

A RICH CULTURAL LIFE: TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACTS OF ARTS, CULTURE AND CREATIVITY

Factsheet 7 drawn from ANA's Insight Report,
'Transformative: Impacts of culture and creativity'

We need to be systematic about strengthening our culture and creativity

A strong cultural landscape is the foundation of a strong democracy, providing opportunities for citizens to consider new questions, express dissent and articulate difference.

Making informed and effective investments in arts and culture creates a rich cultural life for Australia

A rich cultural life generates positive impacts for individuals, communities, societies and economies. A strong creative culture provides opportunities for sharing cultures and values, supporting existing and new forms of artistic and cultural expression, experiencing diverse voices and perspectives, and developing and maintaining national and local cultural heritage. Culture is key to both personal development and developing a cohesive society. Arts and culture provide pathways to imagining different worlds and expressing divergent views – offering implicit invitations for understanding and connection.

That's why we need to be systematic and strategic about developing a strong, rich cultural life that connects and celebrates the many facets of our nation.

The need to deliberately build a rich cultural life

Most of us appreciate arts and culture in some form. In 2016-17, 82.4% of us attended cultural venues and events, and about a third of us created, produced or collaborated in making some form of art. However, our access to specific kinds of arts and culture is often connected to our location and socioeconomic background. Common barriers to access are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1:
Common barriers to arts and culture access in Australia



Economic

- * Event or activity costs
- * Transport costs
- * Time costs
- * Cost perceptions



Social

- * Lack of exposure
- * Cultural barriers
- * Language barriers
- * Accessibility issues



Geographic

- * Public transport access
- * Cost of fuel
- * Travel times
- * Accessibility issues

These barriers also compound each other, further impacting access. For example, the cost of mainstream cultural consumption is generally 200–500% higher in regional communities (compared to in cities). In remote locations, the cost of consuming mainstream culture is up to 1,300% higher than in cities. Therefore, if you live in a regional, rural or remote part of Australia, you're more likely to experience all of the barriers shown in Figure 1.

A nation that gives it a go

31.4%
of adults and
96.6%
of 5-14 year olds participated
*[rather than just attending
or observing] in artistic/
cultural creation or
performance in 2017.*

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.

Research indicates that investing in programs and activities that ensure all Australians have opportunities to access a broad variety of arts and cultural experiences from a young age, irrespective of their family's location or financial position, can help to break down social inequities.

Yet our per capita funding for arts and culture has been steadily decreasing over the last decade. Compared with our international OECD peers, Australia has one of the lowest levels of expenditure on public culture; we are ranked 26 out of 33 members. Our 2019 report 'The big picture: Public expenditure on artistic, cultural and creative activity in Australia' showed that the combined per capita cultural expenditure (from all levels of government) dropped 4.9% between 2007-08 and 2017-18. Local government is the exception and has been consistently increasing its cultural expenditure.

Another indicator of Australia's current cultural investment approach is the fact most Australian arts and culture professionals hold multiple part-time jobs. This situation leaves both professional practitioners, and the arts and culture sector as a whole, economically vulnerable. As a result, and as has been shown during the Covid-19 lockdown, our national cultural life is largely unprotected.

What does a rich national cultural life look like?

A rich national cultural life is exemplified by:

- * significant engagement with arts and cultural activities across the population
- * recognition that Australia's arts and cultural terrain is enriched by diversity, and particularly by the important and ongoing contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across all forms of artistic and cultural expression
- * minimal barriers to arts and cultural participation
- * access to a wide range of arts and cultural activities, including options relevant to diverse audiences
- * supportive economic environments that successfully sustain arts and culture practitioners and producers.

In Australia, there is significant evidence that we want a rich cultural life, and believe that engaging with arts and culture makes for a more meaningful life. And we are willing to spend our money on cultural goods and services — an estimated \$25.64 billion in 2015-16, or 3.5% of total household expenditure. In 2017, we even spent more on tickets to live arts and cultural events than we did on live sporting events! Nine out of ten Australians agree that our First Nations arts are an important part of Australian culture, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists are proportionally more likely to be nominated for a major art award. And 81% of Australians engage with the arts online. So we excel in many of the indicators that exemplify a rich cultural life. BUT, many Australians are still experiencing the barriers shown in Figure 1, and this is something that needs to be rectified if we're to take advantage of all the benefits arts and culture have to offer.



What do middle Australians think about having a rich cultural life?

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)

Without Australian arts, we would lose our sense of identity. You would lose your heritage as well, lose the connection to your country. You want to have something to be proud of, to pass it on [to] the future generations. (Female, Brisbane)

It's about Australia's identity. Our experiences are quite different to someone who may have lived in England or America; even though culturally we may have some connections with language, there are some distinct differences and I think it's important to celebrate those and express them. (Female, Sydney)



Proven strategies for improving the cultural life of a nation

Investment in arts and culture has been shown to generate positive impacts for a rich cultural life. Some successful targeted arts and culture activities identified in national and international research are shown in Table 1.

Challenges	Show diversity in local content	Reduce barriers to accessing arts and culture	Improve arts and cultural workforce security
Possible solutions	<p>National institution collections play a critical role in supporting Australia's democracy, according to a 2018 Parliamentary Inquiry into Canberra's national institutions.</p> <p>The 2019 report, 'Telling Australia's story - and why it's important: Report on the inquiry into Canberra's national institutions' found that these collections need to include - and represent - all Australians.</p>	<p>For those who cannot or prefer not to attend cultural activities in person, digital access is becoming an increasingly critical component of cultural participation. 81% of Australians engage with the arts online.</p> <p>Investment in digital infrastructure for arts and cultural activities can deliver equitable, diverse and accessible arts and culture experiences for all sectors of the community.</p>	<p>New investment models for cultural and creative careers and industries are being explored to improve workforce security for arts and cultural professionals.</p> <p>For example, the UK's Creative Industries Clusters Program seeks to stimulate collaboration between UK creative industries and leading universities' arts and humanities-led research. The program aims to generate new jobs for highly-skilled creative professionals by collaborating on the development of new products and services.</p>

Table 1: Challenges and solutions proposed through strategic arts and culture investment

Opportunities to strengthen our culture through investment in arts and culture in Australia

The evidence is overwhelming: effective investment in arts and culture generates tangible, measurable and significant benefits.

To improve arts and cultural 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.

In light of the conclusive evidence, Australia's public and private investors, policy makers and other stakeholders who want to enrich Australia's cultural terrain should:

Prioritise initiatives for regional and remote Australia

Ensure more Australians can enjoy opportunities to benefit from the particular impacts and value of cultural infrastructure (both built and human) for economic diversification, community wellbeing and population attraction and retention.

Increase opportunities for all Australian children to experience arts and culture at school

Reduce barriers to participation throughout the lifecycle, and encourage children's development and overall well-being. Consider: reviewing the time allocation to The Arts at the primary level (and reframe it as Arts and Culture); improving pre-service teacher training in how to teach arts and cultural activities; and investing in artist-in-school programs.

Ensure Australian content represents our contemporary demographics

Prioritise incentives, requirements and schemes that support collective identity-building through the production and distribution of diverse Australian content that will help to build a unified national identity and represent Australia to the world.

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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