

What is the value of culture?

What is it worth?

Can we measure the impact and value of art and culture on an individual, a community, a society?

Can we calculate the impact and cost if we do **not** value and invest in art and culture and place them at the heart of a society, a community and an individual's life?

*"The arts are essential to any complete national life. The State owes it to itself to sustain and encourage them....Ill fares the race which fails to salute the arts with the reverence and delight which are their due."* Winston Churchill addressing the Royal Academy on 30 April 1938

I wish to argue in this paper that the decline in value for art and culture in the UK is in direct correlation with the decline in State investment and the subsequent accepted rise in charitable fundraising to support arts and cultural activities and organisations. I wish to further argue that unless as a sector (including arms lengths bodies such as the Arts Councils) and as a society we stop accepting this as the status quo, art and culture will become accepted more and more as a 'private good' affordable and accessible to the few and not the many which in turn will have a severely detrimental and possibly irreversible effect on British Society in years to come.

*"The latest report puts the total of private investment in the arts at 21.9% of its (arts) income, or £660.5m ...This is broken down into £372.9m from individual giving, £173.8m from trusts and foundations, and £113.8m from business investment."* Warwick Commission Report 1 with data from Arts and Business

There has been much debate and much written regarding cultural value, how and what to measure, the pitfalls of an entirely economic argument and the difficulty of measuring spiritual value and the impact on well-being. A good summary of all of this can be found in the Warwick Commission's third paper which concludes.

*"The challenge ..., is how to achieve the complex aim of demanding methodological rigour but without forgoing the consideration of the practical, both in terms of the need of the sector, and the constraints to what is possible, and without collapsing cultural into economic value. "* Warwick Commission 2014 Report 3 [www.warwick.ac.uk/culturalvalue](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/culturalvalue)

I believe this to be a false and unnecessary challenge. It is an invented challenge which simply creates a barrier between great high quality art and culture and the masses. Did the aristocracy ever question the value of art and culture? Did the upper classes ever debate how you could measure the value of an opera, a ballet, a painting? Why do the rich act as patrons to the arts? All parents who can afford to send their child to a top private school expect and demand art and culture as part of that child's expensive education. As identified in The Cultural Learning Alliance's report from their series of interviews with Head Teachers of Independent Schools

*"The Headteacher we interviewed stated:*

- *Cultural learning improves children's attainment*

- *They felt a duty to provide cultural learning to the children in their care*
- *They were responding to the demands and expectations of parents”*
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No evidence, statistics or methodologies are required by those parents. No defence needed for the value of culture.

*“Parents buy in to Eton and our approach. To an extent we are talking to the converted about the value of cultural learning. You could get excellent A level results far more cheaply in other ways so a key reason to spend on an education at Eton is the breadth of cultural learning.” Tony Little, Eton College Ref: Cultural Learning Alliance Head Teacher Interviews Report*

Who then are the unconverted? The parents of children in state schools? Do we hear them debating the value of culture and demanding no more public investment? Yes, if you believe the Daily Mail. But if you ask any parent of a state educated child what was one of their proudest moments of their child’s education the majority will reference a cultural activity from the school play to a piece of public speaking to a musical achievement to a piece of creative writing or poetry.

So why must we continue to try to articulate the value of art and culture when we all individually instinctively understand its undeniable and essential value and impact?

It is all to do with economics, slimming down the state, the rise of the Individual and art and culture becoming seen as a private and luxury good as opposed to a public good and human right.

Decades have passed since Margaret Thatcher came to power and called for the arts and cultural sector to make the case for culture and define it in economic terms and yet here we are still chasing ourselves around in circles trying to defend what every individual knows is fundamental to being human. With John Myerscough’s 1988 response to Thatcher in the form of his research paper ‘The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain’ the cultural sector was placed in the position of defence and twenty-six years later we are still there. Even under a Labour Government when funding to the arts was increased, the terms of the debate did not change. Nor did the economic mind set inspired by one of our first economists and revived and brought back into fashion courtesy of Mrs Thatcher.

In the 1700’s Adam Smith (widely thought of as the Founding father of Economics) put forward the theory of a market led economy and the idea, summarized by Phil Thornton in The Great Economists, that

*“It is the ‘invisible hand’ comprised of individual’s self-interested choices that leads to the best economic outcomes rather than central planning...enthusiasm for his theories received a second wind. Two politicians, Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US – and their advisors – seized on his ideas to justify rolling back the state and deregulating labour and financial markets” Phil Thornton – The Great Economists*

It is now urgent that we change the terms of the debate. We need no further research, statistics or proof that art and culture are fundamental to the health and wealth of a nation and all of its people. What we must decide is how interventionist the state should be in terms of ensuring equal access to high quality art and culture. As participants, visitors, audiences, artists and citizens. We need to change the terms of the debate before the state is further shrunk and all that we believed to be fundamental to post-war British society is first devalued and then dismantled. The rise of fundraising for arts and culture is, I believe, equal to its devaluation. I will explain why.

Let us go back a step.

Following the traumatic and cataclysmic losses endured through two World Wars, Britain and countries across Europe were forced to ask what kind of society did they want going forward and how could that be made a reality? Out of the horrors of war came a new chapter where humanity and the value of human life was uttermost. Britain could simply not return to the old order that had existed previously. The two wars created a blank canvas and paved the way for the Beveridge Report, a Labour landslide victory, the implementation of National Insurance, Welfare for all, the creation of the National Health Service and the predecessor to the arts council being formed.

We pay our taxes in order that we may live in a fair and just society. Access to high quality art and culture is a fundamental part of that fair and just society. It allows us to understand, express and question ourselves, each other and the world around us. Art and culture is not simply the ballet, theatre or opera.

*“The arts and culture enhance every aspect of our lives: the vibrancy of our cities, the identity of our rural communities, the future prospects of our children, the quality of our democracy, the sustainability of our environment, the employability of our workforce, our ability to make sense of our own experience and to empathise with others.” David Lan (Artistic Director -Young Vic Theatre & Chair of the What Next? Movement*

Therefore art and culture needs to be demanded as fundamental to our society and a right of every British citizen by the British Public. Our State funded NHS looks after our health. Our State funded Education system looks after our minds. Our State funded arts and culture looks after our souls/spirits/sense of self.

The arts economy model in the UK has basically been a three-part model since the 1940s.

1. State Funded – Centrally through the arms -length body -The Arts Councils of Great Britain and locally through local authorities
2. Through private sponsorship, charity and fundraising and philanthropic individuals, trusts and foundations
3. Commercial income streams.

*“A major reason for the arts’ success in the UK is the mixed economy funding model. Organisations rely equally on government investment, private sponsorship and their own commercial income. “This system, which differs to the subsidy-focussed European or philanthropy-reliant US models, encourages entrepreneurialism, creative risk-taking and accessibility.*

*Today the arts are facing a “triple whammy” funding crisis. Core funding, local authority funding and private giving have seriously declined during austerity, particularly outside of London. This is despite consistent evidence that investment in the arts delivers benefits beyond just providing high-quality entertainment (what the Treasury would term a “private good”). They have been shown to deliver economic regeneration, social mobility, community cohesion, health and well-being benefits and higher attainment in school children (or “public goods”).” -What Next ? movement briefing document*

Art and culture make a great and measurable long-term social and economic contribution to society and are proven to provide a high return on investment. Therefore it makes no economic or long-term sense for the 'health' of the nation to not invest in the arts.

Rather than costing money, investment in arts and culture saves us money. To really calculate the return on this investment we need to calculate the pounds saved on policing, probation services, youth offenders institutions, prisons, welfare, social services, crime prevention, the NHS and all mental health services as a direct result of participation in arts and cultural events.

The question is not can we afford to invest in and publically fund the arts. The question is can we really afford not to?

I recently attended an Institute of Fundraising conference for the arts and cultural sector. The audience was, naturally, largely made up of professional fundraisers from that sector. The opening keynote speaker spoke to the delegates of two things

(i) that the value and status of arts and culture within UK society was in jeopardy, which was resulting in ever increasing funding cuts

(ii) that fundraisers up and down the country were called upon more than ever to raise their game and save the day.

I completely agree with his first point.

I completely disagree with his second.

I believe that only if we put a dramatic halt to the ever increasing reliance on 'charity' to fund the existence of art and cultural activities in this country will we begin to be able to turn the tide and increase the value and status of art and culture in our society.

Whilst we all understand we are going through a recession (and still are contrary to some reports) and that cuts must be made, my concern lies with the ideology behind those cuts. If we accept that one of the first things to go must be arts and culture as it is not 'an essential statutory requirement' then we are undervaluing its purpose, impact and fundamental role. Access to art and culture should be made a statutory requirement of every Local Authority since...

*"Culture is the way we come to know the world, individually and collectively. It is as rich and diverse as the traditions that stand behind its making. It is the active engagement with the creation of our arts and heritage, and the expression of what and who we are as individuals, as communities and as a nation" – Cultural Learning Alliance, ImagineNation 2011*

If we increasingly position art and culture and accept it to be a charitable case which people can choose whether or not to give to, then we further remove it from the responsibility of the state and a public good which should be paid for out of our taxes.

I **do** believe I should pay towards art and culture through my taxes.

**I am not** happy for art lovers up and down the country to choose whether a cultural organisation stays open.

I am not happy for our wealthier art loving citizens to choose which cultural organisations thrive and which do not.

I am not happy that I live in a modern democracy and yet the fundamental right of every citizen to have access to high quality art and culture is being dismantled and relies on the whim and decision and choice of those with 'surplus' money whether it is a spare tenner or 10 million they can spend on the art of their choice.

I am not happy that my email inbox fills up more and more each week with crowdfunding, justgiving and fundraising requests for art and cultural events which I believe should be being paid for out of my taxes.

I am not happy that the poorest in society get taxed twice – once by HMRC and once by the Lottery and yet often receive the least access to high quality art and culture.

I am not happy that the very same Lottery money which was legally bound to be used only as 'additional' to state funding for arts and culture is now being used to cover core costs.

I am not happy that a company is funded by the arts council with tax payer's money to work out ways of asking people to donate whilst visiting a cultural organisation. An initiative that could be achieved in a cheaper and fairer way by simply raising taxes and giving a higher percentage to arts and culture. Why should any one individual decide where his/her taxes should go? I am not happy that charitable giving has become a supportive pillar which was once the state's responsibility

But I hear you cry, I have worked hard all my life, have paid my taxes like a good citizen and I have some spare cash and

- a) I would like to donate it to something that made a difference to my life – ballet/opera/theatre/drama work in prisons/music/the museum down the road/the local poetry club, insert your art/cultural organisation of choice .....

OR

- b) I have never used art/cultural organisations in my life and do not understand why I have had to pay taxes toward stuff I don't use and think those who use it, especially the rich should pay for it so I am happy for fundraising to increase and state funding should decrease.

Well

- a) That is fine as long as there is a decent base of state and Local Authority (which should be a statutory requirement) investment in arts and culture and any private/charitable giving is additional and not be used to keep the cultural ecology alive and breathing as it is being used at present

- b) I have never used a spinal department of a hospital, needed chemotherapy or a fire engine to come to my house but I am happy to pay for every single 'public good' my taxes are used for because I accept and value them and fundamentally believe society would be worse off without them. And anyway you do use them. Every piece of popular culture whether it be music, fashion, TV, advertising, computer games or radio is part of art and culture. Every piece of design and creative work is part of art and culture. Where did the person train who designed your i-phone? Where do fashion designers go for inspiration? Shall we trace back the roots and inspiration of every track you download from i-tunes? Deleting art and culture from your world would leave so many holes it simply would not make sense.

It is the human condition to undervalue that which we take for granted and which has always been there. It is only when it has gone that we realise what we had. We are living through an interesting time. How do you make the world appreciate that the abundance of all things creative we have now is the product of investment in arts and culture between 1997 and 2007 and in twenty years' time and more we or rather our children and grandchildren will reap the results of the current underinvestment and the cuts that are yet to come?

The Institute of Fundraising is twenty-five years old this year. I sat in that conference and wondered if in twenty-five years I might return to an Institute of Fundraising Conference for the NHS where imaginative and creative ideas of how to raise money to fund doctors and emergency services in all hospitals was under discussion and the subject of each speakers address?

Twenty-five years ago the Institute of Fundraising began under a Thatcher Conservative government. A government and Prime Minister which gave us the Market Led Economy we have today. Twenty-five years ago I performed a satirical sketch show on telethons whilst at Drama school. Little did I know then that they, and all charity and charitable fundraising, would become the accepted norm twenty-five years later. Live Aid happened because no government in the world was taking enough responsibility and action on poverty. Instead of forcing them to do so it unknowingly opened the floodgates for huge money raising enterprises from Comic Relief to Children In Need, which remove the responsibility from the state and are now commonplace celebrated parts of our society. A new profession has come into existence – the professional fundraiser. What cultural organisation can now afford to be without one?

And yet I believe it is only if they do without one that long-term they will survive. For this to work the sector must pull together and put a stop to the cover up. The arts councils must cease to try to hold together a broken arts economy model and demand an open debate on the future and value of the art and culture. The arts sector must expose the market led economy for what it is – an unjust and unequal system which has allowed the gap between the richer and poorer to increase to record levels.

What do I propose?

- That those individuals earning £20,000 a year or less pay no Income Tax and those earning £50,000 or above pay significantly higher rates than at present and that arts and culture is secured 1% of the overall government spend. Arts and culture be placed at the heart of our

society and this be reflected in the treasury divide where every department has a percentage ring-fenced for art and culture.

- Proven Tax avoidance by individuals or corporations incur much heavier financial penalties and criminal proceedings.
- Every local authority has a statutory requirement to provide access to high quality art and culture and have an up to date arts and culture strategy in place
- Every school in the UK can only be assessed as satisfactory or above by OFSTED/ESTYN if providing high quality cultural learning consistently across the curriculum.
- NHS invests more in preventive approaches involving art/culture specialists and participatory art/cultural practitioners and professionals.
- We see Cultural Leaders represented widely on broadcast media on everything from Newsnight and Question Time to Breakfast TV and art and culture is given equal airtime as sport.
- We invest in the infrastructure and transport links between all UK major cities and ensure every town has a library, a museum, a gallery, a theatre, a dance venue and a cinema funded by their local authority and the government.

This is not simply about art any more. This is about the very foundation of our society and how we wish to live. We were told a story by the Thatcher government and not even 10 years of a Blair labour government changed that narrative or the terms of the debate.

After a global economic crash, record levels of poverty (with more households in Britain accessing food banks than ever before) it is crucial that we challenge the accepted wisdom of Adam Smith, Friedrich Hayek, Margaret Thatcher and the 'invisible hand', individual is King, market-led economy and ask, without a World War creating the stimulus for the question-

What kind of society do we want and how do we make that a reality?