

SOCIETY AND PLACE: TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACTS OF ARTS, CULTURE AND CREATIVITY

Factsheet 1 drawn from ANA's Insight Report,
'Transformative: Impacts of culture and creativity'

47%

of Australians reported feeling society is broken in 2017 and again in 2019.

36%

felt like a stranger in their own country in 2017.

1/4

of Australians reported frequent feelings of loneliness in 2018.

Society and place: How arts and culture impact societal outcomes

Strategic investment in arts and culture demonstrably delivers social benefits to communities and places. Some of Australia's most pressing social issues could be helped through effective investment in proven arts and cultural activities and methodologies.

The need for a cohesive society

OECD research has shown societies with higher cohesion levels often have stronger and faster-growing GDPs – a finding that has real implications for Australia's future. Because in recent years, a significant number (almost 50%) of Australians reported feeling that our society is broken, and 36% said they feel like a stranger in their own country. One in four Australians reported frequent feelings of loneliness and isolation.

These are not indicators of a connected and cohesive community – they are signs of significant social discomfort and disengagement. And Covid-19 is likely to have amplified many of these feelings.

Feelings of alienation are not simply unpleasant – they're harmful. Research has found feelings of loneliness and isolation are associated with premature death risks similar to those for obesity, smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, or air pollution.

If Australian society continues to fracture in fundamental ways, we can expect significant negative impacts on Australia's economy, society, health and liveability.

That's why we need to be systematic and strategic about developing a strong, rich cultural life that brings people together and strengthens communities.

How arts and culture help build a more cohesive society

Leading Australian and international research shows that when a considered effort is made to direct cultural and creative activities towards improving social cohesion, the impacts are significant. Figure 1 shows the outcomes of targeting arts and cultural investment to increase access and participation in arts and cultural activities.

Figure 1:
How arts and culture helps build a more cohesive society



Build feelings of community, belonging, and trust



Help individuals and communities to recover from disasters and trauma



Enhance empathy and inclusion



Increase civic participation



Help combat the growing issues of loneliness and isolation



Make cities, suburbs and regions more liveable.



What do middle Australians think about the role of arts and culture in building society and place?

Arts and culture really brings people and whole communities together. Without it, we'd be much more isolated as individuals. That's never a good outcome. (Male, Townsville)

I suppose it builds tolerance, and it's about being open to diversity or the acceptance of other people that they may not be exposed to in their own family. So, being exposed to a Middle Eastern sort of culture or music, hopefully that will stop the bigotry or the, you know, hate wars, or whatever you want to call it these days. They can be more tolerant of people's cultures and beliefs. (Female, Brisbane)



Internationally proven strategies for improving societal outcomes through arts and culture

Investment in socially-focused arts and culture has been shown to generate positive social impacts. Some successful targeted arts and culture activities identified in national and international research are shown in Table 1.

Objective	Build social cohesion	Strengthen inclusion and diversity	Trauma recovery	Regional development
Strategic investment activity	Invest in public events such as arts festivals and cultural celebrations.	Invest in arts and culture activities that reflect and explore a diverse range of perspectives and experiences.	Invest in creative activities designed to address trauma and conflict.	Invest in targeted support for arts and cultural activities in urban, regional, rural and remote areas.
Proven outcomes	<p>Successfully brings people together and bridges social barriers through shared experiences.</p> <p>Decreases feelings of loneliness and increases overall social cohesion.</p>	<p>Helps build cohesive societies by acting as a catalyst for cross-cultural empathy and understanding.</p> <p>Creates opportunities for people to identify with others, reducing cultural bias.</p>	<p>Enables individuals to purposefully engage with the arts in ways that support recovery/resolution.</p> <p>Enhances community connection and increases civic participation.</p>	<p>Access to arts, cultural and recreational facilities is a key factor in our decisions about where we live – this factor rates higher than public transport and education facilities.</p> <p>Investment helps attract and retain populations as well as improving social cohesion and increasing economic diversification.</p>

Table 1:
Successful social outcomes achieved through strategic arts and culture investment

Opportunities to improve societal outcomes through investment in arts and culture in Australia

The evidence is clear: effective investment in arts and culture generates tangible, measurable and significant benefits across many different areas of our lives. Australia now has the opportunity to refresh its national policy settings and create a more coherent investment approach across governments, businesses, philanthropic organisations and creators.

In times of crisis, arts and culture are more critical than ever

The world has changed in 2020, and the evidence about the impacts of arts and culture are more relevant than ever. Research shows that, during and following major crises such as health emergencies or natural disasters, effective arts and cultural activities are those that aim to reconnect affected communities, reduce feelings of isolation, strengthen people's connection to place, provide opportunities for reflection and commemoration, and foster a shared sense of hope and optimism. Arts and cultural activity can also increase a nation's soft power potential; a critical resource during a period of global disruption.

In light of this conclusive evidence, Australia's public and private investors, policy makers and other stakeholders who want to improve societal outcomes should:

Apply learnings to address loneliness

Invest in research trials for Australia-specific arts and cultural interventions addressing loneliness/social isolation and other relevant health/wellbeing issues and implement data-driven programs to achieve optimal outcomes.

Build and strengthen communities

Prioritise new investment in cultural participation programs and arts-based initiatives that are proven to bring communities together, build social connections and encourage inclusion and cohesion.

Enhance regional and rural development

Support initiatives for regional and remote Australia to benefit from cultural infrastructure (both built and human) – including economic diversification, community wellbeing and population attraction and retention.

To improve arts and cultural access and participation opportunities for all Australians; inform a contemporary approach to cultural and creative industry development; and address Covid-19 recovery, Australia's public and private investors, policy makers and other stakeholders should:

Champion a National Arts, Culture and Creativity Plan

A National Arts, Culture and Creativity Plan would inform more coherent policy settings and investment at all three levels of government. This could be achieved in the same vein as the existing National Sport Plan, 'Sport 2030', that identifies enduring and non-partisan principles and clarifies responsibilities.

More information

A New Approach is an independent think tank championing effective investment and return in Australian arts and culture. We research and report on arts and culture investment issues and policy settings. By sharing our findings with key Australian decision-makers, we support the development and implementation of effective, informed and strategic investment.

ANA was established in 2018 with a \$1.65 million commitment by The Myer Foundation, the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation and the Keir Foundation. The Australian Academy of the Humanities is the lead delivery partner for this initiative.

The information and data provided here is detailed further – with evidence sources – in our 2019 Insight Report, 'Transformative: impacts of culture and creativity'. The quotes from middle Australians are from our 2020 Insight Report, 'A view from middle Australia: Perceptions of arts, culture and creativity'.

See www.humanities.org.au/new-approach for more information and to access the full reports.

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