

COMEDIA

The Social Impact of Arts Programs

How The Arts Measure Up:

Australian research into social impact

Working Paper 8: Deidre Williams

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FOREWORD

The Social Impact of Arts Programmes' is Comedia's 4th major study of cultural policy, following research into libraries, parks and the creative city. It addresses key issues in contemporary arts practice, including the social purpose and value of participatory arts, through case studies and related research. The aim of the project is to develop a methodology for evaluating the social impact of arts programmes and to begin to assess that impact in key areas. This is being addressed by:

- a) Establishing a number of case studies to evaluate the social impact of specific programmes and the assessment structures within which they operate.
- b) Reviewing existing literature on social impact in relation to arts programmes alongside comparable thinking in other fields.
- c) Providing a background analysis of the value of arts programmes in achieving social outcomes more commonly targeted through other forms of intervention.
- d) Stimulating a debate around the social impact of arts programmes through the publication of working papers, and associated meetings and seminars.
- e) Publishing a comprehensive report outlining the findings of the research and proposing a workable methodology for the evaluation of the social impact of arts programmes.

To date, and following a feasibility study in Bolton, the programme includes case studies in Nottingham, Glasgow, Portsmouth, Hounslow, Batley, North Western Scotland and Finland. A further international study is looking at the social impact of the creative use of digital technology.

The advisory group members are Ken Bartlett, Franco Bianchini Tony Bovaird, Roland Humphrey, Alex MacGillivray, Anne Peaker, Usha Prashar, Prof. Ken Robinson, Polly Toynbee, Dr Jill Vincent and Perry Walker. The researchers are Chris Burton, John Chell, Esther Davis, Helen Denniston Owen Kelly, Naseem Khan Charles Landry, Francois Matarasso Peter Stark and Eva Wojat

The study also includes a series of Working Papers, written mostly by people who are not directly involved in the research, but who have specialist knowledge or interest to offer to the debate around the social impact of the arts. As the series title suggests, they often draw on work in progress, or explore issues discursively, without necessarily offering answers.

This Working Paper, no 8 in the series, was written by Deidre Williams, a former community arts worker and now an arts consultant, from South Australia. Deidre conducted the only substantial research into the social impact of community arts projects which we have come across, published as *Creating Social Capital* in 1996. She draws on, and updates this unique Australian research to make a powerful case for recognition of the diverse benefits arising from community art, and the factors on which they depend.

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*PS The final outcome from the Social Impact of Arts Programs was published as *Use or Ornament?* which is available from COMEDIA publication sales Jill Chandler 0115 989 0068 (Deidre)*

Preface

In 1994-95 I undertook a research project to identify the long term social, educational, artistic and economic benefits arising as a result of government funded community based arts projects. Supported by the federal arts funding body, the Australia Council for the Arts, the study researched 89 projects that were funded by the Council two years earlier. The resulting publication, *Creating Social Capital* was released in February 1996. It details the findings and demonstrates the links between the arts projects and the long term benefits.

Although this study demonstrates that community based arts projects generate significant developmental outcomes, it has received little response from community arts practitioners, community workers or policy makers in Australia. I believe this is largely because of the current conservative political climate affecting all areas of the public sector. It has caused the down-sizing of government, privatization of public services and a reduction in government spending in favor of a market force economy. These changes are occurring in all levels of government, including local government that has become a major player in community cultural development in recent years. Because advocates of community cultural development are frequently employed or funded by government, they are focusing on the economic benefits to generate recognition and support for this work.

Consequently the indicators for community cultural development receiving most attention from cultural development workers and government alike are those concerned with familiar economic measures. More specifically economic measures linked to cultural tourism strategies. These include: arts related employment or new enterprise developments; multiplier effects from local festivals or arts events; and retail growth as a result of arts focused urban redevelopment strategies. The social, educational or cultural outcomes presented in *Creating Social Capital* are receiving little emphasis or acknowledgment in favor of the economic arguments.

The danger in pursuing particular economic aspects of the work in the absence of a broader commitment to the inter-relationship between the social, educational, cultural and economic dynamics is that the economic strategies alone are likely to fail to deliver the expected results. Too many projects promising economic benefits and delivering disappointing results will see support for community cultural development reducing instead of increasing.

Community based arts strategies ultimately succeed in generating sustainable economic outcomes when they are supported within a broader cultural development focus incorporating related social and cultural objectives. The catch is that there is still no evaluation framework for community cultural development that incorporates all the related outcomes to inform the real financial and economic impact of the work. Never has this task been more pressing than in the present Australian economic and political climate.

How The Arts Measure Up draws on the findings presented in *Creating Social Capital*, and links the indicators used in that study to key outcome areas for community cultural development in Australia. It argues the critical link between community culture and social cohesion and demonstrates how community based arts programs are powerful catalysts for developing healthy, viable communities. The ideas presented in the following pages are offered as a contribution toward identifying that elusive framework for evaluating community cultural development outcomes.

Deidre Williams 1996

1.1 COMMUNITY ART IN A SELF ORGANISING SOCIAL SYSTEM.

Debates about community art; what it is, why it is important and how to assess its value, have abounded in Australia for more than 20 years. Historically this work has been primarily resourced through government arts funding programs. This has generated a continuing problem in that community arts projects have been required to demonstrate their value against the criteria of the relevant arts funding bodies.

As many community arts practitioners have discovered, within a traditional, or fine arts policy framework, you're stuck with an agenda which, in both popular and professional opinion, places community art at one end of a hierarchy, and opera at the other. The value of community based arts production will always be severely compromised while it is stuck in a fine arts paradigm.

A community culture paradigm

To date it has proved extremely difficult to get arts funding bodies to place community art in a broader paradigm — community culture. This is not surprising considering the difficulties in defining the term 'culture', or the implications for government arts bodies in broadening their fine arts policy paradigm to encompass art in community culture.

Community art is most commonly known as the poor cousin in the art family or the naive newcomer to the social work family. But community art is not concerned with social work as we know it, nor is it focused on the production of art as a commodity, rather the production of art as the expression of community culture. A sociological definition of culture provides an ideal context for understanding the importance of community cultural expression. In 1982 the Second World Conference on Cultural Policy, in New Mexico, ratified the following statement on culture;

Culture ought to be considered today the collection of distinctive traits, spiritual and material, intellectual and affective, which characterize a society or social group. It comprises, besides arts and letters, modes of life, human rights, value systems, traditions and beliefs. ¹

This view of culture provides a starting point to explore the importance of community culture within a nation. And more specifically within a pluralistic contemporary society. This view of culture emphasizes the importance of expressing community values, creating a sense of place, gaining new insights and learning new ways of doing things.

...the sociological conception of culture possesses a number of qualities which are relevant to the process of development and the future. Anyone who is involved in a community, national or international activity will be immediately aware of the enormous importance of values, patterns, themes, symbols and behavioral characteristics for development. In many ways, the challenge of development is to reinforce values, patterns and themes which are working, but equally as important if not more important, to change values, patterns and themes which are not working. ²

Culture is never static

The pace of change in the world today demands new ways of thinking, new patterns of behavior and new value systems. Often the old answers and even the old questions are no longer adequate. For many, the education gained as a young person is no longer sufficient to ensure the capacity to interact effectively with society, find employment or generate income. Global migration means that the cultural values and practices many people grew up with are now blended or co-existing with numerous different cultures within the same locality. For many families and communities the culture of work has been replaced with a culture of unemployment, and the concepts of family and gender roles have changed dramatically.

Often those who find themselves in situations of substantial social change are also expected to shed the cultural perspective that gave their lives meaning and direction and adopt a 'new' cultural perspective. When faced with this type of social displacement, many people retreat into the periphery of society, becoming despondent, passive and self disparaging. The imposition of social change along

with the denigration of the values or lifestyles which gave life meaning and structure can also produce hostility as often as it does apathy.

Artistic responses

What we can do for ourselves depends on what we know of ourselves. Social isolation, despondency and poor self esteem all work against the likelihood of self discovery and greater self determination — for individuals, communities and nations.

Collaborative artistic practice at community level is a potent forum for communication of ideas and values. In the quest for seeking new ways forward the arts can draw on the intuitive, the non-rational, the mythical and the symbolic, and can be a powerful tool for cutting through existing patterns of thought and behaviors.

The value of community art is in its expression of community culture, as part of the culture of wider society. In this arena community art becomes a part of the process of community cultural development — a process concerned with fostering an environment in which cultural democracy can occur. This process recognizes the importance of community as fundamental to cultural expression, along with the space for social interaction and resources for artistic production. It values community artistic expression as an important way in which communities: can create a sense of place; affirm their values; assert their differences; and communicate their aspirations.

It sees collaborative artistic production as a powerful vehicle for experiential learning and appreciation of other value systems. It does not over emphasize the value of art as artifact or concentrate on fashionable elite notions of specific artistic form. It sees the value of art residing in the present and in how it directly adds value to, or creates meaning in people's lives. This could be things such as; the importance or clarity of what is communicated through the art work; *whose* voices or stories are heard; and *whose* values are embraced within the art work. In other words, the relationship between the art work and the living context in which it was conceived and to which it relates.

In a Western contemporary culture, these activities are an essential addition to, and antidote for, the passive relationship with homogenous popular culture emanating from the commercial media. Community cultural expression provides people with the opportunity to communicate individualism, eccentricity, diversity and inspirational example. It is also a process through which people — communities — can use artistic expression to challenge social norms, mobilize for, or resist change. It provides room for people to participate in artistic communication as well as to spectate. It is an essential and powerful way in which people build and rebuild community, release creative energy and transform minds, organizations, institutions and society.

1.2 AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH

In 1994 the Community Cultural Development Unit of the Australia Council for the Arts supported a national study to examine the long term value of 89 community based arts projects they had funded in 1991. The study tested social, educational, artistic and economic outcome indicators, commonly accepted by community art practitioners and government arts funding bodies, as describing the long term value of the work.

The study included a survey of 109 community participants from public funded community based arts projects, plus 123 community members who had observed the projects. It asked people to rate the long term value of the project for their community. It found that the communities concerned could demonstrate distinct links between the impact of the arts projects and lasting social, educational, economic and artistic outcomes.

The resulting publication, *Creating Social Capital*, details the social, educational, economic and artistic benefits that were evident, two years after community based arts projects. It reveals that public funded community based arts projects were powerful catalysts for community development and renewal as well as agents for substantial individual development. Over all, respondents recorded positive impact for each outcome area as follows:

96% recognized positive educational outcomes

94% recognized positive artistic outcomes

90% recognized positive social outcomes

72% recognized positive economic outcomes

The findings demonstrated that the value of government funded community based arts projects and programs was largely in terms of social or cultural impact, and influences several types of outcome:

- **Building and developing communities**
- **Increasing social capital**
- **Activating social change**
- **Developing human capital**
- **Improving economic performance**

The following chapters take each of these outcome areas and examine why those outcomes are important and how community based, collaborative arts projects can produce these results.

2.1 SOCIAL CAPITAL

Community based, collaborative arts programs and projects are highly effective in producing the following social capital outcomes:

- **Improved communication of ideas and information**
- **Improved skills in planning and organizing activities**
- **Improved understanding of different cultures or lifestyles**
- **Improved consultation between government and community**
- **Increased appreciation of community arts**

One of the most valuable activities we engage in as human beings is the business of creating and maintaining social order. As social animals, these complex systems are crucial to the process of living, reproducing and building communities, states and nations. The business of creating group rules and processes of organization is constantly in progress within nations, from government right down to the local level, and between nations. As with all self organizing systems, all parts contribute to the well-being of the whole, change is a constant factor and diversity is a critical element in maintaining vitality and harmony. What goes on at the local level will indeed eventually impact at the national level and vice versa.

Meaning and group values are expressed through social interaction. Community, in all its forms, is about the lives of people and how they construct meaning and build trust together. It is the arena for living and expressing culture. The benefits derived from these experiences have recently been described by several writers and researchers as 'social capital'. The 1995 Australian Boyer Lectures, *A Truly Civil Society*, presented by Eva Cox, examined the notion of social capital which she described as being generated by:

...the processes between people which establish networks, norms, social trust and facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit. ³

This concept of social capital sits beside the familiar concepts of financial capital, physical capital and human capital. It describes the capacity for mutual cooperation towards the collective well-being within a community or wider society.

Social capital is the social glue, the weft and warp of the social fabric which comprises a myriad of interactions that make up our public and private lives — our *vita activa* ⁴ ...the elements which increase social capital are mainly based on interactions. They involve space, time, opportunities, precedent and the valuing of process. We need the opportunities to interact with a reasonably broad spread of people, and to build up a level of trust through positive rather than negative experiences. ⁵

Drawing on the work of American political scientist Robert Putnam⁶, Cox argues that the social capital theory suggests that humans achieve more by cooperating than competing, and that experiences which develop trust and a discovery of common ground allow people to move from a defensive 'I' to a mutual 'we'. She suggests that an over emphasis on competition and an undervaluing of the time and opportunity to work co-operatively together, undermines the capacity to build trust and common ground in our communities and in society. Cox suggests that:

Trust should be defined as inexhaustible because it is increased, rather than depleted by positive use. The more we work together with others in environments which encourage co-operation the more likely we are to trust others, and the occasional failures of trust will be less damaging. Social capital is therefore increased by use. It can be depleted by widespread lack of trust or by our own failure to trust others. Without trust we avoid contact with others because we fear betrayal. This is the core component of social connections. ⁷

Putnam's studies in regional Italy offer statistical evidence that co-operation pays off socially, bureaucratically and economically. He argues that if we can come to trust others as we trust ourselves, prosperity and economic growth follow.⁸ Governments that fail to invest in developing social capital risk facing considerable expense caused by the degeneration of the social fabric. Lack of trust and mutual understanding generates fear and social withdrawal, an erosion of community leadership skills and an absence of positive role models for community development.

2.2 COMMUNITY ART AS A GENERATOR OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Community based, collaborative artistic production, as per the community arts model, is an extraordinary catalyst for generating social capital. The process of group artistic production relies on identifying common goals, group cooperation, and effective communication of complex ideas. Competition is replaced with collaboration and self interest is counter-balanced by group needs.

In line with Cox's and Putnam's claims about how social capital is generated, Williams found in that the long term benefits emanating from community based arts projects were directly related to the impact of co-operation, trust and collaboration to reach a common goal. This was most frequently described by the respondents as developing a strong sense of group ownership in the project. It was most likely to happen when there was a shared responsibility for achieving the project aims. Group ownership was generated by an inclusive attitude to group membership, openness to people's ideas and sensitive leadership with a balance between providing direction and consensual decision making. These ideas are further elaborated in the following three case study extracts.

2.3 COMMUNICATING IDEAS AND INFORMATION

Case Study: Boomtown Rural Theatre Project

This case study is an excellent example of the place for ritual and legend in expressing and celebrating shared values and creating defining moments in the life of communities. The project created a large-scale theatre event which brought together community members from five small isolated towns within a remote rural region of Tasmania. The intention was to generate a sense of regional identity in the face of local government amalgamations, and to lift the spirit of the community as the mining industry, the major source of employment, was in a state of decline. The resulting play, *Boomtown*, told the story of a fictitious mining town and its colorful and tenacious people who survived through a boom-bust-boom cycle. It involved hundreds of people as cast and crew, or as participants in a grand parade on opening night.

The experience of working together

The project did indeed significantly lift the spirit of the community and bond them in a difficult time. The large scale of the event meant that residents had to work together intensively. This experience generated a special energy as ordinary people worked together, to make an extraordinary event. The most common phrase participants used when reflecting on the experience was that 'people came out of the wood work' to join in the preparations. The heightened levels of activity led to three important insights: that people had talents that they were previously unaware of; that they had created something more amazing than what they had imagined possible, and what could be achieved in a spirit of cooperation. Most communities only experience this intense cooperation and focus on a large scale in times of disaster, such as bushfire or flood. To have experienced this level of cooperation as part of a celebratory and legend creating event was a wonderful experience with long lasting value. One resident observed:

*It brought a lot of people together who would not have otherwise come together. It wasn't demanded of them, we wanted to do it, get involved, that was what it inspired. Now it is a story on its own, like the bushfires — and now 'Boomtown'. You can't remember other plays, but 'Boomtown', we all remember that!*⁹

Apart from the value in creating a model of community cooperation, residents also saw the project was valuable in bringing strangers together and building friendships, as well as showing new facets of well known people. In some cases this broke down negative stereotyping and left a greater

recognition of people's talents. One of the major benefits was in the role model it provided for young people, one participant reflected:

*It showed the kids there is more to life than football and violence, and that you can do things together as a combined effort...to me they're the long term benefits.*¹⁰

This project strengthened the sense of a regional community, built networks of on-going value, generated pride and confidence, uncovered local talent, bonded people in times of hardship and demonstrated what a resourceful community they were. It was also a great night of theatre! Respondents in this case study rated a positive response to these social capital indicators as follows:

Improved communication of ideas and information	100%
Improved skills in planning and organizing activities	93%
Developed community identity	93%

2.4 IMPROVED UNDERSTANDING OF DIFFERENT CULTURES AND LIFESTYLES

Case Study: Panic Stations, Police and Young People Theatre Project

This project involved young people and police in a creative development process, and as performers in a theatre/music production. The resulting production, *Panic Stations*, was a large successful production, presented as part of *Come Out*, South Australia's biennial youth arts festival. A cast of around 30 young people and five police officers presented music - theatre promenade performance which illustrated life in their community and the interaction between community and the police.

From confrontation to co-operation

Apart from being an entertaining theatre production, the experience proved to be a catalyst for moving from a confrontational to a co-operative relationship between young people and police. The participants believed the creative process of the project gave the young people and police an opportunity to relate to each other as ordinary people. The workshop process used to create the performance narrative required the group to develop a relaxed climate of trust. Through games and improvised enactments of community issues, and putting themselves in another person's shoes, individuals moved past stereotyped ideas of 'other'. The young people got to experience being in the shoes of the police, the police got to explore how powerless young people feel in the face of police authority. One of the police officers involved commented:

*The main value [of the project] was the bridges that were built and the barriers that were broken down....it built [young people's] self esteem and it also established a rapport with the officers who were involved.*¹¹

Many of the young people involved came from low socio-economic backgrounds, where attitudes towards the police were negative, and interactions with a police officer usually meant trouble. For these young people, finding themselves developing friendships with police officers, feeling valued as a member of the creative team developing the performance script, and gaining the skills to perform, was a potent mix.

Issues such as domestic violence, teenage runaways, car stealing and personal identity were all grist for the mill of the story line. Seeing the social education impact of the project, other police in the region expressed interest in the project as a method of improving their policing role. Members of the theatre company were invited to present information sessions for other police officers, about the project's aims and working processes.

As with many other case study examples, the participants felt that one of the major long term benefits was the impact of the role model the project provided for the participants and wider community. This was most clearly expressed as:

*In the future those kids might not go on to be politicians, but they might become leaders in their own community as well as role models for other kids on the way. [The project] put a foundation there for these kids, and a lot of self worth [which] they can build on...*¹²

Respondents in this case study rated a positive response to these social capital indicators as follows:

Improved understanding of different cultures or lifestyles	86%
Increased appreciation of community arts projects	93%

2.5 IMPROVING CONSULTATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY

Case Study: Resident's Mural Project

This project involved the community in creating a mural on a factory wall in a suburban residential area in Adelaide, South Australia. It was conceived and developed by a group of residents concerned about the need to improve their suburban environment, and motivate the local government council to develop a small allotment of vacant land abutting the factory wall, into a community recreation reserve.

A mural as catalyst to community empowerment

The mural project became a focal point for discussion about local environmental and recreation issues, and eventually a catalyst for community awareness raising. The mural, extending 150 meters in length, and up to 12 meters high at its apex, reflected images of community, past and present, and depicted the recreational reserve the residents aspired towards. With its portrayal of families enjoying a green and peaceful park, neighbors chatting over fences while the postman cycles by, the mural presented an illusion of extended landscape. The whole exercise generated an enormous impact.

Although some of the more politically active residents had attempted to negotiate with the local government council regarding the need for a community reserve, past efforts had fallen on deaf, and sometimes hostile ears. However, the high levels of community involvement in the mural provided the time and focus for residents to discuss their recreational and environmental aspirations together. The combination of the impact of the mural, which was valued by residents and the Council alike, plus the clearly articulated community voice, finally moved the Council to consult with the residents over their ideas for a community reserve. Approximately two years later the reserve was completed.

Participants believe that the project was particularly valuable in generating a climate for mutual cooperation between the local government council and the residents. This in turn, forged a commitment to the longer term goals for the reserve and the cooperative working relationships needed to achieve these goals. One of the participants observed:

*The project gave people a structure, a way of doing things. You build unity through action, not by talking ideals or abstracts. A good thing about community arts [projects] is the action, it's concrete....If you don't have a project, you don't have the catalyst or focus.*¹³

Respondents in this case study rated a positive response to these social capital indicators as follows:

Improved consultation between government and community	90%
Improved communication of ideas and information	95%
Increased appreciation of community arts	90%

INCREASING SOCIAL CAPITAL: OVERALL RESULTS

Overall, the case studies average positive results for these social capital indicators were as follows:

Improved skills in communicating ideas and information	92%
Increased appreciation of community arts	92%
Improved skills in planning and organizing activities	87%
Improved understanding of different cultures or lifestyles	80%
Improved consultation between government and community	64%

The national average response to these indicators was consistent with the case study findings as illustrated below.

Improved skills in communicating ideas and information	95%
Increased appreciation of community arts	94%
Improved skills in planning and organizing activities	90%
Improved understanding of different cultures or lifestyles	80%
Improved consultation between government and community	64%

These results indicate that community based arts projects and programs are effective ways to facilitate *...processes between people which establish networks, norms, social trust and facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit* — Cox's description of what generates social capital.

3.1 DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES

Community based, collaborative arts programs and projects are highly effective in producing the following community development outcomes:

- **Developed community identity**
- **Decreased social isolation**
- **Improved recreational options**
- **Developed local enterprise**
- **Improved public facilities**

Before examining how community based arts programs and projects can produce these outcomes, it is important to reconsider the value of 'community', as a fundamental unit of society.

The term 'community' enjoys periods of popularity and periods of being distinctly out of fashion with government agencies and politicians. In the arts in Australia, the idea of 'community' has never held great currency, (although 'audience' and 'general public' are very powerful concepts). In general, the term 'community' as a prefix in areas of activity such as community arts, community health, adult and community education, means it will enjoy a low status with government and be poorly resourced. There are a number of reasons why this value judgment persists, but one very valid reason is, that all community based methods of working — in health, law, arts and economic reform — operate in a reverse order to the top down system of government.

Advocates of public systems using community based or participatory methods of working, argue the need for a more balanced approach from government, in the way that they develop and support social systems. These advocates believe an over reliance on top down systems of government destroys or oppresses much that is valuable and essential to maintaining social harmony and fostering self determination. Community based professionals in numerous disciplines believe that a greater investment in community based systems, which operate in a cooperative relationship with government, have the capacity to build and enrich communities and society. The results they argue, although taking a little longer to manifest, act as an effective preventative measure to many of the negative outcomes from the social disintegration being experienced in many Western countries. Things such as homelessness, unemployment, disintegration of family units and networks, drug dependency and street violence. Governments primarily concerned with 'bottom line' economics and short election terms rarely have time for, or are motivated to explore, alternative methods of working and the rewards they might offer.

3.2 COMMUNITY IS A LIVED EXPERIENCE

Regardless of government trends and party politics the reality of community is constant and critically important in everybody's lives. For most people 'community' isn't a concept, it is a lived experience that gives their lives structure, meaning and value.

Community is that entity to which one belongs, greater than kinship but more immediate than the abstraction we call 'society'. It is the arena in which people acquire their most fundamental and most substantial experience of social life outside the confines of home...community is where one learns and continues to practice how to be 'social'...it is where one acquires 'culture'.¹⁴

The need to perceive community, experience community, and feel a sense of belonging in a community, is essential to individual well-being and to our systems of social organization. Witness the reality for many people in suburbs where there are poor community facilities, high levels of social isolation, lack of opportunity for personal and family advancement and where mistrust, fear and aggression is role modeled daily. Compare this to the experience of wealthy people who live in well serviced suburbs where residents feel compelled to build high walls and install complex security systems to protect themselves and their possessions from perceived 'outside' danger. What values

and views of the world do the members of these communities pass on and reaffirm to each other? How do their beliefs and actions affect the wider society?

In *Creating Social Capital*, a participant in a case study project involving an Aboriginal school in central Australia observed that:

*These are living and learning experiences. People don't have concepts of (the school as) community. They live it — they live it and they remember it.*¹⁵

Participation in community life, is far more than a quaint, warm fuzzy concept, it is an essential experience of a 'system of value, norms and moral codes which provide a sense of identity within a bounded whole to its members'.¹⁶

Diverse community life increases the opportunity for exposure to, and participation in numerous communities, thus increasing understandings of the world of human experience. As the human population base grows larger so too does the need for strong community culture. This observation is well described by Cohen in *The Symbolic Construction of Community*:

As government becomes bigger and more remote from the constituent elements of society; as economics appears to become increasingly centralized and institutionalized, so it loses credibility and relevance as a referent of people's identity... the scale of such government means that it has to operate at an extraordinarily high level of generality or in response to very particular or powerful interests. In both cases, the vast majority of people are going to feel under-represented and inadequately understood. They may even feel deliberately excluded. As a result, they become politically introspective and reach back to a more convincing level of society with which to identify. ...The suggestion is, then, that people assert community, whether in the form of ethnicity or locality, when they recognize in it the most adequate medium for the expression of their whole selves.¹⁷

Community therefore, is firstly a fundamental element in the experience and expression of culture. Secondly, people understand culture through their experience of community, which is most powerfully expressed through myth, tradition and ritual. And thirdly, if culture embodies a system of values, norms and moral codes, then art is one of the most powerful ways in which those values are communicated. Some examples of these ideas in action are presented in the following three case study extracts from *Creating Social Capital*.

3.1 DEVELOPING COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Case Study: Yipirinya Aboriginal School, Alice Springs

Yipirinya is a bilingual, bicultural Aboriginal School in Alice Springs, Central Australia. It is an independent school run by a council of Aboriginal elders who represent the town camp community and its four language groups. All the children at the school are Aboriginal and approximately 90% have English as a second language. The school has had a monumental struggle to become registered and receive government funding, plus there is a great deal of poverty within the town camp community which is exacerbated by the huge cultural gap between Western and Indigenous cultures. The transient lifestyle and degree of alcohol dependency within the town camp community, further contribute to the Yipirinya children's juggling act in gaining a Western education and finding a pathway in life which can encompass two cultural perspectives.

The school sought and attracted funding from the Australia Council for the Arts for a team of three artists to work for a number of weeks with the students and teachers. During the project the whole school became involved in developing and presenting a huge outdoor music/dance/theatre event. The final night time performance was a moving and powerful celebratory event which generated deep feelings of pride and sense of identity within the school. Reflections on the project from the participants included these observations:

Yipirinya has had a struggle and the people have a struggle to live and survive...I think [through this event] we saw the school come together and felt the spirit of the place...it brought our community together...

It reinforced the philosophy of the school to outsiders and to insiders. It also helped us to see, "Yes, this is what we're on about", and believe in that philosophy, or we wouldn't be here...

It created a feeling of unity by bringing the whole school together from the children to the staff, and presented a united front which was genuine...¹⁸

The rehearsals and performance required that everyone work together to show-case what they could collectively express. The experience left them feeling strong and united. The event was an icebreaker with the local media and as a result the school received greater media support and promotion. This was important for the school as it generated goodwill and communicated the bicultural philosophy of the school, locally, at a regional level, and within the network of people concerned with education and Aboriginal affairs. A participant commented:

Part of the reconciliation process requires the Western acceptance and understanding [of] and deeper respect for Aboriginal cultural values. This [bicultural] educational model is very significant in this process...but it's not just the Aboriginal people learning Western ways, its the other way round as well. It's hard for Western culture to understand those things.¹⁹

The whole experience also had a particularly positive impact on the children. Aboriginal children are frequently shy and wary of performing publicly. This unique experience of whole community performance generated an enthusiasm which overcame their usual reticence. As a result, the public approval, successful risk taking and enjoyable team work experiences left feelings of increased self esteem and confidence. This generated a willingness to approach new experiences including greater interaction with the non Aboriginal community.

Parents watching their children perform spectacularly in front of a large non-Aboriginal audience, saw a view of their children previously un-imagined. The experience led the Aboriginal women who are the traditional craft makers, to become more confident in displaying their skills in public. The success of the project also inspired the Aboriginal elders who form the School Council, to continue to support the development of new creative work and performances both within the school and at other public events.

3.4 REDUCING SOCIAL ISOLATION

Case Study: Spanish Women Writers' Group, Sydney

This project involved a group of Spanish speaking women writers, who came together to write a play. The women, from Spain, Chile, Argentina and Uruguay, were active writers in their native country, and since arriving in Australia had been socially isolated, largely due to a poor command of the English language. Apart from creating a play, *El Casamiento* or *The Wedding*, the women believed the project was a major catalyst for building a sense of community between them, and for them becoming members of other communities of interest.

The process of developing the play script meant that the women, who lived in different geographic communities within Sydney, had to liaise between workshop sessions to discuss character and story line development. They tapped into each other's cultural backgrounds and experiences as migrants. The intensity of the creative process built trust and respect within the group around their shared values and life experiences. The participants explained:

We became more friendly because we shared parts of our lives...sometimes there are parts of your life that you don't share with other people. But in that project it was everybody throwing emotions and experiences in and sharing them together...

I didn't feel alone [any more] because all the time I'd felt alone — in the car, on the train, even if I went out with people — I felt alone...because I couldn't express myself...

The most valuable experience was to show other people — Australian people — how we live, where we come from and where we are now...²⁰

The public readings and performance of the play brought the women into contact with numerous other people interested in who they were and what they had achieved. The stories in the play presented insights into many of their collective experiences as women migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. The public voice and recognition of their views, was a powerful experience and one which created new social networks and a greater sense of belonging to many different communities. In this case study respondents recorded positive value ratings to these community development indicators as follows:

Improved understanding of different cultures and lifestyles	100%
Established networks of on-going value	92%

3.5 IMPROVING PUBLIC FACILITIES

Case Study: Queensland Neighbourhood Centre

The project involved the community working with an artist and landscape architect, to design and create landscaping and artworks around their community centre. Upon completion the centre was surrounded with a beautiful landscaped garden, with play areas for children, ceramic tile pathways and verandahs, small sculptures nestling into the garden, a stunning sculptured fence, plus a community vegetable patch and orchard. As the community centre was situated in a low socio-economic area, this transformation created quite an impact. Many residents in the area are transient, in search of work and affordable housing. For those taking part, working collaboratively to complete such an inspiring project, generated a strong sense of self esteem and group pride. It also generated confidence in the knowledge that they could achieve something significant by working together.

The participants believe the experience of coming together to contribute to creating a community facility, brought residents out to meet each other and provided them with something in common to focus on. It created a symbol for what they could achieve together and communicated this to others, both within and outside their community. In this case study respondents recorded positive value ratings to these community development indicators as follows:

Improved public facilities	92%
Developed local enterprise	71%

3.6 BUILDING AND DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES: OVERALL RESULTS

These case study experiences were consistent throughout the study. Over all case studies, average results for these community development indicators were as follows:

Developed community identity	86%
Decreased social isolation	74%
Improved recreational options	74%
Developed local enterprise	47%
Improved public facilities	47%

This trend was also reflected in the national findings, with the national average response to these indicators being consistent with the case study findings as illustrated below.

Developed community identity	90%
Decreased social isolation	86%
Improved recreational options	77%
Developed local enterprise	48%
Improved public facilities	50%

In periods of reducing government support for public services and an increasing reliance on market forces to produce solutions, there is a greater need for communities to find new ways express their

collective values and to address their employment, education, health and housing issues. Those communities without a strong community culture, with poor community structures and networks, who have no voice to articulate their beliefs and values, with weak community leadership and no skills in working collaboratively are also likely to be the most disadvantaged.

4.1 SOCIAL CHANGE

Community arts projects are catalysts for expressing alternative views of groups and communities and for driving social change. Community based arts projects commonly produce the following outcomes:

- **Raised public awareness of an issue**
- **Inspired action on a social issue**
- **Improved understanding of different cultures or lifestyles**
- **Generated employment**
- **Increased public safety**

The processes of creating or strengthening communities, and developing social capital, frequently generate the desire for social change. While governments work to improve social systems, their motivation usually comes as a response to community opinion. Community opinion however, is largely a concept, a *perception* of the dominant beliefs, and strongly influenced by the dominant cultural values. Culture is about the creation of meaning, and in a non-interventionist, or market economy, the control of meaning will be in those sections of society with the most resources, and they will naturally control meaning to their own advantage. So social change will be most influenced by those with the most powerful 'voice'.

Community cultural expression is an *essential* component in the evolution and expression of a national culture. The greater our exposure to other views of the world of human experience, the better we understand ourselves as individuals, communities and societies: open and diverse cultural expression enables a broad range of views and beliefs to be communicated. As population grows, social organization systems and information sources tend to distil diversity into 'generalities', in an effort to process the volume of people and activity. While this may suit the needs and interests of the 'average' person, it cannot encompass diversity. The affirmation of diversity and the struggle for meaningful pluralism is an indicator of a democratic culture.

It is at a community level that diversity can flourish, where new views can arise to effect change or challenge established views. Community culture plays a key role in fostering cultural diversity, it is a fundamental element in the expression of cultural values, and social interaction is a requirement for this expression to occur.

Community based, collaborative artistic expression is one of the most powerful ways that cultural diversity is expressed and community values communicated. Community arts projects are highly effective in **communicating ideas and information** and **increasing awareness and understanding of different cultures and lifestyles**, two of the indicators already discussed in this paper.

Community arts projects can also be powerful catalysts for driving social change. The following two case study extracts demonstrate examples of these concepts at work.

4.2 RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS OF AN ISSUE.

CASE STUDY: WOMEN EX OFFENDERS' THEATRE COMPANY, MELBOURNE

This project was a group developed theatre performance by a group of women ex-offenders, exploring issues of drug abuse, imprisonment and social isolation. The production led to a remarkable chain of events: educating school children, parents, prison officers and magistrates on issues of drug addiction; and irrevocably changing the lives of the participants.

The group, now a company called *Somebody's Daughter*, was made up of women in various stages of post-release from Fairlea Women's Prison in Melbourne. The group had formed strong working relationships with the project artists through involvement in workshops and performances at Fairlea, over a ten year period prior to this project. The formation of a group outside of prison walls had been a long held dream of the women. This project was to be the realization of that ambition.

The project had very clear aims which included: artistic development for the women in the group; empowerment of a disadvantaged and marginalized group by giving them a public voice; and raising public awareness of issues relating to the group.

The production told the real stories of the women in the group: how drug addiction had led them to imprisonment; how they had to make a choice about what they wanted from their lives; how this sometimes meant losing friendships; and how some people aren't able to overcome their addiction.

It also told of the difficulties of readjustment on release from prison and provided insights into the life issues which contributed to the women becoming drug dependant and imprisoned. The production's undeniable truths told simply through the story of four main characters made an unforgettable experience for the audiences. School children who tuned out in drug education sessions, became caught up in the characters' stories and learned much that they would not normally hear.

The educational value of the stories they had to tell, was not only for young people, but also for parents and others working with drug dependant people. One group member observed.

*It was really good for people who are connected with addicts in some way, to have a look at what really goes on, because with their own children there's too much pain [to be able to see clearly].*²¹

The value of the project in delivering a drug education message was recognized immediately by stakeholders and the group quickly gained support from charitable trusts to remount the production for a second season, particularly for schools.

The performance also challenged stereotyped ideas and the labeling of people as criminals or drug addicts. The women were well aware how being labeled can keep people stuck in a phase of their life. One woman commented:

*For us, it was an opportunity to use our skills to reach a lot of people and [try] to break down some of those stereotyped beliefs...We haven't got two heads — we're normal everyday human beings. You know 80% of women go to prison because of drug related offences. But when did their sentence start? Usually way back when they are in their early teens or being abused as children. People need to know that.*²²

The group was invited to perform and facilitate workshop discussions for a training program, Working With Women Prisoners. They also performed for an audience of 40 magistrates. The script was selected in Victoria for the Theatre Studies and Drama Review List and was studied by secondary school students. The group performed inside women's prisons in Victoria, and became a beacon for women in prison, as a body which could speak up for them. When the government mounted a proposal to close Fairlea women's prison and merge it with a male prison facility, *Somebody's Daughter* utilized their public profile in the media to effectively highlight the issues. The proposal was subsequently squashed and the company was acknowledged as a significant voice in representing the issues for women prisoners in the debate.

Another educational benefit that nobody had anticipated, related to the children of the women who had been in prison. These children participated in the art workshops with their mums. During chance conversations in these sessions it became clear that the children held all types of misconceptions about their mother's imprisonment, and important points of view that their mothers were unaware of. The children's views were voiced through drawings and prose in a booklet titled *When I Grew Up I Understood Everything*. The publication itself is a powerful educational tool which illustrates the urgent need for reform of the prison system, and a more enlightened approach to drug addiction issues.

The project also had enormous long term beneficial social outcomes for the women in the group. The value of a strong sense of group belonging, developing self esteem, coming to terms with personal unacknowledged trauma, gaining public acceptance for who they are and for four members of the

group, overcoming heroin addiction, literally changed people's lives. The Director made this observation:

I don't think I anticipated the benefits [in terms of drug addiction] would be so marked because of how hard it is to give up. But to see the profound effect on four people, it was huge. I was stunned at that, and frightened in a way too, because it appalls me to see how little is required. ²³

This project had a huge ripple effect, in what it had to say to its audiences, and how those audiences were affected, and in positively changing the lives of the women who were involved. Members of the group reflected that their talents coupled with what they had to say, constituted a potent force for personal transformation and social change. The group went on to attract further funding and sponsorship support and mounted a second production *Call My Name*, in 1994. This production included in the cast, two of the daughters whose lives had been dramatically affected by their mother's imprisonment.

Following its Melbourne season, *Call My Name*, began touring interstate. *Somebody's Daughter* continues to mount projects whenever it can attract resources to support its work.

In this case study respondents recorded positive value ratings to these social change indicators as follows:

Raised public awareness of an issue	100%
Lessened social isolation	100%
Inspired action on a social issue	95%

4.3 IMPROVING PLANNING AND DESIGN FOR PUBLIC SPACES.

CASE STUDY: INNER CITY CHILDREN'S FARM, MELBOURNE

The farm is situated on the banks of the Yarra River in inner-city Melbourne. It is used as a recreational and environmental education facility by residents, schools and casual visitors of all types. The site has never been developed other than for farming and has open paddocks, vegetable patches, animal runs, and an array of rustic farm buildings, riverbank fishing and picnic areas. It is situated on crown land and is managed by a committee elected from the community.

The project aimed to: develop community participation in a planning and design process for the farm; create opportunities for the community to express their vision for the site; and secure a management focus for the farm's future.

Three consultants, an artist and two landscape architects, were employed to facilitate a community consultation and develop design plans for the site. The participants believe that the major long term benefit of the project was the validation of the farm's management style, gaining a clear direction for its future and the ability to confidently articulate this vision. One of the groups observed:

*It'd always been a bit of a mystery how the farm came to be such a lovely place without any professional people actually making it that way. Clarifying some of that mystery and how things could be changed without destroying that, was an important part of the project.*²⁴

As a result of the educational experience of working with the project consultants, the staff and committee not only gained confidence in what they already knew about the farm, they also learned a great deal about environmental design principles and language. They could now talk about the principles and values of the farm site in a convincing way.

Inspired by their new found confidence and good ideas, the farm management set about developing some key sites on the farm, the first being the main entrance way. During this exercise they had to work co-operatively with local government council engineers, who were skeptical of the farm's environmentally friendly approach to the site management, their technical ability, and the incorporation of artworks into the construction. By the end of the gateway project the council engineers were on-side and supportive of the farm's management approach, and interested in some of the ideas and methods they had been introduced to. A group member observed:

*Council saw the farm do a project which was large scale, innovative, involved solving some engineering problems in partnership with council, and came up with a really attractive artistic solution. It was launched by the Mayor and our local federal member. It was good for the farm's relationship with council which is one of its principal funders.*²⁵

The farm provided an excellent example of an alternative approach to creative design for public facilities which the council's community arts officer, with support from the engineers, used to inspire several new council projects to improve other public facilities.

The short story here is, that since this project, the farm has continued to develop and grow stronger and has managed to prevent short sighted urban development destroying this unique asset. This is a major achievement as the land is considered by many as much too valuable in a monetary sense, for such recreational and educational activities. The farm committee have sought and won further funding based on their successful track record of innovative creative development. They have managed to move their position from one of underdog in the eyes of government agencies, to that of a model of a well informed, well managed, valuable public asset, named by the State government as one of the features making Melbourne a livable city.

This project not only significantly improved the farm's management efficiency and influenced government's attitudes towards a community facility, it also was a major factor in preserving the farm for present and future generations to enjoy.

In this case study respondents recorded positive value ratings to these social change indicators as follows:

Improved planning and design for public spaces	100%
Inspired action on a social issue	75%
Improved understanding of different cultures or lifestyles.	75%

4.4 ACTIVATING SOCIAL CHANGE: OVERALL RESULTS

Community arts projects which set out to achieve a social change outcome were very successful in producing the positive results they aimed for. Over all case studies, the average positive results for these social change indicators were as follows:

Raised public awareness of an issue	88%
Inspired action on a social issue	62%
Improved understanding of different cultures or lifestyles	80%
Generated employment	49%
Increased public safety	44%

The national average response to these indicators was consistent with the case study findings as illustrated below.

Raised public awareness of an issue	90%
Inspired action on a social issue	57%
Improved understanding of different cultures or lifestyles	82%
Generated employment	45%
Increased public safety	38%

These results validate the impact of artistic expression in creating social and cultural change from a community base. This impact can be experienced at a local, regional or national level as illustrated by the two examples above. The findings from *Creating Social Capital*, illustrate the strong link between, community, culture and social change. According to Cohen, community is a phenomenon of culture and is meaningfully constructed by people through their creativity, symbolic prowess and resources:

The myth of inevitable conformity suggests that the outward spread of cultural influences from the centre will make communities on the periphery less like their former selves — will dissipate their distinctive cultures...These culturally imperialistic influences will move outwards along the tracks of mass media, of mass information, of spreading infrastructure, of mass production, national marketing and consumerism, ushering in a monolithic culture which will transform behavior. ... [These views] assume that people can have their culture stripped away...they assume people are somehow passive in relation to culture: they receive it, transmit it, but do not create it... [These views] ignore the indigenous creativity with which communities work on externally imposed change.²⁶

The degree to which communities can work creatively to counteract unwanted externally imposed change, depends on the resources at their disposal. This includes, artistic skills, community leadership skills, money, networks, venues and facilities. All of the community arts projects researched in *Creating Social Capital* would not have occurred without some form of financial support. In these cases, it was supplied through federal government arts funding. All of the projects researched generated extremely valuable outcomes for their communities, some with far reaching consequences. Those communities most financially impoverished, will also be those most oppressed and silenced in the ongoing business of cultural interaction. Without resources for cultural production their ability to bring their views or values into the processes of social interaction is seriously undermined and at worst, made impossible.

5.1 HUMAN CAPITAL

One of the major residual benefits from community based, collaborative artistic production is in developing human capital. The following indicators are common human capital outcomes from community arts projects:

- **Improved communication skills**
- **Increased ability in planning and organizing**
- **Increased problem solving skills**
- **Improved ability to collect, organize and analyze information**
- **Developed creative talents**

Before examining the human capital outcomes from community arts projects in more detail, it is important to explore the concept of 'learning for human development'. This concept starts with the recognition of the essential life long learning experiences we undertake as social beings in a changing world. It proposes that as people develop their potential, they encounter two types of life learning — or learning for human development. They are firstly, the learning necessary for self renewal and secondly the learning necessary for personal transformation.

...human beings change as they grow — they have different questions of meaning; society and culture change and their questions change with those changes; experiences change and the questions emerge yet again.²⁷

These changes can be because of life events being encountered or various life stages, and it can also engage different focal points or reference points for learning. In *Approaches to Adult Education for Human Development*, Willis²⁸ suggests that there are four major focal points:

Personal, relating to a personal sense of self; Ecological, relating as a biological being in the eco-environment; Social, relating to life as an individual linked or opposed to others in social relationship; Political: relating to life as a member of gender, race or class groups, linked or opposed to other groups.

These points are further elaborated:

The personal: Awareness at this level of consciousness turns people's attention to the way they construct themselves as persons: how they take on or discard habits of thought and action.

The ecological: Awareness at the ecological focus point of consciousness is when people think of themselves as ecological beings, engaging with the material universe, in which they create and which enriches or restrains their opportunities and choices. Ecological consciousness is also linked to environmental consciousness which turns people's attention to the way they occupy space and shelter, consume food and oxygen, and shape the natural environment by [their activities and production]

The social: Awareness at this focus point of consciousness turns people's attention to the way they are located in and affected by existing social relationships and how they create and engage in new ones.

The political: Awareness at this focal point of consciousness turns people's attention to the way they are located in and affected by existing political groupings and the inequalities between them. It can also involve reflection on how these relationships are created, the morality of the inequality between such political groups and how they can be made more equitable.²⁹

Learning for human development is a vital and complementary learning experience to traditional education. Traditional education is about transferring information, values, skills and disciplines that will maintain the *present* order of society. Learning for human development helps people critically evaluate and gain greater personal insights and understanding of the world around them. It also develops the confidence and skills to be an active participant in that world. Aspirations for social

transformation are born as people come to see their potential as ‘creators for culture, history and an alternative social vision.’³⁰

[There is a] distinction, but not dichotomy, between education to meet economic development goals and education to meet individual and social development goals. [The goal of education for social development] at a personal level, is to enhance one’s understanding of and control over some aspect of the life environment. At a community level, it is to enhance the quality of community life and the capacity of adults to operate competently as citizens of the body politic, and as members of family and community groups.³¹

In *Creating Social Capital*, Williams found that community based arts projects were catalysts for experiential learning. The types of learning experiences that participants described, closely relate to the renewal, critical reflection and transformation experiences which characterize learning for human development.

Williams found that the learning for human development outcomes generated through community based arts projects were influenced by four major impacts.

- The impact of experiential learning — seeing something differently
- The impact of defining or re-defining — knowing what is meaningful
- The impact of finding a voice — naming what is important
- The impact of knowing how to take action — making the changes needed

When combined, these impacts represent the experiences of critical reflection, renewal and transformation. In all case study projects, participants recounted examples of groups of people developing new skills and understandings. These were generated through experiential learning, critical reflection and in articulating shared values, new insights or visions for the future. Case study respondents were also able to describe how their projects inspired further social or community action towards a shared goal. A selection of three case study examples follow.

5.2 ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Case Study: Inner City Children’s Farm (2)

During this project, members of the community, the farm management committee members and the staff engaged in creative workshops in an attempt to articulate the essential qualities or values they felt were embodied in the farm. As a result of these experiences, the participants’ knowledge of the site and the values it embodied for them were reaffirmed. Through the process they also reflected on their role in preserving the site and protecting it from unwanted development. Together the staff and management committee learned more effective language to describe their vision for the farm. This counter balanced existing power relationships and enhanced communication with government bodies who could either assist them or undermine them in their vision for the farm’s future. A participant reflected that since the project:

*We have a much stronger sense of our ability to determine our own future — in terms of the value of what we’re doing, how we’re managing the land, and the value of the services we’re providing. It’s also given us the confidence to deal with external forces that seem to come in a never ending stream, wanting to change the farm.*³²

In this case study respondents recorded a positive value rating to the following human capital indicators:

Improved communication skills	88%
Increased ability in planning and organizing	88%
Improved ability to collect, organize and analyze information	76%
Increased problem solving skills	75%

5.3 SOCIAL AND POLITICAL AWARENESS

Case Study: Residents Mural Project (2)

The project engaged residents in the process of designing and applying a mural on a large factory wall overlooking a residential area. Participants believed that through this project, they began to see the social and political issues affecting their recreational and environmental needs quite differently. They began to realize that their community had suffered the pollution that had come with various industries, and as these industries went, the pollution had stayed on in their lives. They began to recognize that the site they were working on was a form of passive pollution, which through the mural; they converted into a thing of beauty for their community. As people got involved they realized they could effect real change towards a preferred future, different from that on offer from their local government authority. One participant summed the learning experience as:

*The mural project showed people that you can make things happen for your community without necessarily being in a position of power — the power of the group could be strong.*³³

This project also provided the opportunity for some key people to learn and develop skills in applying for arts funding, political campaigning, community consultation, and in public presentation of information. The reaffirmation of their values, coupled with new skills, forged the way for the community to establish a co-operative working partnership with council and achieve their vision for a recreational reserve. In this case study respondents recorded a positive value rating to the following human capital indicators:

Improved communication skills	95%
Increased ability in planning and organizing	95%
Developed creative talents	90%
Improved ability to collect, organize and analyze information	75%
Increased problem solving skills	72%

5.4 PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL AWARENESS

Case Study: Women Ex Offenders' Theatre Company (2)

This project was an extraordinary catalyst for human capital outcomes. For the participants, the project was a major life altering influence. Working through creative workshops, the women were able to reflect on the life experiences which had led them to being imprisoned, and all the associated trauma and inequities these experiences held. One young woman observed the impact on her:

*[Just] having a voice [in theatre]...I was speaking for so many people and that was a real privilege, and in the beginning really, really hard...I didn't have a voice my whole life and I felt I wasn't worth anything. I was just a junkie...Since then I haven't used drugs. So much has happened since then. I have a different life, I speak differently, my politics are different. I didn't even know who I was then. I'm not saying I know who I am now, but I like myself now.*³⁴

The creative workshop process required the women to reflect back on their experiences, and share these often painful memories with the group. Through this process of reflection and analysis, the women were able to develop other perspectives of their experiences which escalated them out of a cycle of confusion, self loathing and despair. All the participants saw this project as a major catalyst for personal and social transformation, and one which created significant political impact. One participant commented:

*These are our experiences in life and we do want to be somebody who can speak out about them and not remain a victim to them: the sexual abuse, the drug use, the institutionalization.*³⁵

The director summed up the impact of the project on the participants in this comment:

In the end, people are only empowered if they [act] for themselves — while they've got someone talking for them they don't move on. ³⁶

In this case study respondents recorded a positive value rating to the following human capital indicators:

Improved communication skills	95%
Increased ability in planning and organizing	94%
Improved ability to collect, organize and analyze information	82%
Increased problem solving skills	88%
Developed creative talents	94%

5.5 OVERALL POSITIVE IMPACT RATINGS FOR THE CASE STUDY PROJECTS

It would seem likely that regardless of what community arts projects set out to achieve they are very successful in developing human capital. Over all case studies, the average positive results for these human capital indicators were as follows:

Improved communication skills	92%
Increased ability in planning and organizing	86%
Improved ability to collect, organize and analyze information	80%
Increased problem solving skills	74%
Developed creative talents	91%

5.6 NATIONAL SURVEY OVERALL RATINGS

The national average response to these indicators was consistent with the case study findings as illustrated below.

Improved communication skills	95%
Increased ability in planning and organizing	90%
Improved ability to collect, organize and analyze information	86%
Increased problem solving skills	82%
Developed creative talents	93%

The group interaction inherent in community based arts projects provided the opportunity for people to gain wider social perspectives and helped them clarify their thoughts and/or decide what action they wanted to take. The action could relate to their own needs, that of a particular group or community or the broader society. The process of reflection is often most effective when done in a cooperative creative group environment, as generated in community based arts projects. In this environment members are more able to challenge 'commonsense assumptions' and other internalized social and cultural values from different perspectives.

Although creating art through a collaborative process may be the group goal, the meaning this experience has for individuals will differ. The group may use the learning experience to challenge social structures or reaffirm commitment to shared values. For individuals the learning experience might generate the impetus for significant life change or provide the skills and insights to advance their work or personal life goals. However it is put to use, in these times of rapid social, economic and industrial change, the human capital generated by participating in these arts projects is a rich resource.

6.1 ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

Existing economic indicators are inadequate for measuring the value of artistic activity or community cultural development. What is the monetary value of a cohesive community for example, or a high level of social capital? The inadequacy of the dominant economic indicators, along with governments that require the arts to be justified in economic terms, frequently causes one or both of the following responses: to try to make a convincing case for how arts activity meets government economic imperatives; or to dismiss those economic policies as irrelevant. Eva Cox makes this observation about the current Australian trend to argue artistic activity in the context of industry, in an attempt to relate to government economic imperatives.

...The arts industry — note the word — feels compelled to justify its funding by pointing to its capacity to employ people, its export potential, and even its capacity as a marketing tool to promote a national identity. These justifications neutralize any opposition from Treasury and Finance. They make the bean counters feel secure. However the emphasis on industry undermines our capacity to see the arts as an area where we explore creativity for its own sake; where we enjoy participating in activities even if they are not professionally saleable. Creative outputs are more than their resale value.³⁷

The second option mentioned above, that of withdrawing or dismissing the argument, fails to generate or feed a more enlightened debate necessary for change toward a better system of economic measures. A useful observation about these dilemmas is made by Belinda Probert as follows:

In public debate, the most common response is to try to counterpoise human, social or environmental perspectives to the economic — the argument that ‘economics is not everything’, or that we have other policy objectives, such as social justice, which must be set against economic imperatives. But this strategy leaves us as supplicants...

Economists have successfully established their self-definition; an economist is one who speaks rationally about the production and distribution of material welfare. The rest of us are special pleaders or merely represent vested interests.

The transformation of economic theory into theology has had the effect of bludgeoning everyone except business representatives and economists into silence. But it is precisely this question of what is left out of the dominant definitions of what counts as ‘the economy’ which needs our attention. This question is a more strategic one than the attempt to down play the significance of the economy vis a vis other equally abstract conceptions of society or social values.³⁸

Answers to the question, *what is left out of the dominant definitions of what counts as the economy?*, would include among many others: environmental conservation; peace; unpaid labor; artistic activity; as well as social capital, community development, enlightened social change, and human capital as described in earlier chapters of this paper. But why are these things left out of the indicators or definitions of what counts as the economy? The economy isn’t a thing that exists as a whole, it is merged with social, cultural and political activities. All economic policies and economic solutions have underlying social values. The challenge is to draw attention to the limits of the value system underpinning the economic frameworks of our times. Economic imperatives are informed by the dominant cultural and political values, not the other way around. When the present economists decide to fight inflation first, they have made a social decision that they are not interested in the human costs of the unemployment they create.

The debate about what is left out of economic indicators, is not fixed in economic theory, it is fixed in the dominant social and cultural values, and change will ultimately be motivated by political will. Creative expression at community level is one way for articulating the cultural values people want enshrined in public policy, and want reflected in economic frameworks.

Notwithstanding the problems in measuring the economic value of community based arts projects, Williams found that survey respondents could identify many links between the impact of community arts projects, and the economic indicators that were provided. These indicators were primarily

concerned with cost savings in public expenditure. The national survey recorded the following positive responses to public cost savings indicators.

People who considered that cost savings in public expenditure had been produced through:

Improved consultation between government and community	66%
Improved planning for or design of public spaces	46%
Improved developing public facilities	50%
Prevention of crime	38%

Most projects in the study sample did not set out to achieve economic outcomes, but could still identify links to economic benefits. Projects most able to assess economic impacts were those with clear aims concerning improvements to public facilities, exploring industry issues, or social issues relating to the incidence of criminal behavior.

For example the Inner City Children's Farm case study described in earlier chapters, recorded extremely high positive responses to the following indicators for cost savings in public expenditure.

Improved consultation between government and community	75%
Improved planning for or design of public spaces	100%
Improved developing public facilities	75%

The **Women Ex-offenders Theatre Company** case study also previously described, recorded positive responses to indicators concerned with social issues relating to the incidence of criminal behavior, or the process of rehabilitation

Prevented crime	70%
Led to employment	88%
Developed local enterprise	70%

Unpaid labour

All the case study projects examined in *Creating Social Capital* were effective in attracting resources for community cultural development outcomes. The vast majority of community based arts projects, typified by those surveyed in the study, operate predominantly on a voluntary basis. This means that the outcomes being delivered by this work, and described in this paper, are largely generated as a result of unpaid labor. Within the current economic frameworks this productivity is invisible and consequently not counted.

Business investment

Secondary to this, is the volume of resources supplied on an in-kind basis as sponsorship. This typically includes things such as: loaned equipment; donated materials; loaned vehicles; free publicity, or sponsorship in the form of discounted services, and donated professional services in accounting, law or technical services, for example. Within the current economic frameworks these services are invisible and consequently not counted as business investments in community based arts production.

Investments in the arts

Apart from developing artistic talents and inspiring further work of artistic merit, community based arts projects also generate support for and appreciation of the traditional or the fine arts. When asked if their exposure to the community arts project had increased their appreciation of the arts, 85% of *Creating Social Capital* respondents believed that it had. This level of positive impact was consistent for the project participants (89%) as well as the community observers (81%). Around half of those who developed a greater appreciation believed they had attended more theatre, exhibitions or arts events, or bought more art, craft or books as a result. Within the current economic frameworks the capacity to expand markets for artistic product is invisible and not counted.

A successful project is likely to have a considerable impact in generating support for the arts, locally and further afield. Many community based arts projects generate high levels of participation in artistic workshops and performance, or as audiences, volunteers and local sponsors, positively affecting

participants and the wider community, in favor of the arts. Approximately 60% of respondents believed that the impact of the community arts project in question generated further support for community arts projects from other stakeholders.

Within the current economic frameworks this capacity to attract increased investment in the arts is invisible and not counted.

Overwhelmingly, respondents said they would recommend projects like these to other communities, and believed that funding community based arts projects was a valuable investment of the public arts dollar. Politicians and political parties with an over reliance on economic performance, will fail to recognize and capitalize on the immense popularity that community based arts funding programs has with their constituents.

In short, *Creating Social Capital* found that successful community based arts projects were effective at generating new arts markets, attracting non-arts funding and sponsorship to employ artists to work with communities, and attracting significant levels of business investment in the form of donated goods and services.

Over all, the national survey recorded an average positive response to these indicators for the arts economy as follows

Developed further work of artistic merit	90%
Increased sales for art work or developed audiences	56%
Attracted further resources for community arts projects	61%
Increased appreciation of the arts	85%

Factors for Success

Williams found that there were several factors influencing a successful outcome for community based arts projects and generating long term benefits such as discussed in this paper.

A creative arts focus: maintaining a creative arts focus to cultural development projects.

Clear outcomes: clearly stated outcomes for all aspects of the project covering all stakeholder perspectives.

Successful risk taking: support for participants to set and achieve artistic and social challenges.

Cooperation and trust: creating a climate of group ownership, trust and co-operation.

Artistic collaboration: artists working as collaborators in achieving all the project goals.

Pride in the result: generating a sense of group pride in the collective artistic achievement.

Audience impact: an artistic product that inspires its target audiences.

Clearly stated expectations

The first and most important was starting with a clear understanding among all project stakeholders that they were embarking on a creative *arts* project with other social or educational benefits. This was essential for keeping the focus on exploring individual artistic expression during the project. Broad social, educational or economic outcomes were generated from the impact of the collaborative artistic experience. This was most enhanced when the creative development process supported and fostered the participants' artistic expression and showcased their expression in a well structured artistic design. The artistic goals were defined in relation to the cultural context and purpose of the project. The greatest positive impact occurred when the artistic abilities in the group were stretched to achieve the shared artistic vision, and this vision was creatively communicated to audiences.

Meaningful levels of participation

Successful projects provided the opportunity for participants to take up artistic or social challenges that also contributed to achieving the goals set for the project. This type of successful risk taking directly generated the human capital outcomes and contributed to the social capital outcomes.

Group ownership, trust and co-operation

Participants identified that developing a climate of trust within the group was critical to the artistic, educational and social outcomes. This generated a safe environment for a creative development process in which a broad exchange of creative ideas could be explored without ridicule or censorship. Group trust and a sense of project ownership were most successfully built where the leadership and facilitation styles were appropriate to support the evolving group maturity and levels of ability.

Pride in artistic achievement

Creating a meaningful and inspiring artistic result was at the heart of every successful project. Artistic quality was defined by participants as how the finished work affected them and their community, and how the art work embodied or represented what they set out to achieve together. This included achieving a more ambitious or complex artistic result than what they had imagined prior to embarking on the project. Pride in the final achievement consolidated and validated what was learned during the process.

Artists as collaborators

The artistic abilities of the professional artists were cited as a critical factor for success, followed by their ability as a creative facilitator. This was underpinned however, by the degree to which the artists applied their skills towards achieving all *the project goals*, not just the artistic goals. The most successful projects were those in which the artist(s) developed a teamwork dynamic where participants could take up the degree of challenge they wanted. This approach was most likely to tap into and foster emerging artistic talents among the participants, which in turn strengthened the integrity of the artistic outcome.

7.1 OTHER FACTORS UNDERPINNING SUCCESSFUL RESOURCING

The degree of goodwill that is developed within other allied local or regional organizations and networks

Project resources were obtained through a mix of funding, sponsorship, in-kind support and volunteer time. Without high levels of goodwill from a broad base of allied organizations and networks, the resource pool is likely to be too small or unable to sustain the demand.

•The degree of investment by other stakeholders in the long term outcomes;

When a deeper appreciation of the long term outcomes of the work was developed among stakeholders, it created opportunities for a partnership approach to resourcing future initiatives building on the long term potential of the work.

•The capacity to develop community leadership;

Where there were poor leadership skills, or leadership was vested in too few people, it was frequently too difficult to sustain the commitment to longer term goals.

The existing frameworks for assessing the value of community based arts practice are inadequate. The traditional or fine arts paradigm does not extend to embrace the concepts of cultural democracy, social capital or learning for human development. Yet the function of art in society is much more than the body of products created by a few, for public entertainment or private art collections.

The collaborative production of art is central to: expressing community culture; developing human and social capital; building and re-building communities; and transforming minds, organizations and society. Yet there are many people who would not even consider these outcomes as being even remotely associated with the arts or the role of government.

Economic frameworks are unable to measure the dollar value of social cohesion, count the monetary returns from people realizing their potential or the productivity gains associated with self determination. The idea of the *method* of working — the way we do things — being a valuable product in itself, is many years away.

The social and economic challenges of the twenty first century will demand attention to a balance between productivity and social maintenance. A continuing over emphasis on commercial productivity will increase the risks associated in leaving insufficient time and resources for the other half of the equation — social relationships. There is much evidence to suggest that productivity and wealth are increased as a result of greater attention being paid to how to improve the way people work together, build relationships and create their futures together.

Community cultural development is one element in a convergence of disciplines that are progressively forming stronger connections— art, eco-environment, education, human rights and spirituality — all operating from the central point of cultural values. Without an articulated framework for cultural objectives, art, eco-environment, education, human rights and spirituality are all subservient to the current approach to economics, a poor measure for these issues.

This paper has explored how the experience of community is fundamental to cultural expression, along with the space for social interaction and the resources for artistic production. How societies create organizational structures able to resource these activities and evaluate outcomes, is a key question of our times. Cohesive communities are not created by outside planners and ‘professionals’, they emerge out of collaboration and a shared commitment.

We need to acknowledge community art as an important catalyst for cultural development and that this is a valid role of art in society. This requires evaluation frameworks able to reflect the scope and outcomes of the work, some of which have been discussed in this paper.

This paper suggests that key outcome areas for the arts in community cultural development are:

Outcome Areas**Indicators**

Building and developing communities

- Stronger sense of community identity
- A decrease in people experiencing social isolation
- Improved recreational options for community
- Development of local or community enterprises.
- Improvements to, and increased use of, public facilities

Increasing social capital

- Improved levels of communication in community.
- Improved levels of community planning and organisation.
- Greater tolerance of different cultures or lifestyles.
- Improved standards of consultation between government and community.
- Increased appreciation of community culture.

Activating social change

- Increased community awareness of an issue.
- Community action to resolve a social issue.
- Greater tolerance of different cultures or lifestyles.
- Increase in local or community employment options.
- Increased levels of public safety.

Developing human capital

- Improved communication skills
- Improved ability to plan and organise
- Improved problem solving abilities
- Improved ability to collect, sort and analyse information
- Improved creative ability

Improving economic performance

- Cost savings in public services or programs.
- Increase in local or community employment options.
- Improved standards of consultation between government and community.
- Development of local or community enterprises.
- Increased business investment in community cultural development
- Increased resources attracted into community and spent locally.

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