Count Me In

The Dimensions of Social Inclusion through Culture, Media & Sport

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

a report for the

Department for Culture, Media & Sport

prepared by the

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Introduction

This study[1] was set up to examine claims made for the ability of cultural projects to promote social inclusion (cultural projects are here taken to include those incorporating sport, the arts, media, heritage and outdoor adventure). This was to be achieved primarily by collecting evidence from a sample of 14 projects selected from some 200 that had volunteered their services.

The report to the government's Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) from the Policy Action Team (PAT10) (1999)[2] noted the potential. In his foreword, Chris Smith (then Secretary of State for the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS)) wrote: "*… art and sport can not only make a valuable contribution to delivering key outcomes of lower long term unemployment, less crime, better health and better qualifications, but can also help to develop the individual pride, community spirit and capacity for responsibility that enable communities to run regeneration programmes themselves".*

Similar statements have followed from other politicians, particularly in the recent Commons debate on sport and social exclusion (22/11/01), and again in the public health debate (13/12/01). However, the PAT 10 report also came to the same conclusion as previous commentators (e.g. Glyptis, 1989[3]; Allison & Coalter, 1996[4]; Long & Sanderson, 1998[5]) that there is little 'hard' evidence of the social benefits that accrue.

The Research Brief

The study entailed:

- a consideration of the different understandings of social exclusion/inclusion
- using existing literature to provide a context for the practice and achievements of these projects
- an examination of alternative indicators of social inclusion and how these can be implemented
- an attempt to identify, wherever possible, evidence of good practice in the form of what is seen to work, both in terms of securing social inclusion goals and evaluation.

Diversity of Cultural Activities

The 14 projects were selected from around England to make sure that different styles, purposes and targets were included. Although all of the projects share the common purpose of enhancing the quality of life in areas of disadvantage, they cover a wide geographic area and a diversity of specific aims and objectives. Diversity can be seen in: the aim of the projects; the scale and source of funding; the extent of the area covered; target populations; number of participants; staffing structures; duration of the project; and type of evaluation. These are complex projects so simple classifications are not easy. However in broad terms they can be said to represent:

Sport	3	Provide sporting opportunities as a constructive, socially acceptable focus for the energies of young people
Arts	4	Two projects use the arts to stimulate awareness of health issues; one is directed to skills development among disaffected/vulnerable young people; and one is more orientated to educational development.
Media	2	These are directed to skills development among disaffected/vulnerable young people with a view to improving employment prospects;
Heritage	3	One is designed to attract disadvantaged groups into a museum; one is an arts in education project using 'heritage' to stimulate imagination; and one is a library service in rural areas.
Outdoor adventure	2	These provide adventure education as a means of personal development and the fostering of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Social Exclusion & Inclusion

The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) explains social exclusion as *"a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown".*

Arguably, social exclusion represents separation/alienation from the political, economic and frequently socio-cultural processes of society. The implication of the SEU logic is that measures taken to reduce the selected indicators of exclusion (health, education, employment, crime and housing) will necessarily serve to achieve social **inclusion.** Important though such challenges may be, we argue that a simple inversion, if it fails to address the processes of exclusion, will not promote social inclusion. Addressing such inequity is a necessary, but not sufficient condition of social inclusion.

How cultural projects might secure inclusion

There are a number of arguments by which the potential of cultural activities to promote social inclusion might be considered to have been achieved:

- **Involvement in cultural activities = de facto inclusion** (cultural activities may be seen to be in and of themselves a good thing, and increased participation in them benefits the individuals concerned because they are thereby included in something valuable).
- **Higher participation rates in cultural activities by groups presumed to be excluded** (e.g. minority ethnic groups, the unemployed, older people).
- **Involvement in cultural activities improves policy indicators** (currently: education, employment, crime, health):
- **Opening up structures and promoting human potential** (as a result of these projects there may be benefits at the individual level (to encompass factors like confidence, esteem, skills) or collectively as 'community capital' (extended social networks, increased community cohesion, civic pride, collective skills, etc.)).

Evaluation - milestones, outputs and outcomes

Some projects are evaluated only/largely in terms of timely meeting the **milestones** established for the delivery of the programme. This is done largely to satisfy funding agents regarding due process and is commonly accepted as perfectly adequate to demonstrate proper project management.

The next level considers measures of **outputs**: e.g. the number of events staged, the number of people attending on at least one occasion or for the duration.

But a consideration of the power to promote social inclusion requires an evaluation of the success in securing **outcomes** that at the very least advance the position of those who are socially excluded. So, it is important to know whether people get jobs, does their health improve, or do they move into gainful employment, or if crime is reduced. In other words, in what ways have the outcomes changed the lives of the participants?

There is a growing appreciation that the scientific model of research is unlikely to provide the kind of assessment required. The feeling that ideas of confidence, esteem, community cohesion, etc. are not amenable to quantitative measurement may be perfectly correct, but the challenge then has to be to identify what does constitute 'evidence'. It is common for project workers to report specific examples of people from the project who have achieved something valuable. This is vulnerable to being dismissed as merely anecdotal evidence. Few people doubt that such projects **can** produce social benefits, which is what such instances demonstrate. The question is to what extent they occur and whether it rises above pure happenstance.

Convincing indicators

The projects involved here are disparate and there was never any intention that a standardised set of indicators should be imposed. We therefore sought a possible set of outcome measures. Our starting point were the key governmental interests as expressed by the Social Exclusion Unit:

- Improved **educational** performance
- Increased **employment** rates
- Reduced levels of **crime**
- Better (and more equal) standards of **health**

Beyond those four we identified a large range of alternative social inclusion outcomes as a result of our review of the literature (we could have selected many more). We have grouped these under 3 main headings, as follows:

Personal development	***Social cohesion***	***Active citizenship***
• Self-esteem • Personal performance • Raising aspirations / Self-confidence • Employability • Interpersonal skills • Control over own destiny • Relationships with 'peer' groups	• Celebrating own culture • Social connectedness (relationships between individuals) • Community cohesion (people and groups operating in concert to secure common interests) • Civic pride (identification with local community and pride in the local community for its own residents) • Relationships with 'other cultural' groups ♣	• Involvement in decision making • Exercising rights & taking responsibilities • Sense of ownership / 'stakeholding' • Relationships with 'establishment' groups

We sought to use this set of evaluation domains by presenting it to project teams and then accepting whatever evidence each project could offer to a consideration of the use of cultural activities to promote social inclusion within those domains. We summarise our findings here under each of the seven headings.

Education

Low educational achievement may not of itself constitute exclusion, but it may precipitate social exclusion through jeopardising employment opportunities, denying access to information because of illiteracy, and feelings of alienation. Criminality (at least in terms of recorded crime) is also strongly associated with poor educational performance.

The projects demonstrated that much of the benefit in education is attributable to various aspects of personal development. This is largely presumed to flow from self-esteem and confidence, but also involves the kind of social skills essential to co-operating with others. Project workers 'see this for themselves' and in some cases have it confirmed by people external to the project (e.g. teachers), but have little recorded longitudinal data. However, it is reassuring to note that outcomes of the education projects include:

- an improvement in individual pupil motivation
- improvements in the general ethos of the schools
- dealing with particular problems eg. transfer from primary to secondary
- a widening of pupils' cultural experiences.

♣ Including other religious, other socio-economic, other age groupings etc.

Employment

Because employment is something that typically happens after involvement in the project accurate records tend not to be held by cultural projects of the type considered here. Some project staff managed to 'cobble together' figures for us, but it is clear that the Employment Services are in a better position to collate such information and make sure it is fed through the system. The most obvious audience for this is the project staff themselves so that they can be informed of the success of their labours. The projects have met with some success in easing people into jobs, but their more obvious and demonstrable success is in moving them towards job-readiness. An impact on skill levels, aptitudes and orientations is secured in large part because of their clients' identification with the cultural activities concerned.

Crime Prevention

Although still limited, it is perhaps in the area of reducing crime that most effort has been made to gather evidence of the success of projects. The popular arguments that involvement in cultural activities helps to reduce crime tend to be twofold: that it 'keeps them off the street'; and that it has beneficial psychological consequences which lessen the person's disposition to commit crime.

The projects expecting to have an impact on anti-social behaviour tend to work on the presumption that getting people involved in their activities will have that effect. Consequently, even though they may be very successful in reducing crime and delinquent behaviour, they have little evidence demonstrating this relationship.

Health

During the 1990s and now into the new millennium there has been growing acknowledgement in government that economic inequalities in capital, property, employment and income have important impacts on health outcomes. Broadly defined concepts of health, well being and quality of life remain shaped by social disadvantage.

Data on the impact on health status are elusive. However, there is evidence here of cultural projects promoting health networks and increasing referrals to the health services. Such health data needs to be collected systematically to be valid and reliable. However, it is no small task to encourage GP practices to take on such research. The impact of these projects may be on a fairly small scale but they have been working with 'hard to reach' groups who had previously been left largely untouched by the health services.

Personal Development

Involvement in cultural activities is typically assumed to be associated with personal development: e.g., increasing self esteem and self confidence, learning social skills, sense of achievement, learning to exercise one's own ability to act (empowerment), or more simply extending oneself in new directions. These inevitably underpin many of the other beneficial outcomes discussed in other parts of the report.

Unfortunately, personal development is rarely able to be measured except subjectively. That having been said, in almost every case studied in this research, the project workers were convinced that many of those on their respective programmes had enjoyed a fulfilling experience, which had made them more rounded individuals, better able to appreciate and respond to what life has to offer.

Social Cohesion

The kind of interaction that these projects are capable of stimulating between people with newly acquired common interests also provides the basis of a cohesiveness that is of collective benefit. Whether through pride in the local area or people working more effectively together the fabric of the community is enriched. It may take some time for any observable community

benefit to be observed though. One of the key indicators here is the demonstration of project participants 'putting something back' into the community, which should be documented carefully by the projects to offer to sceptics as one indicator of the project's worth.

Active Citizenship

Talk of social inclusion invites questions about what people are being invited to be included in and what say they might have in that. Certainly at a national level one might expect a strategy for social inclusion to be concerned to make the structures of society and organisational networks more open in order to foster:

- Involvement in decision-making and agenda setting
- Exercising rights and taking responsibilities

Arguably, for people to be 'included', they should be involved in the institutions of society and the decision-making associated with them. However, for most of these projects the scope for self-determination by participants (beyond the 'professionals') is limited. Individual projects may work hard to welcome participation, but appear to have little success in opening-up wider decision-making processes beyond the project.

The Practice of Evaluation

What is considered to 'have worked' is largely the instinctual response of the professionals responsible for the projects. Only rarely were they able to draw on supportive research evidence. The project teams took it as an indicator of success that people turned up and stayed. The presumption is that they will then have benefited from what the project has to offer. If the link with social inclusion is to be established, recognising the importance of considering outcomes is essential. This has been tackled in a variety of ways by the projects:

- **Recording:** Detailed recording of events/activities – photographs, exhibits, publication, etc., does not constitute evaluation in and of itself, but it does allow others to make a more informed assessment of the project. These softer 'testimonies of evidence' can be used both to convince stakeholders of the legitimacy of individual projects and to provide a means of self-expression and collective critical reflection for those involved in projects/events

- **Surveys of participants:** People may not be entirely reliable in answering survey questions, but their responses should at least provide useful indicators if the questions are designed to address the intended social inclusion outcomes of the project.

- **Consumer Panels:** Some of the providers make use of group discussions with consumer panels to aid their evaluation. These have to be carefully constructed and conducted to make sure that they address the desired outcomes of the project and require a trained facilitator with a degree of independence from the project officers.

- **Longitudinal appraisal:** Ideally the assessment of change should be based on longitudinal data, but these were hard to find. In some cases comparable data are collected on repeated occasions (e.g. attendance records), but as these are processed to satisfy the monitoring requirements of the funding agency on a periodic basis they are not consolidated into longitudinal data sets.

- **In the longer term:** What may count in the long run is some form of changed behaviour and a favourable community impact which may only become apparent at a much later date and which may be influenced by factors outside the project. Some form of survey of expressions of intent on the part of participants, if answered truthfully, may offer a surrogate and a means of deriving information important for evolving project management.

- **An external view:** Although not without its problems, using outside evaluators has proved useful to several of the projects. This not only draws in additional skills, but a more disinterested perspective helps to persuade external organisations of the credibility of the findings.

Conclusions

Our experience of the projects validates their selection as initiatives making a difference to the lives of individuals within selected target groups. We identified aspects of the work of all 14 projects that promote social inclusion against some of the seven dimensions discussed in the report and there is considerable anecdotal evidence to confirm this assessment.

Project evaluation usually generates the feedback necessary for the project's own management purposes and to satisfy funding agencies, who do indeed appear to be impressed with their success. However, there is little effective evaluation against social inclusion **outcomes**. Hence while **milestones** are registered, some **outputs** recorded and levels of **satisfaction** sometimes assessed, outcomes less often play a part. Furthermore, even at this relatively simple level, few of the projects are able to provide accurate data on the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants.

In part, this shortage of material evaluating the effects on social inclusion may be a consequence of the timing of this exercise. The projects are more concerned to demonstrate that they are delivering the services that they committed themselves to than to engage in the complexities of evaluation. Indeed, evaluation of outcomes capable of 'proving' the case may be beyond the resources/capacity of projects like these. They have to address competing priorities on limited resources and keep funding agents happy with a view to extending the life of the project (and in some cases their own employment). In such circumstances too there is pressure for the findings to show the project in a good light; there are clear imperatives to present a positive impression of the work of projects.

We have signalled some of the complexities of the challenge faced by those seeking to promote social inclusion. For example, just because a project is delivered in a disadvantaged area does not necessarily mean that the presumed benefits are accruing to the socially excluded. Just because the project is working with the socially excluded and delivering benefits to them does not necessarily mean it does anything to promote social inclusion. Although it might be possible to construct some measures of efficiency (e.g. number of people engaged per unit of expenditure), the lack of attention to outcomes as opposed to outputs means that it is virtually impossible to address cost-effectiveness. Moreover, whether they are desirable benefits is a political judgement that might shift from time to time.

Recommendations and the way ahead

The nature of several of the outcomes requires longitudinal research to assess them. This will not just necessitate extending operations into the future, but securing baseline data at the outset. The demonstration of change may thereby be effected, but that would not necessarily establish a causal relationship. In truth this can rarely be achieved in the evaluation of social policy, though it may be worth investigating the research design for the *Sure Start* programme to see if that lends a model that could be adopted.

The projects are being evaluated, but not against the same criteria or even agenda as DCMS adopts. The language used may be very similar, but the meanings different. We therefore support the QUEST recommendation that 'a dialogue be opened about bridging the gap between the current language and measurement of social inclusion and the actual activities and contribution of the cultural and sporting sectors'. We also support QUEST's proposal to establish a research forum to make maximum use of existing research and shape future research to ensure that it is both efficient and effective. However, rather than being a one-off event this needs to be constructed as a rolling, evolving programme.

During the course of this study we received several requests for help in conducting research that project managers felt was beyond their capabilities. We think it important that both project workers and participants be integrally involved in any future research as a collaborative enterprise with sensitive researchers.

The Quality of Life

We should not forget that there is much to celebrate in projects that provide cultural experiences to members of society who might not ordinarily encounter, or even welcome, such exposure. It is sometimes disconcerting that so much of the cultural provision for young people in particular seems to be validated by the extrinsic benefits that it provides. It should be remembered that culture, in its widest sense, refreshes and expands the capacity of the mind and body and provides intrinsic benefits, which go a long way towards providing the rights of citizenship, which in themselves encourage active and responsible citizens. We were persuaded that these projects were enjoyed in and of themselves, offering **fun and a contribution to quality of life.** This is, of itself, an outcome worthy of celebration, and has therefore been added to our seven measures of success.

The full report is available at www.lmu.ac.uk/ces/lss/research/countmein.pdf or can be purchased from the Centre for Leisure & Sport Research, Fairfax Hall, Beckett Park, Leeds LS6 3Qs price £25 (cheques to be payable to Leeds Metropolitan University).

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