holds: we need to look at the changing nature of the attitudes and roles of public, politicians and professionals, and at the changed relationships between them. When looking at culture, each pairing of that triangular relationship is marked by a dialogue that is either absent or dysfunctional.

How then, are these relationships changing? The professionals of the future will find a public that is more participative and more demanding: the public will have the technology, the levels of education, the means of communication, and the will to create new cultures. Their increasing presence as actors and not just as audiences may raise the level of respect for professional standards of quality. The new class of pro/ams will increasingly challenge the distinction that government makes between professionals and amateurs. They will have a thirst for learning, and greater confidence in making demands. Education and increasing cultural socialisation will mean greater participation in all forms of culture (Hewison and Holden 2004).

Culture will become more important to the public. In the C20th we got a sense of worth through work, with culture as an entertainment, and as compensation for work. In the C21st we get a sense of worth through our cultural identity. We need culture more and more to make sense of our lives; that in turn means that the risk of cultural participation is not just financial, it's also a risk of self-esteem and self-definition. Gordon Brown thinks that creativity is one of the most fundamental markers of our national identity, "at the heart of British qualities" (Brown 2004).

In the future there will be more elision between the public and the private. The new brand of social entrepreneurs operating in the cultural world want to make money as well as to pursue other, equally important, aims. They do not see why they should be hampered by the funding system's insistence on charitable, not-for-profit status, and this presents a challenge to our conventional approach to culture.

Professionals in the cultural sector often seem to see their paymaster as their source of legitimacy, rather than the public. Culture then gets stuck in a 'service agent' mode, delivering 'benefits' for a funder instead of creating value that is recognised by the public. In place of being responsible for the delivery of culture, in future, funding bodies will be enablers, with responsibility for encouraging public participation in culture, and expression through culture, thereby strengthening the public realm

and society. At present, the system of public funding is saddled with a history and language of dependency and patronage. In the future, cultural professionals will need to engage in a greater dialogue with the public.

As for politicians and administrators, they will come to realise that what the public cares about in culture is the intrinsic value that culture provides. The public does not associate culture with the instrumental agenda that the politicians have focussed on. Although the public may care very much about crime reduction and education, they do not see what their local swimming pool or museum has to do with all that. The official language and policy framework for culture is completely at odds with the everyday understanding of the word.

Politicians and administrators will also have to resolve the tension between the demands of different funding streams at different political levels: supranational, national, regional, and local.

Combining the two triangles would give the RES a framework with which to understand where it can act to generate the types of value that it seeks to promote, because they open up discussion about the values that need to be taken into consideration, and how the interests of the various parties interact. The RES has a direct interest in the creation of instrumental value; particularly economic prosperity and the things that underpin it such as learning and social capital. It should be interested in intrinsic values and the quality of culture because that is what the public cares about (apart from the fact that such public sentiments then in turn feed into the economic agenda). And it should be interested in institutional value: in the cultural infrastructure and in the way that cultural organisations carry through their public purposes to construct the public realm and generate social capital.

4. What do we think we know?

Before looking at policy prescriptions and how the region might approach the question of culture, we need to look at the context in which it is operating and try to determine what we think we know, so that we are basing policy on solid foundations.

4.1 The macro-economic picture

In 2001 Chris Smith, then Secretary of State for Culture, wrote that “The most successful economies and societies in the twenty-first century will be the creative ones. Creativity will make the difference – to businesses seeking a competitive edge, to societies looking for new ways to tackle issues and improve quality of life” (DCMS, 2001). There is not enough space here to interrogate this assertion in any depth. There has no doubt been some froth and hype around the creative industries agenda, and the easy assumption that more culture equals more creativity equals more prosperity has been questioned recently in James Heartfield’s pamphlet *The Creativity Gap* (Heartfield 2005). But even accepting that rhetoric has sometimes moved ahead of reality, there is an increasing body of evidence showing that, as Will Hutton told SEEDA recently, “Innovation and investment in R&D are the drivers of economic growth”.

In a recent speech, James Purnell, Minister for the Creative Industries, returned to the theme saying that the creative industries have “contributed to a quiet revolution in the shape of our economy...(and) over the last decade have grown twice as fast as the overall economy. Today they employ 2 million people and account for a twelfth of our economy, more than in any other country” (Purnell 2005). The most extensive economic study on the growth of the creative economy in the U.S., reaches the same conclusion: that competitive advantage exists, and thus wealth is created fastest, where knowledge is applied to find innovative solutions to problems (Florida 2002).

4.2 The importance of culture and the creative industries in the South East

The global picture of the importance of creativity to economic success impacts at regional level. The CCIs are of fundamental importance to South East England, employing 560,000 people, or 13.2% of the regional workforce; growing at a swifter rate than other sectors of the economy; with growth outstripping other English regions; producing an annual turnover of £46.5bn (DPA 2002. 19-20). The sector as a whole is characterised by high levels of self-employment, and a workforce that is better

educated and better rewarded than the regional average (DPA 2002. 28): “All the available evidence points towards the creative industries being of paramount importance to the South East and the South East being the region, outside London, where they flourish more than any other” (SEEDA, 2005.1). The creative economy, however problematic in definition, is a significant success story for the South East region, and one that is likely to be of increasing importance, with the region in a flagship role: hence the Regional Assembly’s comment that “culture and creativity should have a higher, and perhaps a defining, profile in the ‘regional brand’” (The Regional Assembly 2003 3.20).

4.5 The wider benefits of culture

There has been much debate about the wider benefits that investment in culture brings, culminating in John Carey’s recent book *What Good Are The Arts?* (Carey 2005). Yet with all the caveats, there *are* areas where the evidence for the instrumental benefits of culture is strong. The detailed supporting evidence is given in Oakley 2004 and SEEDA 2005 (2), but in brief summary these are:

- Employment and Regeneration. Lord Puttnam spoke passionately and convincingly in the House of Lords in June this year about the culture-led regeneration of the North East. The cultural content of regeneration in Slough, Chatham, Hastings and Bexhill provides examples closer to home. Yet the Regional Assembly’s Select Committee report on Culture and Regeneration (dated April 2003, and so possibly out of date) noted that “appreciation of the role of culture in regeneration is not thought to be sufficiently mainstreamed in the RDA” (The Regional Assembly 2003. 3.2).
- Socially excluded young people: sport, film, music and drama provide the easiest ways to engage with them, and provide opportunities for learning.
- Socially excluded older people: archives, oral history, museums reach out to them.
- Identifying with the wider community: culture creates shared social space, with all the implications for conviviality, health, well-being, and safety that that implies.
- As the Strategy Unit says, “the benefits of physical activity on health are clear, well evidenced and widely accepted. 30 minutes of moderate activity five times a week can help to reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases, some cancers, strokes and obesity” (Strategy Unit 2005)
- Learning. As Oakley says “there is clear evidence that... early intervention and promotion of cultural participation at school and pre-school can influence basic skills and literacy acquisition”

(Oakley 2004. 2, also 16 passim). This was confirmed in the recent U.S Rand report, the most extensive investigation into the effects of culture ever undertaken. (Rand 2005)

4.6 The characteristics of culture in the South East

The South East has a range of cultural and environmental assets of very high quality that define the region's character and are the foundation of its ability to grow in a sustainable way. The region is rich (though not uniformly or equally rich at a sub-regional level) in every type of cultural facility, from sports grounds to historic landscapes, from music festivals to film archives. (see SEEC 2001). The region also has creative industry hot-spots, though with different industries clustered in different places. Both the cultural and creative sectors are well-positioned for international, particularly cross-channel collaborations.

That said, culture in the South East is fragmented and unplanned. It is not, like many other English regions, dominated by one large metropolitan area with a major controlling local authority. Instead, cultural provision is spread across multiple Local Authorities responding to very local needs. Parts of the cultural world are self-organising and spontaneous: museums, festivals and sports clubs are often started by interest groups and we are likely to see a much more democratic model of culture as we get a more participative and empowered public. Therefore we can expect a more unplanned and organic culture. But at another level, the policy priority is to keep transport and travel to a minimum, and to create a regional cultural infrastructure so that there is sensible public provision avoiding competition for audiences and public funding.

4.7 We know the creative industries are important, but what is the connection between culture and creativity?

The connections between culture and creativity are manifold. At the most fundamental level, deep-rooted cultural forms are reflected in modern day economic strengths: Japan and miniaturisation, the U.K. and language, Italy and design.

- A creative economy results from a creative population. In turn, creative people are characterised by their:
 - Attitudes: they are comfortable with taking risks, confident, questioning, experimental, happy with complexity and unresolved questions, and imbued with a belief in learning as an incremental process, not something that ends when formal education is complete.

- Motivations: They want to make a difference, often to make money, they derive satisfaction from the process of innovation and are persistent in pursuit of their goals. They tend to work hard.
- Knowledge: they possess knowledge content, and high-level critical skills to interrogate knowledge. They can see the transfer possibilities of knowledge from one situation to another, and perceive connections.

We will never be able to unravel the full complexities of the many ways in which culture, creativity and the economy intertwine, although one problem is obvious: the cultural and creative industries are strong in themselves but “too little of this creativity seems to spill over into British business more widely” (Cox 2005).

Looking at the listing above we can see that there is an obvious correlation between cultural production, the way that cultural creativity works, and the wider notion of creativity affecting all aspects of life. This is why the highly influential report on the arts in education *All our Futures* recommended “a much stronger emphasis on creative and cultural education” (NACCCE 2000), and why such ventures as Creative Partnerships are starting to show that engagement with culture is helping young people to become creative learners. One implication of this is the need to consider the development of cultural professionals as educators to meet increasing demand from schools.

5. Drawing conclusions from what we know

5.1 Mapping culture against the RES

The exercise of mapping culture against the RES has been discussed in detail elsewhere (Oakley 2004), so instead of repeating what has been said there, I will offer some comments.

5.2 Sustainability

“SEEDA’s overall goals are set within the context of sustainable development - a notion which implies the interaction of economic, social and environmental factors in order to build a society that is more equitable and uses natural systems in a way that protects them for future generations” (OAKLEY, 2004. 10).

The idea of a creative, knowledge-driven, ‘smart’ economy has an obvious appeal in the context of sustainability. Charlie Leadbeater, when writing about the new knowledge economy, called his book *Living on Thin Air*, which is presumably non-polluting (Leadbeater 2000).

The RES adopts as one priority the sustainable use of natural resources: is a cultural and creative economy a ‘light’ economy in terms of the use of natural resources and the generation of waste? In one sense yes, because it relies on knowledge, not on raw production (although in global terms it may simply be displacing non-sustainable practices). A prosperous and highly educated population tends to be more concerned with issues of sustainability (Seattle, California, Bavaria, all provide examples) Whilst this is tricky ground, there is reason to suppose that a knowledge-based, creative, regional economy offers a better chance of a sustainable model than the alternative industrial economy.

5.3 Competitive business

“Enterprise, Growth and Innovation” are an RES priority for competitive business. Culture is part of that R&D.

In a global economy competing for a skilled workforce, culture has a crucial role to play, both in terms of developing the skills of the resident population and attracting inward migration of skills. In the regional context these are equally important. Kate Oakley rightly says that the evidence that cultural

investments are attractors of talent comes from the US, and she argues that because US populations are more mobile than European ones “there are dangers in simply transferring US findings to a different cultural context” (Oakley 2004. 2). Given the scale of inward migration to the South East region from within the UK, and the likelihood of more movement of people within Europe following enlargement of the EU, the idea of culture as an ‘attractor’ of talent needs to be taken seriously: the highly skilled, and also increasingly mobile, people who work in the creative economy are attracted to the region partly because of its cultural infrastructure.

5.4 Successful people

It is clear that a well-educated workforce correlates with a workforce that is interested in consuming culture (see Hewison and Holden 2004). In addition, the importance of learning to the creative economy has been noted, as has the fact that the cultural infrastructure supports learning. In this sense, culture can be seen as one facet of business support in a dynamic economy.

But there is a dark side to the success of the creative economy: it tends to generate greater inequalities in wealth, because as the remuneration of those in the ‘creative class’ rises more rapidly than those outside it the gap between them widens. Florida shows that in the US, economic inequality is highest in places that have the strongest creative economies (Florida 2004). Greater inequality destroys social capital. It should be a policy priority to make sure that opportunities exist for everyone to enter the creative classes (and culture is very important here), and also to make sure that those who are not in the creative class are not left behind.

5.5 Vibrant Communities

Culture is one of the central pillars of the public realm, and it provides one of the most important ways in which people gain a sense of their own identity and their place in wider communities. Evidence shows that people who consume culture are more likely to be active in their communities (Oakley 2004. 22), and as Will Hutton says ‘high levels of social capital promote trust between businesses and between employers and employees’ Many parts of the cultural world are organised as social enterprises with a community focus: sports clubs and community arts centres spring readily to mind.

5.6 Effective infrastructure

The creative economy and the wider economy are founded on people. Those people need physical infrastructure: transport, buildings, broadband; a legal and financial infrastructure: access to capital, contractual relationships, intellectual property rights; but they also need a cultural infrastructure, for physical and mental health, for entertainment, for intellectual stimulus, and most seriously for learning. The cultural infrastructure needs to be part of infrastructural thinking, but it does not seem to feature in the RES in this way.

6. The policy response

Drawing together these various observations into a policy response is well under way, and there are two themes that are particularly worthy of note.

- The first is the attempt to trace an orderly and logical progression from high-level PSA targets to action that is contained in the RES.
- The second is a noticeable and laudable pragmatism in the face of the complexities that the region faces, reflecting a concern for what works. This is exemplified in the following statement from SEEDA's response to the DCMS:

“The RES is a high level document, and there is no strategy within it for the creative industries themselves, bringing together all the programmes, specific and generic, which apply to the creative sector and co-ordinating the work of the various regional agencies in relation to this sector. While there is a certain appeal in a pattern of interlocking strategies all fitting into a master plan at regional level, what matters in the end is the effectiveness of action at the point where it reaches the client... Provided such initiatives are based on appropriate diagnosis, properly targeted, and effectively managed, marketed and delivered, there is no a priori reason why they should not be as effective as a more centrally planned and co-ordinated programme of activity” (SEEDA 2005. 13).

These are wise words, though there seems to be another side to the picture. The Regional Assembly's report on the select committee on culture and regeneration notes “The committee was particularly exercised by SEEDA's apparent predisposition towards ‘classic’ economic development interventions producing ‘hard’ outputs.” The committee then said that ‘soft’ outputs are just as important, and that ways need to be found for measuring them.

However a note of caution needs to be sounded about the national drive to improve the evidence base about what culture can achieve. Many studies, for example Culture Southwest 2004, Oakley 2004 and DCMS 2004, have called for more and better research. The latter document refers to “the urgent need, expressed by all the English Regional Cultural Consortia for a more robust and reliable evidence-base on which to develop future policies for culture”. This appeal needs to be interrogated. We need to know why we want more research. The search for evidence can turn into an absorbing exercise in itself, a kind of displacement activity. Furthermore, evidence is only useful if it can be turned into

knowledge, so we should decide what constitutes the right sort and quantity of data, matching it to the decisions that need to be made. An even more fundamental issue is to ensure that we have the organisational structures and attitudes in place to act upon what the data is telling us. Neither of these questions is being properly interrogated – there exists a general assumption that more means better and that, once we have the evidence, the right actions – from increased Treasury spending to better decision-making by funders - will simply flow from it.

This paper began by asking how culture supports the RES, but the question can be turned on its head: how can the RES support the development of culture? However, both these questions seem to miss the point because culture and the economy cannot be separated in this way: they are not just mutually dependent, they are symbiotic. Culture should not be seen as an add-on, a nice-to-have that results from, and is paid for, by a successful economy. That is an old-economy, 1980's way of looking at culture as a decorative addition to life. Culture is much more serious than that; it is integral to a successful economy. A vibrant economy and a vibrant culture go hand-in-hand. The question seems rather to be where the region's resources can best be used to create an ecology where culture and the economy flourish together.

There are a number of areas which the RES should address

- Direct investment of time and money in culture-led regeneration
- A pre-occupation with the elements of culture that support learning, particularly public libraries, and the interface of culture and formal and informal education
- Workforce development for the cultural and creative sectors themselves, (possibly most crucially in global media)
- Development for cultural professionals working in education
- Visible infrastructure in cultural buildings and affordable workspaces
- Addressing specific social groups such as socially excluded young and old people, through cultural programmes
- Meeting specific needs of the cultural/creative industries in particular places. Again, pragmatism is apparent in the current approach, which appears to be sensibly targeted: SEEDA's policy towards the creative industries, that "different sub-sectors are prioritised in different contexts" (SEEDA 2005. 5), makes sense.

This list will be familiar, and it is essentially an instrumental agenda, predicated on the idea of predictable cause and effect in policy intervention. All very well as far as it goes, but in concluding, I would like to outline something more visionary. Culture is dynamic and ever-changing; we continually re-invent ourselves through it, we play with it and we create new forms of expression. One reason why there is such a problem with ‘measuring culture’ is because it won’t stay still: longitudinal studies are often fruitless because agendas move on.

So perhaps we should think less about the hard-wiring of culture in the form of buildings, accredited professional training, and evaluation reports, and start thinking more in terms of:

- Creating a healthy and sustainable cultural ecology in which a diverse culture flourishes. By ‘diverse culture’ I mean not only ethnic diversity, but diversity of cultural forms, expressions and ways of engagement; one that offers chances for all people to participate in and create the culture of their choosing. Cultural ecologies are analogous to biologic ecologies: variety and diversity enable creative and dynamic change; and in turn that produces a stronger, more resilient environment.
- Understanding and enabling careers. Very many people working in the CCIs follow informal, apprentice-based rather than qualification-based, career paths and little is known about how well this works, whether there are useful policy interventions, or whether things are best alone. We do know however, that ethnic minorities are under-represented in the cultural economy.
- Investigate the barriers to entry to the CCIs.
- Pay much more attention to emergent forms of business organisation: Community Interest Companies; social enterprises; places where the private sector meets public purposes and the public realm; informal economy culture.
- Study and promote networks: networks work, and they grow organically; but, in an administratively defined region like the South East, where do they exist? Who is in and who is out?
- Create forums for the flow of ideas as well infrastructure to move people and products. Understand the invisible infrastructures of knowledge.
- Understand where energy hot-spots exist for the CCIs. Cultural hot-spots often cohere around people – who are not always where planners would like them to be.
- Develop an arts/heritage equivalent of the sports equity index, so that we know what sorts of people are excluded from other aspects of culture

- Appreciate that culture, like a sustainable environment, deserves intergenerational equity – we should be handing on to our children a richer culture than we have received
- Above all, understand why the public values culture. The public is primarily interested in the intrinsic and institutional values of culture: the enjoyment, stimulation, challenge, and sense of personal and communal identity that culture provides, offered in a way that is open and easy to engage with.

One might see culture as being one of the fundamental building blocks of the region's economy, something provided and legislated for; but the institutions and products of culture are a small part of the picture. More important are the ways in which people are changed through seeing, doing, thinking and talking about culture. The question 'what is culture for?' is as impoverished as asking 'what good are words?' – it is not mere words that count, but how people use them and are allowed to use them. The RES therefore needs to treat the value of culture in supple ways. Yes, a vibrant culture helps the economy; yes, it is a reflection of a civilised and successful society; yes, it is something to be proud of. But most of all it is valued by people in the region. In maximising Cultural Value, the RES will not only be serving its economic remit, but will also be making life better for everyone.

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