All Party Group: Culture and Wellbeing

11th December 2013

The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the role of evidence about wellbeing and cultural activities, and how it might be used to:

* Provide an argument to increase spending on culture
* Prioritise that spending

# Witnesses

* Tony Butler, Happy Museum
* Daniel Fujiwara, London School of Economics and Happy Museum
* Charlotte Jones, Independent Theatre Council
* Alan Davey, Arts Council
* Gareth Maeer, Heritage Lottery Fund
* Dave O’Brien, City University London

# Group members

* Helen Goodman
* Alan Howarth
* David Lammy (Chair)

Minutes

The meeting began with presentations from each of the witnesses, followed by questions from the group members and audience.

# Witness Presentations

## Tony Butler, Happy Museum

* There is a strong link between communal wellbeing and environmental stewardship.
* Happy Museum carries out work that aims to change the practice of how museums work. Happy Museum understands museums as:
  + Sanctuaries from commercial messages
  + Places where people can build relationships and connections with other people and with objects
  + Places where people can be immersed in culture, which enhances their wellbeing
  + Vehicles via which individuals can give back to the community – either by volunteering at the museum, or co-producing the museum
* Happy Museum has given direct funding and support to implement changes in 22 museums, including:
  + Manchester Museum, where playfulness experts created “play spaces”
  + The Silk Mill, Derby, which hosted a “Remake the museum” project, where visitors were encouraged to tinker with objects and redesign the museum
  + Godalming Museum, Surrey, which made links with community organisations, such that the museum was psychologically owned by the community, who co-produced the museum
  + Woodhorn Mining Museum, which appointed a comedian-in-residence to engage people with the exhibitions

## Daniel Fujiwara, London School of Economics and Happy Museum

* Daniel’s work is concerned with how wellbeing measures can impact on policy analysis
* In the UK, we use cost benefit analysis to assess policy value, traditionally using willingness to pay, subjective wellbeing scores, and objective measures such as life expectancy. Using subjective wellbeing scores instead can be superior because it asks people about how they feel in the moment, or satisfied they are, rather than willingness to pay, which depends on a projection of how one might feel.
* At Happy Museum, they have used subjective wellbeing scores to determine the monetary value of visiting a museum. They do this by describing the impact of visiting a museum on an individual’s reported subjective wellbeing in terms of the equivalent income increase required to achieve the same wellbeing gain. They found that:
  + Visiting museums is valued at £3,200 per year per individual
  + Participating in arts is valued at £1,500 per year per individual
  + Being an audience to dance performances is valued at £2,000 per year per individual
* Such findings can be expanded and used to perform cost benefit analysis of policies to see whether or not policies produce a net benefit to society. This could be used to help with allocation of funds to the culture budget, for example by comparing the impact in terms of wellbeing of spending on culture to spending on other services (such as cleaning the streets etc.).
* We don’t have fine-grained enough data yet to assess the different impacts of different activities, but Daniel is working on an app to collect this data.

## Charlotte Jones, Independent Theatre Council

* In 2005 the Independent Theatre Council created a wellbeing panel. The concept of “measuring what matters” stuck in people’s minds as a result of the panel.
* They though that wellbeing could be used as a way to measure the intrinsic value as opposed to instrumental value of theatre performances.
* The Independent Theatre Council created a “Capturing Audience Experience” tool in conjunction with the new economics foundation. The tool got artists thinking about what the purpose of their work is. The tool is available on their website as a pack which others can use.
* They have found that the tool has been received well because it was created and owned by the theatre sector (importantly, not top-down arts council intervention), and audiences have engaged with the tool because they like to answer the kinds of questions that it asks.
* The Independent Theatre Council sees it as a useful piece of the jigsaw on how to piece together the role of wellbeing in the sector, and is interested in how the tool could be adapted to work across other cultural sectors.

## Alan Davey, Arts Council

* The Arts Council has yo-yoed between valuing the intrinsic and instrumental value of art. They don’t want to stray from the question of the quality of art itself.
* In the next twelve months, they are investigating the impact of culture in terms of social and economic effects.
* They want there to be something for all audiences to reflect need for different funders, such as social or health services, and they feel that they need to better equip art organisations to argue for their impact.
* A problem that they experience is that people’s belief in, and willingness to engage with arts is patchy, so the Arts Council finds it difficult to capture public values of arts activity.
* Existing evidence on this is patchy, but there was a Scottish study of life satisfaction and sports involvement, which is consistent with studies carried out in Scandinavia, which shows that involvement in different arts is beneficial for health. The Baring Foundation’s study on arts and people in care homes and another study on engaging young offenders with music have seen good results.
* Alan thinks that the culture sector has a role to play in increasing wellbeing, but it is difficult to get hold of people in the health sector. He would like a foothold with department of health.
* If culture was acknowledged as being beneficial to other sectors, then it could be possible to lever money from those budgets.
* Alan is unsure about using wellbeing evidence to prioritise spending within culture, as different individuals have different needs.

## Gareth Maeer, Heritage Lottery Fund

* The Heritage Lottery Fund receives 2,000 applications for funding each year, but is currently unable to fund more than half of those. Gareth is interested in exploring the potential for using wellbeing evidence to help with setting strategic priorities for funding, though he believes it is unlikely that a simple well-being metric could be used for the assessment of individual projects.
* In earlier years Heritage Lottery Fund used criteria about project activities - conservation, learning, and participation - to set the priorities for funding. There was an implicit belief that these activities were associated with wellbeing benefits for people, though no work at that time had been done to substantiate the scale of these benefits. More recently the Fund has changed tack as it found an approach based on activities to be too prescriptive and because it left it ambiguous whether or not impacts of projects such as environmental impacts, changing business structures, economic benefits etc were important or not to HLF. The new approach uses an 'outcomes framework' with outcomes grouped into three groups centred around heritage, the experience of individuals, and a societal scale. In effect this creates a type of multi-criteria analysis to inform judgements about applications. Although this approach is not perfect HLF does see it as an improvement and it has been well-received by applicants as well.
* There is still no explicit reference to wellbeing, but instead, an implicit assumption of a link to wellbeing (enjoyment etc.)
* In the future, Gareth sees the possibility that the Heritage Lottery Fund could use wellbeing measures to help it to make strategic decisions regarding the allocation of funding between (for example) large or small projects, types of heritage, geographic priorities. He is doubtful though, about using wellbeing evidence to select individual projects
* For this reason Gareth is interested in doing more work onthe links between people's engagement with HLF funded projects and wellbeing. The Fund has already done one piece of research relating to the well-being benefits of volunteering on heritage projects. This comprised research with 725 volunteers across 130 randomly selected projects, asking a range of both psychological and hedonic wellbeing questions, and comparing results to those for the UK population as a whole taken from the General Health Questionnaire. The research found that volunteering had a positive impact on wellbeing and that this was greater for 'atypical' volunteers (younger and less well educated). However the relatively low numbers of these atypical volunteers meant that the greater, aggregate effect of the funding was to improve the well-being of older, well-educated people, who characteristically have high levels of well-being in the first place. Gareth thinks the relevance of this research to well-being policy is: the case it makes it makes for the importance of volunteering in managing successful transitions both into and out of the workforce; the importance of volunteering for retirees which re-creates the 'best moments' of working life through activities that are engaging, stretching and create a sense of purpose for individuals; and (possibly) the value of inter-generational contact for well-being.

## Dave O’Brien, City University London

* In this session, we have seen various uses of the term wellbeing. It is important that we clearly define what we mean by wellbeing and are careful about use of the term if we want to create a narrative to fight for increases to wellbeing that doesn’t get confused with the technical use of the term.
* There is a risk associated with using wellbeing evidence in an attempt to increase spending on culture, in that if being healthy and employed are the biggest drivers of wellbeing (which they seem to be), then it might be concluded that wellbeing can best be increased by focussing government funding on employment policies, rather than on cultural spending.
* In addition, cultural consumption tends to appeal to wealthier, more educated individuals. Is it right for the state to subsidise or fund work to improve the wellbeing of these groups, which are likely to already have higher than average wellbeing?
* This poses the questions: what do we want government money to do? What kind of cultural policy will we get if we focus on wellbeing?

# Group members’ responses and questions

## Helen Goodman, Shadow Minister for Culture and Media (Labour)

* **[In response to Dave O’Brien]** Of course health and employment have a big impact on wellbeing, but impacting these is difficult. The cultural sphere may represent quick wins.
* **[In response to Dave O’Brien]** Work by the Arts Council and Heritage Lottery Fund in Durham produced a brass band festival, which impacted upon the wellbeing of under-privileged members of society. The Heritage Lottery Fund funded making of new banners which created a sense of community spirit. Wagner and brass band fans can both benefit from spending on culture.
* **[In response to Daniel Fujiwara]:** If participation benefits health, why don’t participative arts have higher values in terms of wellbeing?
* **Daniel Fujiwara**: Subjective wellbeing scores tend to show that mental and physical health impacts wellbeing.
* **[In response to Alan Davey]**: Are you saying better quality art produces more wellbeing?
* **Alan Davey:** No, “excellent” art depends on its authenticity of intention.
* **[In response to Alan Davey]**: What about the fact that people going to the theatre are wealthier?
* **Alan Davey:** Wants projects to be a spark that will engage individuals to have aspirations.

## Alan Howarth, Former Minister for the Arts (Labour)

* Alan is hugely enthusiastic about the elevation of wellbeing in politics. Many leave politics because of the depressing focus on the material, and so wellbeing has a large part to play.
* It seems sort of obvious that the arts promote wellbeing.
* It’s a good idea to continue exploring and refining what the arts are meant to be about.
* **[In response to Daniel Fujiwara]:** Monefication of wellbeing gains seems to be something of a metaphor – if not, one could get bogged down in the details of it. Funding in the arts should subsidise what won’t be commercially viable or popular because it can take decades or centuries for us to realise the value of certain arts.
* **[In response to Dave O’Brien]**: If the principal determinants of wellbeing are employment and health, then this doesn’t exclude the arts, which creates jobs, GDP, good health (according to a growing body of evidence). Alan hopes that the arts council will reflect this.
* **Alan Davey:** It has happened in the past when arts and health ministers worked well together.
* **[In response to Alan Davey]:** The new Health and Wellbeing Board should contribute to this type of interaction and present an opportunity for cooperation. It is designed to be cross-boundary

## David Lammy, [Minister of State](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minister_of_State) for [Innovation, Universities and Skills](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Department_for_Business,_Innovation_and_Skills) (Labour)

* **[In response to Gareth Maeer]:** Gareth was sceptical about wellbeing in looking at individual applications.
* **Gareth** **Maeer:** Gareth thinks that the Heritage Lottery Fund could perhaps use wellbeing evidence in a strategic way, but can’t see a way of using it on an individual project basis.
* **Daniel Fujiwara:** Monetising (cost benefit analysis) is an approach that we may want to use – rather than willingness to pay, because people don’t want to answer willingness to pay questions, or being asked changes the value of a good for them – so monetary equivalent values is better, and much cheaper to do.

# Audience members’ questions

## Jo Broadwood, People United

* People United uses arts to inspire kinder communities. In their work with the University of Kent on mediators in inspiring kindness, they worked with Herne Bay, where there is low volunteering and arts participation. They did various activities to develop kindness, and engaged 6,000 individuals over four years. The town is now engaged. It was very difficult to measure the impact though. They identified an increase in pro-sociality in schools, but found it difficult to demonstrate causality as opposed to correlation.
* **Daniel Fujiwara:** We need research in culture to find causality, but we don’t have it in the arts. Daniel would like to see a push towards more robust methods, and has some ideas.

## Unnamed audience member, Project Researcher

* Wellbeing is a multifaceted concept
* Culture impacts health in different ways to ‘good governance’, which poses impossible questions. Do we want to equate happiness with wellbeing?
* **Dave O’Brien:** It is very important that we clearly define what we mean by wellbeing.

## Unnamed audience member

* Work related stress has overtaken musculoskeletal health problems – the arts has a very important part to play in work-related stress via compassion.

## Glen Everett, Director of Measuring National Wellbeing, Office for National Statistics

* The Office for National Statistics has added a measure of mental health and participation in arts to its wellbeing measures.
* Measuring wellbeing is a long journey, but they are working on it. They are on track with their work to produce a standard framework and definition.
* Research like the OECD’s Better Policies for Better Lives is important as a way to let policy makers create “more bang for their buck”.
* Unemployment, health, and relationships are the top three predictors of wellbeing. There are many others too. Income comes fairly low.

## Paul Sternberg, Action for Happiness/Happy Days Festival

* Before Beckerskillet festival, there was very little investment in the arts there. The area has one of the highest levels of wellbeing.
* A study showed that free membership of the National Trust compared to being prescribed anti-depressants had interesting results in terms of wellbeing, though it’s hard to pinpoint why.
* Paul thinks that it would be interesting to measure the wellbeing of cultural practitioners who are exposed to the arts as a good baseline.

## Lucy Neal, Happy Museum

* Thinks the environment needs to also be taken into account in questions of wellbeing: stewardship of lives, communities, health, but also environment.