



Seminar Notes: Charitable Trusts Delivering Public Culture

Date: 23 January 2020

Attending: Andrea Ovey (Newport Live), Steve Ward (Newport Live), Martyn Seward (Newport Live), Geoff Cripps (Creu Cymru), Glynne Roberts (Well North Wales), Lynn Phillips (Newport Playgoers Society), Sara Clutton (Hafren Entertainment Venue), Martyn Redwood (Congress Theatre), Giles Ballisat (St David's Hall & New Theatre), John Sellwood (Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust), Jane Sellwood (Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust), Paul Kindred (Welsh Government), Amanda Bennett (Welsh Government), Cate Atwater (Community Leisure UK), Jennifer Huygen (Community Leisure UK)

Apologies: Leah Roberts (Newport Live), Olivia Harris (Newport Live), Alan Dear (Newport Live), Simon Gwynne (Halo Leisure), Ryan Statton (Halo Leisure), Richard Hughes (Awen Cultural Trust), Ceri Evans (Awen Cultural Trust), Mike Welch (Aura Leisure & Libraries), David Eynon-Williams (Newport Playgoers Society), Wendy Groves (Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust), Sally Church (Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust), Paul Lewis (Welsh Government Association), Carys Wynne-Morgan (Arts Council of Wales), Elle Henley-Herat (Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales), Nicola Guy (Welsh Government), Steve McFadyen (Alzheimer's Society), Roberta Fusco (Charity Finance Group)

Additional resources discussed

NESTA research on [the social and economic impact of innovation in the arts in Wales](#)

WHO report on [the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being](#)

Welsh Government [ICT strategy](#)

[Google Ad Grants: Free advertising for non-profits](#)

1. The role of cultural facilities

Participants first discussed the simple changes as presented from the Journey to A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language by the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. It was concluded that most of these actions are indeed strengthening the cultural sector in Wales and encourage wider participation with culture and the arts:

- Creu Cymru manages hynt to provide access to theatre for people with disabilities;
- Culture organisations support their local park run i.e. access to toilets and refreshments before and after the event. Simultaneously, the cultural facilities benefit from a diverse audience coming through their doors.
 - The idea was brought up to encourage local Councils to organise more park runs and link it to other community assets to promote a collective experience i.e. park run tourism;
- Culture organisations use the Nights Out scheme to diversify their programmes;
 - Yet, a challenge was noted here with covering the 20% match funding. This is difficult for cultural organisations to manage due to the lack of (or reduced) Council support. Even £200 is hard to find for a local theatre, for example.
- Gwanwyn Festival has led to weekly community meetups

Based on this initial discussion, attendants discussed the role of cultural organisations within their communities, and the challenges they face in fulfilling that role.

Role of cultural organisations

- Support and work with local artists to strengthen the creative community;
- Introduce people to the arts and to new arts/cultural practice that they may not have heard of before to encourage future participation and attendance of arts/cultural events;
 - Example: Splash Festival in Newport with free events across the city centre
- Introduce people to the arts and to new arts/cultural practice without realising it's art and culture but the focus being on having fun;
- The ability of cultural provision to adapt to community needs by being flexible in how and what kind of activities they manage;
- Cultural programming reduces social isolation through activities like tea for two. There is a clear social value in the regularity of the programming i.e. people check up on each other and get concerned if someone is not showing up
 - It was noted here, however, that encouraging social inclusion through the arts and culture is harder for some counties than others due to poor public transport connections.
- Cultural organisations can host health check-ups when they are more centrally located; it makes the centre more inclusive, people can stay around for a cuppa, and they are in a familiar environment which is reachable on the bus line;
- Potential of using digital solutions to amplify the positive impact and reach of arts/culture/sport;
 - A challenge was noted here with using digital given the limited knowledge of how to use it, and how to use it to reach a particular audience like young people

- Cultural organisations collaborate with local health groups, specifically with local Dementia networks to organise Dementia-friendly activities and support a carer's network

Challenges

- How to 'slice' i.e. interpret the word 'community' as there are different interpretations of community, even within the respective community itself;
- Recognition that cultural provision contributes more to the GDP than some other popular sectors (e.g. agriculture) when footfall and tourism are considered;
- Public perception of arts/culture might be negative or 'not for them' which forces some cultural organisations to change how they promote and talk about themselves and/or their programmes;
- Salami slicing of funding by local governments i.e. the strategy behind the funding cuts was not clear to participants;
- Arts/culture sector is behind some other sectors (like sport) on demonstrating the social value and impact on health, ASB, social isolation, crime and county lines challenges. To participants, it is not about how to get arts in as an activity but how to utilise the arts form to address some of society's challenges.
 - An example was given of using theatre to go out to the community and break down barriers.

The discussion concluded with the question of how cultural organisations can be more visible within society i.e. how communities can be made more aware of their existence and programming. The idea of having a national platform for arts/culture in Wales was discussed i.e. a 'what's on' for arts/culture hosted by the Welsh Assembly Government. This was seen as beneficial to the sector, addressing the two main characteristics of currently;

- Needing to look up each individual arts form;
- There is unfinished/incomplete work that has been done by individuals

This platform would play a much needed coordinating role that can help promote and organise cultural programming across Wales.

Two templates that could be used as an example for an arts/culture platform for Wales were given:

- [Dewis](#) - a website to coordinate people towards support for their health and well-being, linked to social prescribing in Wales;
- [Let's Talk Loneliness Resources Map](#) - UK government website to coordinate people towards organisations and events near them that address loneliness

To realise such a platform, it was suggested that collaboration with universities and colleges would be ideal. Specifically, the [National Software Academy](#) of the Cardiff University was mentioned as some attendants had experience working with their students.

2. Culture and Health

After the insightful presentation by Well North Wales, attendants discussed and agreed that there is enough evidence for the positive impact of arts and cultural activity on health and well-being. The main challenge, however, remained to convince the regional health boards and the NHS as they were perceived to be not invested.

Part of this challenge, as discussed by attendants, is that evaluation frameworks look at outputs rather than outcomes. There was a perceived lack of political will on both local and national level to support particular arts/culture and health programmes. All the while attendants reported that their health programmes are too popular i.e. there is a clear demand as shown by the organisations' waiting lists but no capacity to increase the number of classes or participants due to lack of funding/capacity within the organisation. This hinders organisation's 'outputs' levels but does not change the positive outcome of their programmes for those who participate.

The National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS) was mentioned as a successful framework and driving force for social prescribing. The question was raised whether NERS could potentially expand to include arts and cultural activities in the future.

It was noted that the Welsh Government's new cultural guidelines to be consulted on later in the year will include arts in health. The Government will need input with good examples, for which cultural organisations can play a crucial role.

Attendants concluded that there is a need for forums like this seminar to talk about the impact of arts/culture to raise awareness of what good work is being done, and to bring people from across sectors together to recognise the potential.

3. Digital Technology

Participants noted the many different interpretations of digital and that their sector is behind on using it (education is much further advanced, for example). Related to this, they noted that kit i.e. equipment and software are key but that they quickly become out-dated and it's difficult to make software talk to each other. Most software is also not open-source, making it harder for organisations to understand and potentially adapt the software to their existing systems. This forms a real barrier for (starting to) use most kinds of digital technology. Yet, the main challenge remains having the in-house skills and expertise to maximise digital opportunities.

Related to this challenge came the question of how to make the arts/cultural sector attractive for digitally skilled people?

Different examples of using digital technology were mentioned, such as:

- Software to track people's movement within a library i.e. space occupancy monitoring which is very common in education but less so within the charitable arts/culture sector;
- New digital hearing systems to update the traditional loop system
 - Example of [Sound Induction Systems](#) which works with an app and also gives Welsh options

- Have theatre cast do an Instagram take-over on the organisation's account

Attendants further noted the potential to collaborate with tech companies who have their offices in Wales. For cultural organisations, it brings the opportunity to make their work come alive through digital technology. While for the tech company working with a charity or social enterprises strengthens their CSR and gives them the possibility to test software.

4. Financial Sustainability

The discussion from participants regarding financial sustainability centred around the sharing of best practice for alternative fundraising, including examples of:

- Donation button on the website and/or automatically added as optional for online bookings;
- Restoration fund/levy to update fees;
- Ticket insurance

Participants discussed that while they are a charity and/or social enterprise, they do not communicate this fact enough to their visitors. Their charitable status and social value of their work is something they can be more vocal about. Yet, here it was discussed that while communicating this status it is important to focus on what it means for the community. To share the community impact of their charitable work, the use of testimonials and word of mouth were seen as the most effective ways of communicating.

A financial aspect of financial sustainability that was discussed was around reviewing the organisation's VAT, and in particular which exemptions they are eligible for, and the energy suppliers.