

BEYOND THE NUMBERS

**Report from the working group of the same name as part of the
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Nan van Houte: Opening of the session

The tendency to measure the impact of every aspect of public life also affects the sector of arts and culture. To justify spending the taxpayers' money, we are asked to convince society and policy-makers of the value of our practices by presenting figures and statistics.

Should we defend the arts' case over and over again?

Even if we don't like it, it is in our interests to reflect on the measurable and immeasurable components of culture that go beyond the economic effects.

Bringing together the Italian researcher developing the project Measuring Wellbeing for Culture Action Europe, a designer of the monitoring system of Sofia's Municipality, and an UK-analyst, this discussion will contribute to the IETM research activities and the future meetings on the art of valuing, assessing and monitoring. Next meeting on the topics of measuring culture is taking place in February 2015: a Satellite meeting for the funders of arts.

Summary

The first presentation introduced the theoretical foundation of impact assessment of culture, its limitations, different types of methodology approaches, some key indicators.

The second presentation showed measuring culture in action. It showcases the impact assessment approach adopted at the Sofia Municipality for measuring its cultural policies.

The third presentation viewed impact assessment of the arts in a historical perspective. By depicting the story of over 30 years tradition of measuring the arts in the UK, the presenter outlined certain drawbacks as well as future perspectives for improving impact assessment approaches.

Annalisa Cicerchia: Measuring the social impact of culture: Is it only about numbers?

presentation 1

The impact of culture assessment has evolved as part of the overall social impact assessment.

“Social impact assessment includes the processes of analyzing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of planned interventions (policies, programs, plans, projects) and any social change processes invoked by those interventions.”, [IAIA](#)

Are social impacts of culture measurable? The very question generates both scepticism and enthusiasm, both passionate. It is a serious question.

Background: the decline of Gross domestic product (GDP) as core indicator for development

- Dissatisfaction with GDP as sole measure of development/progress has prompted the [Social Indicator Movement](#) as early as 1960s.

For the UN social indicators: [here](#).

For World Bank social indicators: [here](#).

- [Sustainable development](#) enters the debate from the 1970s.

The UN sustainable development database: [here](#).

For the EU sustainable development policies: [here](#).

The first decade of the XXI century inaugurates the era of well-being measures as ways to go beyond GDP.

Defining the role of culture in society: Between instrumental and intrinsic

Starting in the 1980s, a *growing debate on the economics of culture* claims for the sector a relevant role in the overall economy. Cuts to public expenditure, from the 1990s, and, later,

the international economic crisis, lead to continued efforts to justify the very existence of culture.

Over the last 20 years, the main focus has been on the *possible economic and social impacts of culture and the arts*. The 2006 report on [Cultural economics in EU](#) marks a turning point in the perception of culture as a social and economic factor.

Unfortunately, that goes hand in hand with a declining appreciation of culture and the arts per se. *Culture is being viewed upon as an instrument for achievement of social and economic objectives rather than a good on its own.*

Culture and well-being

The international effort aimed at producing *measures of well-being* represents an opportunity for considering the role of culture and the arts in a different perspective.

So far, however, the initial projects (e.g. [OECD's Better Life Index](#)) have granted very little role, if any, to culture. For comparison, indicators are gathered for: housing, income, jobs, community, education, environment, civic engagement, health, life satisfaction, safety, work-life balance.

In an experimental approach in Italy cultural indicators have been introduced: an indicator for cultural participation, for heritage and landscape.

Major difficulties in measuring culture: are social impacts of culture measurable?

Measurement of culture is by no means an easy task because *it may reduce culture and the arts by reducing their intrinsic values* to something less.

Classical studies of its direct and indirect economic impact have faced theoretical and practical difficulties. Social impact in terms of well-being is equally difficult to pin down. *Data are scarce, irregular* and they differ from a sector to another, and the national profiles are hardly comparable. For EU for example, we count on [Eurobarometer](#), which is a standardized sample with 1000 participants from each member state (so you have to compare 1K respondents from Malta – less than 450.000 inhabitants - with 1K respondents from Germany for instance).

So, are social impacts of culture measurable at all?

In the intersection of Culture and Society, there are things that can be measured, while other things can't, despite our efforts and the refinement of our tools.

Measurable elements may be difficult to quantify unless the proper instruments – existing or yet to be created - are used.

Non-measurable elements are open to a number of alternative treatments can be: perceived, recorded, represented, communicated, rejected, transferred, or else.

Why should we measure culture?

- To evaluate our performance
- To assess the (social) value of our activity
- To increase our legitimacy
- To map the point where we are
- To discover unintended effects of our actions (which is common with the arts)
- To be fully accountable

What do we measure?

A continuum of impacts on individual and social well-being:

- Increased knowledge, awareness, understanding;
- Improved relationships, communication, language, decision;
- New values, motivations, visions;
- Nurtured social capital, capacity and leadership;
- New reasons for participation and mobilization;
- Effects on systems quality, access, equity.

All aspects of the impact of culture are quite difficult to be measured and observed and we are still developing sets of indicators to achieve this goal, the main issue being the poor and inconsistent data gathering.

Vania Georgieva, Monitoring of cultural events for the Sofia Municipality

presentation 2

Background: Sofia Municipality funds the greater share of various events and festivals on the cultural calendar of Sofia. *Since it spends taxpayers' money indeed, there was a necessity to keep track and to measure the effectiveness of public spending on culture.* One of the most challenging tasks was to design a measurement system that will not take in account subjective opinions on the quality of artwork or any subjective preferences. Another challenge was how to be able to compare data for different types of cultural events: exhibitions, opera, ballet, cinema, music, festivals, street art, etc. Of course, measuring merely the number of visitors or tickets sold was out of the question.

Focus groups with various experts and stakeholders were conducted in order to design the indicators and the questionnaires.

A 6 steps methodology was elaborated. The survey is to be carried on field at the event and includes filling monitoring cards, taking photos, registering the audience size, filled capacity, involvement of foreign participants, etc., making standardized interviews with audience members and organizers, and post-event media monitoring.

Questionnaire with the public – assessment of their overall satisfaction, comparison with previous editions of the event if visited, accessibility for people with disabilities and for vulnerable groups, the variety of social groups attending. Random sample of visitors was applied.

Questionnaire with the organizers – they are asked to assess their satisfaction with the event and the organization, the size of the event and audience and their partnership with the municipality.

Media monitoring – tone, type of publication, type of media.

The monitoring system is an all-purpose instrument, therefore an index based on a formula was applied in order to compare various events: audience's overall satisfaction 60%, organizers' satisfaction with the size of the audience 20%, media- number of publications and tone of materials 20%.

Overall conclusions from the data observation:

- Traditional art events and festivals attract a lot of visitors whose overall satisfaction is registered to be comparatively high. There is less potential to attract new visitors. The audience is more or less conservative in views. Researchers advise for development and improvement: – to open up to new audiences????
- Alternative fests, contemporary art forms: their audience is relatively small, consists of hardcore fans. These events do attract a lot of newcomers who demonstrate a more critical view on the events they happen to attend than the audience of the traditional art events. Advice for development and improvement: the municipality has to initiate debates on contemporary art topics, to provide support for spaces and media for information and critical reviews, to promote educational programs.

Some general recommendations to Municipality that spur out of the survey data:

- proactive approach in promoting cultural events is a necessity;
- internal monitoring system should be developed in order to keep track on the effectiveness of public spending on cultural events;
- systematic data collection should be put into practice;
- clear and traceable criteria for funding should be elaborated and introduced for all funding programs.

The survey of the Municipality funded cultural events proved to be helpful for both the organizers and the Municipality.

The survey is not focused on number of visitors but their overall satisfaction, therefore it can be applied to both large and small scale cultural events.

Sara Selwood: Beyond the numbers: applying measures to the arts

presentation 3

Sara Selwood, an expert in impact assessment of 30 years experience, presented the working group members with a view over the longtime tradition in measuring the impact and effectiveness of publicly funding on culture and heritage.

We have been using quantitative measurements to justify and value culture and to indicate the effectiveness of our organizations. But even our politicians accept that what matters with the arts cannot actually be measured, Sara Selwood says.

Background: The Arts Council of Great Britain

Arts as the universal good

What we think about applying measures to the arts depends of where we are coming from.

The Art Council (the former Arts Council of Great Britain, now divided into the [Arts Council of England](#), [Scottish Arts Council](#) and [Arts Council of Wales](#)) was established in the 1940's as an arts funding institution. In those days arts were valued mostly for their intrinsic qualities. The purpose of the Council was to support the creation of such *universal qualities as truth and beauty, which in the continental paradigm were believed to be uninterfered by class, race, gender and cultural difference*. They did not by definition be satisfied by market. This specific way of thinking assumed the artist as a special source of cultural value therefore for years on the Arts Council was focused on supporting the artists and fostering them on government funding. Perhaps this approach established the tension between the artists and the public's interests in healthcare, education, employment, housing, etc.

Naturally back then no one was thinking of implying measurement indicators to the sector. It took almost 30 years to come up with the notion of actually measuring the impact of arts on public life.

Arts on the eve of the [Thatcherism](#)

It took almost 40 years till the first attempt to quantify arts impact, to gather statistical information on arts and to analyze it was applied.

In 1983 an independent think-tank, [Policy Studies Institute](#), was the first to gather data on how much money was spent on the arts, how many people were employed, what they learned, etc. The purpose was to inform funding policies in a situation of economic and social stagnation.

The early 80's in Britain were time of recession, soaring unemployment, strikes, and social tension. The conservative government of Mrs. Thatcher applied free market policy, deregulation to all public spheres. Public funding was cut drastically. Culture activities were particularly vulnerable and the new management of the public sector forced arts organizations to modernize quite efficiently, effectively and economically.

The history of applying performance indicators and measures towards the arts starts here.

Own Humphries, Anthony Gormley, [Angel of the North, 1998](#)

Measuring the arts: justifying their funds by economic terms

In the new free market paradigm the Arts Council was in a position to defend itself and the funding in arts by applying economic terms to the cultural agenda. It started talking about how arts contributed to economic recovery in the post-industrial cities, that they were vital to their distinctiveness and cultural tourism, that they humanised their environment, enhanced employment and confidence amongst communities. If we put it in the Thatcher government's own language: funding in arts was earning back a fortune and was contributing to the free market values.

When I was ... going to the Treasury I knew that talking about truth and beauty wasn't going to get me any more money. I think it is always going to be the case with the Treasury, no matter who is in government. ([Chris Smith, 2011, Arts are vital to the well-being of our society](#), The Guardian)

Measuring the arts: the social importance of spending on culture

The new Labour government, which was elected in 1997, justified *spending on culture as being of social importance*. Culture was explicitly treated as *instrumental (as opposed to intrinsic)*. It could boost people's aspirations, enhance children's educational performance, it could combat social exclusion and it could bring communities together. The notion of the arts as absolutely vital to the well-being of society was prevailing over the research of its direct economic impact.

The Department of Culture's ambition to make culture provision accessible to the many, not just the few and it therefore it regarded cultural institution as centers for social change. And, like other government departments, it needed to meet targets and to generate outcomes. In order to achieve these goals, investments in the sector were increased about 125% apart from the billions coming from the National Lottery.

The Arts were supposed to *target particular audiences and the effectiveness of funding organizations was closely scrutinized* and all this was completely unprecedented.

Data collection became central and amongst other things that could be counted, *children participation in educational activities and programs, participations and visits by members of different minority social groups* valued the money and economic performance. These were top-down indicators, which were intended to benefit the Department itself because they gave information on what was happening as result of its policies. This was the opposite of

ideology-based decision-making. The objective was to tackle forces not to respond to symptoms.

To hell with targets

Unfortunately, evidence showed organizations were failing to meet their targets, but no policy changes were undertaken.

Performing artists, once under attack for apparently not paying their way, are now in the dock for attracting the wrong kind of people. And it doesn't seem to matter whether what we do is any good or not... Until recently, the National Theatre's audience was getting worse reviews than some of its shows. Then somebody noticed some kids in the house with studs through their noses, and the reviews looked up...

Nick Hytner, [To Hell with Targets, The Observer, 2003](#)

The current government seems more relaxed about targets; they have dropped data collection over certain indicators to reduce the burden it imposed on the organizations.

British arts organizations tended to regard much of the quantitative data collected by the government as irrelevant and they barely used it by themselves. But despite being under less pressure to gather data now, *gathering intelligence over their various operations has become more important*. They have previously benefited from the comfort of more funding, but now organizations are much more likely to recognize that performance metrics have become critical in their struggle to survive if not to thrive these days.

Circumstances have changed; most of the art organizations are using various media to reach broader audiences: for ex., live streaming brings thousands of visitors around the world.

Current trends: intersection between the quantitative and the qualitative

Some practitioners still argue that *instrumental cultural policies and measures of its effectiveness lead to decline of artistic autonomy* in the publicly funded arts organizations.

The other thing that has always been criticized is of course methodology of data gathering and analysis. Despite 30 years reputed collection, a current inquiry in the UK culture life has found that amongst all other longstanding problems, *the lack comprehensive and robust quantitative data collection is still unresolved*.

The fact is that financial and other profiles may undermine evidence based policy development. On the other hand, quantitative measurements are criticized as reductions. After all, audience numbers for example are not an accurate measure of artistic quality.

So, what is the alternative?

The Arts Council is currently trying to tackle with this now. Since the effects of the arts are intangible and could be captured in personal taxonomies, qualitative assessments, case studies, critical reviews, a few years ago the Arts Council reintroduced the *Peer review*. But this so called “informal critical judgment” runs the risk of being subjective and tends to raise conspiracies of self interest: arts people reviewing other arts people and despite the fact that they buy tickets, audience’s opinions are rarely expected.

So the Arts Council has been currently pursuing an approach adopted from Australia - to see if it is possible *to assess the overall quality of work* by reviewing quantitative data as well as credible qualitative evidence from all stakeholders and the arts sector itself. Like other approaches, this one also relies on a generic framework of different aspects of quality of cultural experience. It is based on what different organizations are trying to achieve with their work. *This approach brings the organisations’ own reflections together with those of its peers and the public.*

[Quality Metrics Pilot](#) (The Manchester Metrics pilot, May 2014)

Nine core metrics to be rated by self, peer and public assessors:

- **Presentation:** it was well produced and presented
- **Distinctiveness:** it was different from things I've experienced before
- **Rigour:** it was well thought through and put together
- **Relevance:** it had something to say about the world in which we live
- **Challenge:** it was thought-provoking
- **Captivation:** it was absorbing and held my attention
- **Meaning:** it meant something to me personally
- **Enthusiasm:** I would come to something like this again
- **Local impact:** it is important that it's happening here

Five metrics for self and peer assessment only:

- **Concept:** it was an interesting idea/programme
- **Risk:** the artists/curators really challenged themselves with this work
- **Originality:** it was ground-breaking

- **Excellence (national):** it is amongst the best of its type in the UK
- **Excellence (global):** it is amongst the best of its type in the world

The Arts Council's most recent report (2014), which could be used for advocacy purposes: [here](#).

Disclosure: Attaching numbers to the arts has always been problematic but now as public funding is constantly going down, arts organizations are finding that they have to understand how well different aspects of their operations are doing. They need measures for that. It has taken a very long time and various changes in circumstances to actually get to that and this experience may project some value towards the sector altogether.

QA session

Q: Since 2008 funding for the arts is down, is there any point of doing this research? Politics only do care about the votes not the arts.

A: Measuring the impact of culture has sharpened the government's sense how culture impacts the overall life. It is true though, that a lot of money was wasted and no changes occurred.

Q: Quantitative data gathering seems to be time consuming and costly activity. It seems to be quite difficult to apply to small organizations. Is it feasible for them anyway? Should we exclude the smaller organizations?

A: It is indeed time consuming but it is necessary to know the diversity of your audience even for a small-scale organization. An effort has to be made in trying to see the overall effect of culture. Probably the most feasible solution is to have an independent research body onboard so that both funding donors and the arts organizations could benefit from its research work.

Q: How could effectiveness be measured by satisfaction? It may not the main objective of contemporary arts to satisfy its audience.

A: Sofia measurement tool is open for comments, contributions and alternations aiming to make it more suitable for the objectives of the research.

Q/ A more global issue: in various reports on the topics of well-being (the UN reports, the World Bank reports, the OECD ones) different approaches are applied towards developed and third world countries. In EU countries for instance there are arts and values, and social inclusion while in the developing countries the emphasis is put on culture and its impact on economics, in prevention of conflicts, etc.

A: There are different sets of indicators. The two main approaches towards culture are, firstly, to perceive culture as different types of cultures in cultural diversity (community, traditions, etc.) and the other is to refer to culture as a sector activity in the economic sense and in the sense of organized sector where one can practice the arts and culture. The [EENC](#) expert group proposes to make use of both methods so that the measures can be applicable to all countries in the world. All these efforts are aimed at gaining recognition of the importance of culture and in terms of the research of well-being culture indicators seem to be far less instrumental, being close to a more robust understanding of culture.

UNESCO – [cultural development indicators set](#)

Q: Of course, a distinction between the arts and culture is to be made. The arts are not about the consumer-and-product model. The artist's is not to satisfy the audience.

A: A new language for speaking about the arts to the public has to be developed – beyond the numbers. We need to effectively use research data for advocacy purposes of culture and the arts.

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A wish was expressed for the discussions to follow: not to focus on defending the arts and its funding but rather to start from the vibrancy of the sector and the question how to make the sector even more vital by using the measurement data and research results.

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