



THE ART OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY

EXCHANGE, MMM,
new economics foundation (nef)

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Summary

Exchange (a group of performing arts practitioners and organisations based in Tyneside, including Ballet Lorent, The Empty Space, Northern Stage and Nikolas Barrera) commissioned this provocation from Mission Models Money (MMM) and the new economics foundation (nef). It is concerned with three inter-linked issues: the role of arts and culture within sustainable economic development; how artists and other creative practitioners can contribute to sustainable development and finally how to ensure artists and creative practitioners are able to achieve sustainable livelihoods throughout their life-cycles, especially as emergent independent artists.

The Art of Living Dangerously urges all those working with arts and culture to rethink their contribution to a vision of sustainable development that benefits the whole of society¹. Faced by the challenges created by environmental degradation, increasing social injustice and the aftershocks of the global financial crisis, this task becomes more urgent than ever. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the development of that new vision by illuminating the role that artists and creative practitioners have in developing sustainable economies, i.e. those that are 'economically viable, environmentally sound and socially responsible' (IUCN 2006).

Active participation in arts and culture develops ideas and imagination that challenge the status quo, builds capabilities such as resilience, the collaborations that enable active citizenship and the creation of enterprises motivated by much more than profit. This is the sustainable basis of the huge economic impact of the cultural sector, as well as its contribution to how people feel about themselves and where they live, rather than just as a contributor to growth led consumption culture. Artists and creative practitioners can invigorate communities both through the work they make but also their presence in local life. Artists and creative practitioners are, Exchange argues, 'key workers' and entrepreneurs in the development of healthy and sustainable communities, modelling ways of living that exemplify adaptability, resilience and innovation and contributing to local economies in ways that enhance rather than diminish wellbeing.

The message of the paper is that the livelihoods of artists and the sustainable development of people and places are interlinked issues. It imagines a future where public interventions do more to support the livelihoods of artists. And these livelihoods, often deeply precarious, help sustain the public life of towns, cities and villages. To achieve this vision, public policy should be concerned equally with artists' ability to achieve sustainable livelihoods and take risks, as it is with funding their work per se. The arguments for the value of arts and culture in a general sense are well rehearsed and are now part of the language of cultural policy and urban regeneration. But to start to understand the actual and potential contribution of artists and creative practitioners, we have to concentrate less on what arts and culture do and more on what *artists actually do*, how they live, take risks and how they could achieve more sustainable livelihoods².

1. 'Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' *Our Common Future*, Brundtland Report 1987

2. 'A livelihood comprises people, their capabilities and their means of living, including food, income and assets. Tangible assets are resources and stores, and intangible assets are claims and access' *Chambers and Conway*, 1991

If these multiple contributions to our cities, towns and communities are to meet their potential in ensuring that our economy functions sustainably into the future then the health of the arts and cultural sector and the current fragile reality of individual artists and creative practitioners must be urgently addressed. Evidence shows that the majority of individual artists and creative practitioners have extremely low and precarious incomes, and are often dependent on partners and families to be able to make their work³. There is huge concern that arts and culture will become the domain only of the privileged and therefore less diverse. Living as an artist or creative practitioner may always be a risky business, but it needs to be more possible for a greater diversity of people of all backgrounds if our society is to strengthen the foundations for a more sustainable economic future.

The paper is divided into 3 sections. In section 1 we look at **how to understand the role of arts and culture within sustainable economic development**. We begin by looking at the state of the UK economy, and the search for ways to fix it. We argue that the problem of the economy is not its failure to grow, but the kind of damaging growth it promotes and the value it misses. We argue that this has distorted cultural policy, leading policy makers to become overly fixated with 'what culture does' over a wider understanding of who artists are, how they create, work, learn and shape a living. Overlooking artists' livelihoods has contributed to a perceived separation between artists and society and worst of all has created an indifference to who gets to become an artist. As a start to seeing this right, we suggest how culture can be situated within a framework of sustainable development. This gives economists a different perspective on growth, and cultural policy makers an understanding of the value of artists and creative practitioners that starts from what they do and how they live, rather than just the products of their labour.

In section 2 we look at **how artists and other creative practitioners can contribute to sustainable development**. The section recounts the process of developing this 'Theory of Change' with Exchange in the North East of England. It looks at how this reframing could affect artists and creative practitioners and their immediate networks, the wider community in Tyneside, and wider society, how these communities could be involved and how we might start to value and evaluate these differently.

In section 3 we look at **how to ensure artists and creative practitioners are able to achieve sustainable livelihoods throughout their life-cycles**, something we call **The Art of Living Dangerously**. This requires action on the part of artists and those who support them in three key areas:

Practising Livelihoods: Artists coming together, with other creative practitioners to critically reflect on how they create self-sustaining strategies.

Pooling Risk: Ways for artists and creative practitioners to share the risks of new financial, operational and creative endeavours.

Utilising Space: Ways for artists and creative practitioners to access and animate unused space in towns and cities.

Finally we look at the imperatives and trade-offs for policy makers and funders involved in rebalancing between sustaining art products and sustaining artist livelihoods.

³ Eikhof, D.R. and Haunschild, A. 'For art's sake! Artistic and economic logics in creative production', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 2007 amongst many others

The paper ends with ten provocations to all of us. These are questions for artists, creative practitioners and arts and cultural organisations as well as public and private funders and all those involved in making and influencing policy, which we hope others will respond to.

We do not express or advocate for the art of surviving in a broken system - an approach that would suggest unsustainable boot-strapping for artists within a system that does not know how to value them - but rather, *The Art of Living Dangerously* describes the transition to a different model of development. A way to make the lives of emerging artists more visible and viable as well as the policy making logic of the towns and cities of which they are a part.

The Art of Living Dangerously is something that more of us will need to learn as we live with increasing uncertainty and growing inequality. This paper is an incomplete picture, the start of telling a new story and one we hope will be discussed, contested, critiqued and added to. It is our hope that it is a provocation to all of us that fuels and encourages further enquiry and research in the UK and elsewhere.

About the project

We have brought together several strands of enquiry in this report: **Exchange**, the **new economics foundation (nef)** and **Mission Models Money**. All three organisations operate in very different spaces and each carries its own set of interests and responsibilities. The process of creating the Art of Living Dangerously has itself been an action research exercise in our combined ability to reframe our own thinking and practice. The provocation that follows is the product of a creative collaboration and a contested conversation. There are points of emphasis, ideas, positions in the following paper that provoke different reactions and responses but the research collaboration has maintained an honest and open process. It is our intention that the process we have worked with and the provocation we have created provide an open space for individuals and organisations to respond with authenticity but also with the adaptability to move beyond our current fixed positions. We need to take the risk to find more innovative ways to rethink our contribution to a vision of sustainable development that benefits the whole of society.

Exchange⁴, a group of arts organisations in NewcastleGateshead, have been working together since 2008 to explore how best to support the needs of emerging independent artists and creative practitioners working in performance – dancers, theatre makers, audio-visual artists and others. Beginning with an interest in shared rehearsal/work space, Exchange wanted to explore how best to make the case for the best possible support to individual artists and creative practitioners in a city where considerable investment has gone into large scale 'cultural hardware' in the shape of institutions such as Northern Stage, Dance City, Baltic and The Sage Gateshead and the buildings that house them. As organisations with different degrees of regular public funding and assets such as buildings or access to workspace, but all important in their spheres, Exchange's starting point was how best to create the conditions for individual artists and creative practitioners to thrive in the city's arts and cultural ecology, in ways which build the resilience and productivity of all involved and the wider community.

Mission Models Money has been supporting Exchange in this collaboration, and through its re.think programme is investigating the role of arts and culture in helping people respond to the 'bigger than self' challenges of climate change, resource scarcity and social injustice. They were particularly interested in how the kinds of artist development Exchange are involved with could model and promote 'bigger than self' thinking and contribute to a radical reframing of the value of arts and culture both socially and economically.

nef has a long record of research into how best to measure economic development and wellbeing, in ways that move beyond a simple 'GDP' focus. nef have argued for a 'great transition', necessary because the 'business as usual' economics of governments and central banks has failed. It has failed even on its terms – unable to deliver consistent growth or a fair spread of income, little evidence of the promised trickle down effect as income and well-being disparities grow wider and wider, decreasing social mobility, growing evidence of negative impact on the environment and life-satisfaction static as working hours diverge between 'longer and longer' and 'none' – because those terms are based on the illusion of infinite growth from finite resources.

4 *Ballet Lorent, The Empty Space, Nikolas Barrera and Northern Stage*

'Avoiding the scourge of unemployment may have less to do with chasing after growth and more to do with building an economy of care, craft and culture. And in doing so, restoring the value of decent work to its rightful place at the heart of society.' **Tim Jackson**, Economist

Introduction

Art and culture have the potential all over the world to weave communities together. Where would the Lower East Side, Hoxton and Kreuzberg be without the artists who repurposed streets as galleries, old shop-floors as theatres, warehouses as homes? What about the wellspring of ideas, favours and contacts that need to be swapped, exchanged and fostered to make the festivals of Edinburgh, Notting Hill and Lewes happen every year. Each evening across the country there are pubs, village halls, back-rooms and clubs, filled with comedians, films, dancers and poets who provide a point of conversation, start new thoughts and give us an un-mediated experience of connection to people, ideas and feelings. It's the artistic spirit that galvanises a movement, makes a place, and can transform a school. At their best, as they live and work, artists bring people together - they remind people that that they are a *people*.

But since the 1990s art and culture have largely only been able to be valued in policy terms as a contributor to a model of economic growth. The association of art and culture with up-market consumption, real estate development, global de-regulation and new sources of 'creative human capital' has positioned large areas of cultural and creative practice as an accomplice to an unsustainable growth agenda. The creations of European Capitals of Culture, 'Cultural Regeneration' projects, the idea of the 'Creative Class'⁵ have, perhaps unintentionally, focused attention on one of art and culture's benefits - at the expense of a broader understanding of what artists do.

We need a new story about art and sustainable development that starts with artists and the places and communities in which they live. That recognises how they breathe particular kinds of life into the places where people congregate and come together. That demystifies their involvement in an informal economy exchanging skills, ideas and materials. That shows their role in helping communities see the often-unseen 'livelihood assets' around them that can bring them adaptability and resilience. That shows the type of 'social learning' and innovation made possible when people, ideas and imagination come together. What could be more important, at a time when the types of exchange facilitated by the economy provide such poor ways of valuing and growing what really matters?

In this paper we will look at how this reframing of our understanding of what 'cultural value' is can find a home in theories of sustainable development and, drawing on the work of Exchange, we will look at what this could mean for communities that seek to position artists throughout the life and culture of towns and cities across the UK. Throughout we will focus on artists and other creative practitioners - as it is only through their day-to-day practices that we can understand the full value of the difference they make to places in which they live and work.

The irony of this focus on artists and their livelihoods is that in times when art itself is increasingly perceived and sold as a luxury commodity, being an artist runs the risk of becoming a luxury profession. The fees of an undergraduate degree run up to £27,000, a masters degree to £12,000 and then there are the barriers of class, gender and race, the expectation of free-labour to negotiate before securing work as an artist or other creative professional. The more exclusive art education becomes, the more abstracted art becomes from society, social progress and sustainable economic development. This conception of the purpose of art and characteristics of artists could not be further from the one imagined in this paper. With a comprehensive understanding of what artists do to make places better, we can dismantle some of the barriers that prevent artists from thriving – and build foundations from which they can share knowledge, pool risk with one another and open-up new spaces to live and work. Changing our understanding of what an artist or creative practitioner actually does, can help to alter who gets to become one.

Section 1: Culture and Sustainable Development

'The only intelligible meaning of "benefit to the economy" is the contribution – direct or indirect – the activity makes to the welfare of ordinary citizens.' **John Kay**, Economist

This section looks at the state of the economy, and the search for ways to fix it. Those trying to reform ideas of economic growth are attempting to place a value on what many experts in 'cultural value' have long been attempting to describe - the value of those things that are hard to put a price on - creativity, learning, attention, community and so on. Situating culture within a framework of sustainable development gives us a way of bringing these two perspectives together, it gives us a different perspective on growth for economists, and a way of understanding the value of artists and creative practitioners that starts from what they do and *how they live*, rather than what benefits they produce for cultural policy makers.

1.1 The state we're in

Our immediate economic turmoil stems from the evening of Sunday, September 15, 2008, when Lehman Brothers, one of the largest investment banks in the world, filed for bankruptcy. In the week that followed, the largest bank run in history broke out. Hidden from most of us, the shadow banking system – that immense conglomeration of off-balance sheet, deregulated and tax-less activities and institutions assembled during the years of the boom – collapsed in on itself. Close to half a trillion dollars disappeared from the US banking system in five days. Banks and financial institutions across the globe were threatened with collapse.

The response, now familiar, was to bail out the financial system. Governments across the globe used their own powers to borrow and to provide financial assurances to prop the system up. An immense burden was, as a result, transferred onto the public sector, onto, ultimately, the rest of society. The cost of this operation globally has been estimated by the International Monetary Fund to be \$11 trillion. The Bank of England's estimated cost for this to the UK is £1.3 trillion.

The bailouts stabilised the financial system.⁶ But they did not prevent an exceptionally sharp recession erupting, worldwide. Economic growth has faltered, businesses are struggling to survive, people are losing their jobs and sometimes their homes. The UK has been particularly badly hit, the victim of its bloated financial services sector, unemployment has risen, expenditures on unemployment benefits accelerated. But tax revenues also fell. As across the rest of the developed world, the UK government deficit – the gap between tax revenues and public spending – yawned open. So public spending has been cut, affecting many including those in the independent arts, threatening livelihoods and development.

But the initial policy response of austerity has so far failed to cut that deficit or deal with unemployment and deepening inequality. This austerity approach is counting on return to GDP-growth to achieve these goals. But here the wider and deeper uncertainty about conventional economic thinking is highly relevant. Growth, held since at least the 1950s as the panacea for all economic problems, was not delivering. Whilst the top 1% saw income and wealth soar during the “boom”, median real household incomes stagnated or even fell. Consumption for the majority was sustained only through growing indebtedness. At the peak of the boom, UK households were the most heavily indebted of anywhere in the world, with 163% of average household income held as debt. Inequality has worsened over the past thirty years not just in terms income and wealth, where it has been most extreme, but also in terms of life expectancy, health and education.

The environmental damage associated with the late twentieth century growth model – most notably in its greenhouse gas emissions – shows no signs of abating. Whilst the energy efficiency of the UK economy has improved sharply over time, the impact of this on total emissions has been cancelled out by growth in the economy. This dominance of scale over efficiency is playing out in more extreme fashion globally. Critically the conventional growth model saw environmental damage as reversible – growth now would pay for sorting the problem out in the future. For many acute, localised environmental problems this was the case but the urgent problems we face, such as climate change, involve major irreversible tipping points something that is not only recognised internationally but demands that economies are run within their environmental means something the conventional growth model does not recognise.

The link between these immediate and systemic challenges is increasingly not only recognised but also debated in terms of a paradigm shift. ‘Questioning growth is deemed to be the act of lunatics, idealists and revolutionaries,’ according to the economist Tim Jackson. But we are faced with a dilemma, no growth risks economic collapse and unemployment, full-on growth risks increasing inequality and destruction of the ecological systems on which we depend for survival.

1.2 Valuing the wrong things

Our current model of economic growth is failing because it often attributes value to the wrong things. It can only recognise certain kinds of value. Popular criticism has focused on whether Gross Domestic Product is the best goal for a government. The best known critique of this measure came from the Sarkozy Commission report, set up in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, led by Nobel laureates Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen. They identify three broad types of problem.

First, as an economic measure GDP does an inadequate job because it focuses solely on income but should also cover wealth and employment. It also critically fails to measure the distribution of these

⁶ *International Monetary Fund Working Paper: Bailouts and Systemic Insurance, November 2013*, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/cat/longres.aspx?sk=41048.0>

three. Second, increasing well-being for all, the purpose of an economy, is delivered by more than those things that are measured in terms of price. This is important not just because these things need to be included in a measure of prosperity but also because economics can influence them for better or worse. Third, but not the main focus of this paper, GDP but particularly cost benefit analysis fail to address the threat of reaching irreversible tipping points in environmental damage and climate change.

For some the damage caused by misplaced measures of growth extends beyond the tangible wrongs of environmental degradation and inequality, but has corroded social relations. Professor Tim Kasser has documented the supplanting of the 'intrinsic values' of community, empathy and sharing with the 'extrinsic values' that have to do with fame, success, power and money⁷. In Canada, the essayist FS Michaels talks of the emergence of a 'Monoculture' whereby 'the economic story is the story of life itself'. In 2010, on his death bed the historian Tony Judt wrote about the erosion of the idea of public good, while the American philosopher Michael Sandel recently coined the memorable epitaph that we have shifted from Having a Market Economy, to Being a Market Society.

For Tim Jackson, the heart of the problem is the relationship between labour and productivity, the more productive we are the higher our incomes are the higher GDP is. But three of the things that suffer most directly from the pursuit of economic growth through labour productivity are things that are not based on the direct creation of measured and measurable economic output or growth, but still matter very much to our quality of life and shared prosperity, namely Care: the time energy and attention taken to look after each other; Craft: the time, energy and attention taken to make or mend things ourselves and/or make them beautiful rather than just useful; and Culture: the time, energy and attention taken to produce artistic works of enduring value.⁸

In short, he argues *'avoiding the scourge of unemployment may have less to do with chasing after growth and more to do with building an economy of care, craft and culture. And in doing so, restoring the value of decent work to its rightful place at the heart of society.'*

It is almost as though our dominant growth measures shine no light on things we have always valued. Without it they have withered.

At a time of unprecedented public sector cuts and in the light of a continued deficit in public borrowing we increasingly have to make choices about what matters. Perhaps it is difficult to value care, craft and culture because they do not fit easily into the economic growth story or we distort them by insisting they do. These things are more than commodities or traded services, they are fundamental to responding to the challenges of the human condition, of our times and for future generations; to building community well-being, democracy and sustainable livelihoods for all.

1.3 Placing a value on what artists do

There are similarities between the current attempt within economics to place a value on those things not valued within the current model of economic growth, and discourses within cultural policy that have attempted to place a measurable value on culture and the arts. Both have struggled to prescribe a value to things that cannot be touched or easily counted.

⁷ Prof Tim Kasser, *Common Cause and Values and Frames*, 2011

⁸ RSA Blog, May 2012, <http://www.rsablogs.org.uk/2012/socialbrain/economy-care-craft-culture/>

Many of the attempts to describe the value of culture have identified its social and economic benefits, partly to justify itself in an economic orthodoxy that has required measurable proxies and outcomes. These 'instrumental' benefits of art and culture tend to be cited in opposition to 'intrinsic' benefits. Discussion of the value of culture has pitched the question of whether the arts should be valued for their contribution to (politically determined) social goals, against the idea that their value should be taken as innate.

Both of these approaches emphasise 'what culture does' over a wider understanding of what it is that artists actually do and how they maintain a livelihood - their day-to-day roles, rhythms and modes of being. In ways that mirror what growth measures can and cannot see, we find proxies for the value of the artistic 'product' rather than in the life-style, behaviours and learning that produced it. So the multiplier effect of investing £2m in turning a water-mill into an art gallery; the difference a programme of museum visits makes to classes English GCSE results; opera visitors attested experiences of the 'sublime', tell us little about the artists and creative practitioners who produce these paintings, buildings and experiences. How do they develop? Where do they live? What was their purpose in becoming and remaining an artist? What networks are they a part of? How do they learn and create? What is their relationship to the place that they live? What is their role in community life?

These questions are important to ask now. When the yard-stick of social progress is economic growth, the utility of culture and the arts is understood in as far as they contribute to that growth or ameliorate the social problems that hold it back. But with the model of economic growth under question - fundamental questions being asked about labour productivity, the damaging impact of growth on the environment, social relations and so on - the question for the arts and culture is also changing. We are moving from asking 'how should we determine the value of art and culture to the economy?' to investigating whether, within the practice of artists and creative practitioners there are patterns of living, behaving and acting - a different value system - that might help us to establish and locate a different model of sustainable economic development?

There are some pointers in the available literature to the contribution artists and creative practitioners make to their locality that give us clues as to how artists and creative practitioners function in distinctive ways⁹. While these tend to focus on the benefits of artists work, rather than descriptions of their livelihoods and patterns of working, they start to make it easier to see how artists create. In section 2 we will look more deeply at these. It is clear that more research is needed.

Creating places and the public

Artists' work is often involved with places where people meet and congregate. They can be a vital part of creating, animating and extending these spaces. The Creative Placemaking programme in the US¹⁰ is clear in suggesting a role for artists and creative practitioners in creating the vibrancy of a place, which in turn leads to retention of creative people of all occupations, leading to economic development both directly through art markets and audiences and indirectly through bars, restaurants and the leisure/tourism economy. Anne Gadwa even argues that there is little evidence of gentrification as a result of artists and creative practitioners moving into a neighbourhood, and that artists and creative practitioners,

⁹ Arts Council England, *Be Creative Be Well: Arts, Wellbeing and Communities*, 2012

¹⁰ See *Creative Placemaking* by Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa A white paper for The Mayors' Institute on City Design, a leadership initiative on the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the United States Conference of Mayors and American Architectural Foundation. NEA 2010. - See more at: <http://arts.gov/publications/creative-placemaking#sthash.8oLCCaWz.dpuf>

with their mixed but generally low incomes, can even help retain the diversity of a neighbourhood undergoing development¹¹.

Alternative exchange patterns

They are involved often with an informal economy of exchange, in skills, ideas and materials that is often not monetised but works with other forms of capital and value exchange. In some ways maybe, artists operate with a model balancing market-involvement and 'bigger than self' interests that is required in remaking the broader economy. Artists and creative practitioners are seen by some as examples of, or precursors to, new models of work. The characteristics highlighted include high levels of self-employment and 'entrepreneurial' behaviours to sustain their artistic practice, strong networks and skills sharing. They are also seen to operate in the market without being solely shaped by profit and return. It is also argued that in finding some kind of balance between income and art practice, artists and creative practitioners may be a model for a new post-growth economy. As Tim Jackson argues again 'And here perhaps is the most remarkable thing of all: because these activities are built around the exchange of human services rather than the relentless throughput of material stuff, there's a half decent chance of making the economy more sustainable.'

Identifying community assets

Artists and creative practitioners work often values relationships and activity not just in transactional monetary terms but also in ways that can enable people to recognise and realise potential livelihood assets. This is what makes the artistic spirit important for commerce, but also for communities. Some arguments have stressed the way in which professional artists and creative practitioners' work is part of the broader economy, deriving income from clients and customers and spending it in the supply chain or the local economy. They also emphasise the importance of the creative skills arguably at the centre of artistic practice, and the role in creating and spreading innovation of all kinds¹². The portfolio working which most artists and creative practitioners describe when explaining how they make art and a living¹³ is seen as a potential model for future ways of working, part of the shift from single or long-term 'monogamous' employer-employee relationships. The skills of an artist are also seen as having wider application than simply the production of cultural product, but as useful in education and the wider creative industries and economy.

These three activities – creating places; alternative patterns of exchange, and identifying community assets – are not descriptions of the livelihoods of all artists across Britain. It's unlikely that there is an invisible, under-valued world of artists and creative practitioners in Britain's towns and cities, operating with a different value system, slowly bending the dominant economic paradigm to their behaviours. If there were there would be established systems of support and exchange, more co-operative structures to support homes and workspaces, associations to share the risks of being a sole-trader, and artists would be better connected to schools, hospitals and the fabric of day-to-day lives of most people.

The reality is more grim. Over the last fifteen years, the idea that the supply of artists and creative practitioners can be 'taken as read' led to investment going more into bricks and mortar, than into the

11 Anne Gadwa *How Art Spaces Matter II* http://metrisarts.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/1-HowArtSpacesMatter_II.pdf

12 eg Oakley, K., B. Sperry, and A. Pratt. *The Art of Innovation*. London: NESTA, 2008

13 eg Hans Abbing *Why are Artists Poor: The Exceptional Economy of the Arts*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, June 2002
Baines, Whitlock Baines, S. and Wheelock, J. 2001. 'Contextualising the creative labour process for visual artists.' Paper presented to the 19th International Labour Process Conference, 26 - 28 March, Royal Holloway College, London

creative practices which make those cultural buildings assets to the community, rather than liabilities to be maintained. This squeezes out the scope for artists and creative practitioners to form livelihoods around those patterns of behaviour outlined in the previous section.

These infrastructure developments have become flagships for particular kinds of culture and have limited the opportunities for other and new kinds of practice to develop. They create a 'sector' for culture to inhabit, rather than connecting art and culture to everyday life. Some have even suggested that when such infrastructure developments are brought together and marketed as part of a 'creative city' or similar, they can actually accentuate social class segregation.¹⁴

Most importantly, it has led to an indifference to who gets to become an artist. If the benefits of cultural product matter most, who is making it and how it is made becomes less important. However, it is problematic for society if only the wealthy can afford to become artists and limit the potential talent, diversity of perspectives, voices and experiences. Moreover, if artists come only from privileged backgrounds it is also unlikely that they will be residing in the most deprived communities. The working conditions of artists and creative practitioners are notorious and subject to much research over the years by public and private funders and policy-making bodies. There is a strong consensus that despite the tiny minority of artists and creative practitioners who 'win big', the vast majority earn significantly less than in other professions with a similar level of higher education and have poor pension provision. This has meant that artists and creative practitioners' incomes and work conditions, their ability to build sustainable livelihoods and careers within particular localities or communities, have become ever more precarious and vulnerable.

In the same way that economic theory grows in the shoes of 'rational economic man', the culture of economic growth has made artists and creative practitioners a kind of positive ghost in the machine of most frameworks for measuring the effects of culture. Just as the critiques of classical economics require a certain 'outing' now, so too do we need an 'outing' of the artist and how they create, survive and thrive, what they do, who and where they are. While the economic arguments for the benefits of culture have increased and maintained 'bricks and mortar' in recent decades, we have overlooked artists livelihoods, which has contributed to a separation between artists and society and worst of all has created an indifference to who gets to become an artist. The cruel irony is that the more separate, siloed and elite artists become, the easier it is to argue in times of austerity that they are a luxury society no longer afford. We are trapped in cycle that reduces the relevance of artists and creative practitioners at just the time when the alternative value-system that sustains artists and creative practitioners is most needed.

One way to reframe this could be to borrow a framework from international development to suggest a fresh way for artists and creative practitioners and all those involved in influencing and making policy and funding alike to reposition artists' livelihoods in a new context.

1.4 Placing art and culture within sustainable development

There is a growing shift in interest from 'creative cities' to 'sustainable cities' ¹⁵ with a strong argument made for the inclusion of culture in all policy areas. In 2010 United Cities and Local Governments, a

¹⁴ Prof Jonathan Vickery, *Beyond the Creative City*, May 2012

¹⁵ eg Kagan, Sacha. "From the Unsustainable Creative Class to the Sustainable Creative City: An Emerging Shift in Cultural Policies?" (October 15, 2010). <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1692189>

global body for local government, adopted a Policy Statement, 'Culture: Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development' which argued for the inclusion of culture into models of sustainable development, alongside economic, social and environmental, and the promotion of cultural diversity. The central argument is that 'culture ultimately shapes what we mean by development and determines how people act in the world.'

The Statement argues for a definition of sustainable development where cultural vitality sits alongside environmental responsibility, economic health and social equity. Agenda 21 for Culture has promoted the arguments for culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development globally. It has to some extent been accepted by UNESCO who suggest that 'cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature' and it becomes; one of the roots of development understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence' (*The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* UNESCO 2001). David Throsby describes how even the World Bank has set out how culture can contribute to its development objectives by:

- Providing new opportunities for communities to generate income
- Catalyzing local-level development using community skills and resources
- Generating income from protected or renewed community assets
- Strengthening social capital
- Diversifying capacity building for knowledge-based societies ¹⁶.

However, the recent conclusions from the Rio+20 Conference make little explicit reference to the role of culture, and still refer to 3 pillars of sustainable development excluding culture. There is little evidence of anywhere in Britain giving serious attention to Agenda 21 for Culture and this more holistic concept of development. In 2011 the UK Department for Culture Media and Sport sponsored a research fellow whose concluding paper, for instance, argues strongly for the cultural sector to make a more purely economic argument for the arts and describe contingent valuation, it makes little reference to sustainable development. In some senses this is a symptom of a wider issue: the current emphasis on economic growth and tight fiscal control as a response to 'austerity'.

The 'Sustainable Livelihoods' framework developed and promoted by the Department for International Development in the late 1990s, and utilised primarily in the fields of poverty reduction and international development, is a form of asset-based development. (DFID 1998.) It seeks to understand the systems in which sustainable livelihoods can be developed, identifying five kinds of assets an individual or household might have, the context in which they can utilise those, their vulnerabilities, and goals for their livelihoods.

Judi Piggott, who has argued for the application of the Sustainable Livelihood framework to understanding the economic role of artists and creative practitioners in the creative economy defines it thus: 'A livelihood system framework is asset-based, identifying and building on existing strengths, rather than focusing on needs. Its core concept is sustainability, in that greater capacity and resilience to reduce economic vulnerability is the goal.' ¹⁷ (Piggott 2008) Piggott's work, in the context of sector development in Canada,

¹⁶ David Throsby, *Economic and Culture*, Cambridge University Press, 2001

¹⁷ Judy Piggott, *Sustainable Livelihood Systems: A Framework for Understanding the Economic Role of Artists in the Creative Economy*, 2008 http://synergybydesign.ca/sites/default/files/Sust_Livelihood_System_FrameworkPaper.pdf

takes a systems approach to mapping and understanding the creative economy at the level of individual creative assets - the artists and creative practitioners themselves - borrowing 'livelihood systems' from international development work and moving beyond the framework of a manufacturing and growth economy's language.

Figure 1 is a model Sustainable Livelihood Framework, as developed by DFID¹⁸

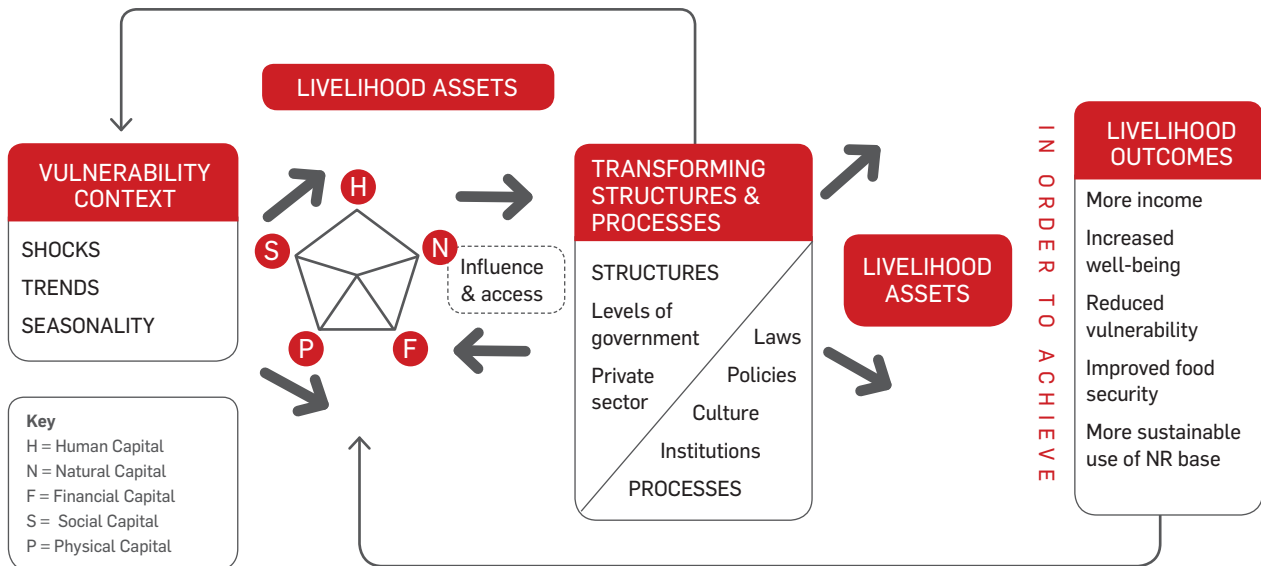


Figure 1: Sustainable Livelihood framework

Livelihood Assets

The framework defines five kinds of 'capital' that make up those assets:

- Human capital: skills, knowledge, health
- Natural capital: land, natural resources, environmental health
- Financial capital: savings, income, borrowing
- Social capital: networks and beneficial relationships
- Physical capital: infrastructure, buildings, equipment, energy.

Not all of these are as relevant to the case of emergent independent artists in NewcastleGateshead, but one can see how these types of capital might influence an artists' ability to sustain a livelihood, taking the example of a dancer, for instance:

- Human capital. Initial training followed by continuing professional development and opportunity to make work and have it peer-reviewed, whilst keeping the body fit would tend to increase assets. Lack of regular workshops, lack of exposure to current and 'next' practice (or ability to partake) would tend to diminish it.
- Natural capital: Good environments to live and rehearse in would increase capital in this area: cramped, damp unhealthy spaces would tend to diminish it.

18 eg DFID Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheet <http://www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/O901/section2.pdf>

- Financial capital: Having money available, whether from income, savings, family or borrowing would tend to increase opportunities to create work to a high standard. Lack of available finance, either for investment (into say training or equipment, or time to rehearse) or for ongoing costs, leading to distracting 'day jobs', would tend to weaken the artists' ability to fulfill their livelihood ambitions alongside their cultural ambitions.
- Social capital: Strong networks and beneficial relationships that lead to collaboration, commission, income and skill-sharing all strengthen an individual. A lack of networks and poor connectivity will tend to lead to isolation and diminished social capital.
- Physical capital: Being able to access (via affordable public transport or good roads) high quality but affordable studio, rehearsal, performance and office workspace, at convenient times would be key physical assets for a dancer – even if not owned. Having no access to suitable spaces, or to ones that were too cold or costly would leave them with little physical capital.

These 'livelihood assets' are key to negotiating the 'influence and access' necessary to carrying out what the framework calls livelihood strategies. The combination of human, social and financial capital aspects are arguably key to entry into the arts – with its emphasis on 'talent' but also its documented reliance on networks, and a growing perception that the ability to work for nothing for a while is an entry requirement.

Livelihood strategies are the ways in which a person or family unit seeks to draw in the resources and other support which make their desired 'livelihood outcomes' possible. These may include a portfolio of roles or of activities and services they offer to others. They may also include support from family members, or, for short periods, borrowing or debt. They are likely to be heavily influenced by the nature and extent of the assets an individual has – or even feels they have.

For artists and creative practitioners, these strategies will be shaped by their assets – what they have to play with, and can offer – but also by their operating environment, and its 'vulnerability context'. To use a crude example, the viable strategies available to similarly skilled, networked and financially resourced dancers may differ if they choose to live in London or in Louth in Lincolnshire. Their livelihood outcomes may also necessarily differ.

Livelihood outcomes are the expectations of a viable livelihood (a mix of monetary income, personal or family well-being and security of food and housing, and reduced vulnerability to changes in circumstances) and the sustainability of their use of resources. Artists and creative practitioners often live with a high level of vulnerability in precarious livelihoods. This has major implications for the diversity and democracy of artistic practice as many without family backing (both financial support and encouragement) may be excluded by their inability to live with such levels of vulnerability. Research suggests artists and creative practitioners often 'trade' present security for potential future success, which may never arrive.

Transforming Structures & Processes are those policies, institutions, legal frameworks and general 'how we do things round here' ways of working in which people must operate. These can be more or less helpful to creating sustainable livelihoods. Examples of enabling structures in the creative and cultural industries might be the legal framework of intellectual property law, licensing laws, employment practices such as internships, touring networks in the performing arts, or indeed the arts funding system.

Vulnerability context is those things that may change to affect the individual – this might include the seasonality of work or income, shocks such as natural disasters, or changes in populations, markets or demand for services or goods. The resilience of regional economies forms part of the vulnerability context – their assets, networks, equilibrium and ability to adapt in response to change, for instance¹⁹. Equally the adaptive resilience of local cultural sectors or of artform sub-sectors will form part of this context.²⁰

By working together individuals and communities can shift their relationship to the framework as well as being subject to it.

The reality of many artists and creative practitioners' livelihoods should not be ignored. As noted before, average income is low in comparison with other activity with equivalent professional training and qualification, pension and maternity provision is poor or non-existent, and self-subsidy is commonplace. This affects both lives and artwork, through lack of equity of access to the sector and development routes within it.

The framework builds on an asset-based approach that many, including Mission Models Money, have increasingly argued for and established in the cultural sector. This approach stresses the possibilities created by both tangible and intangible assets, including social capital, rather than the 'gap' or needs-based approach which is often perceived as 'the arts holding out their hands again'.

Additionally, the framework shares an emphasis on the centrality of tangible and intangible assets with ideas of cultural 'adaptive resilience'– defined as 'the capacity to remain productive and true to core purpose and identity whilst absorbing disturbance and adapting with integrity in response to changing circumstances – and the ability to develop a more secure livelihood'²¹. Similarly, networks and financial resources are key characteristics of adaptive resilience, and can be related to the vulnerability context in the Sustainable Livelihood Framework.

Finally, the framework has the possibility to be used flexibly enough to encompass all the aspects an artist or cultural worker might seek in their livelihood and how this related to the context in which they are working. This is important to connecting earning a living to other common aims of artists and creative practitioners, such as developing creativity, expression or communication, and wider public good which may not be present in all occupations. In doing so it also has potential to simultaneously connect to the full range of possibilities for the effects of culture, providing measures, which are more holistic and integrated in their intent and application.

This holistic analysis can then be used – as recommended in literature examining the potential usefulness of sustainable livelihoods thinking - to identify focused interventions, resisting the temptation to create over-complicated programmes which aim to address every problem in the system (Ashley Carney 1999). Sustainable livelihoods then become an underlying approach to development, rather than a specific 'workstream'. This has the potential to change the way in which emergent independent artists are seen in the development of culture and for policy makers to shape strategies in ways that support emergent

¹⁹ Pendall, Rolf, Kathryn A. Foster, and Margaret Cowell. "Resilience and Regions: Building Understanding of the Metaphor." *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 3, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 71–84.

²⁰ Mark Robinson, *Making Adaptive Resilience Real*, Arts Council England, 2010

²¹ Mark Robinson, *ibid*

independent artists networks in tandem with the overall community sustainability that we would argue should be their aim.

DFID have identified a set of core principles that have strong resonance with commonly held principals in cultural development. They suggest development activity should be:

- People-centred: focusing on key concerns and acknowledging and positively building on the difference and diversity in people’s perspectives and positions.
- Responsive and participatory: involving the people concerned, including – in our case – emergent independent artists
- Multi-level: working at different levels so that individual and community-level interventions influence higher level policy and strategy and vice versa
- Conducted in partnership: working across the public and the private sector, involving actors from all parts of the ecology where appropriate
- Sustainable: achieving a balance between economic, institutional, social and environmental sustainability
- Dynamic: livelihood strategies should respond flexibly to changes in situation in localities and amongst emergent independent artists

So what might a Sustainable Livelihood Framework relating to emergent independent artists in sustainable communities look like?

Figure 2 builds on the outline of the application to artists given above.

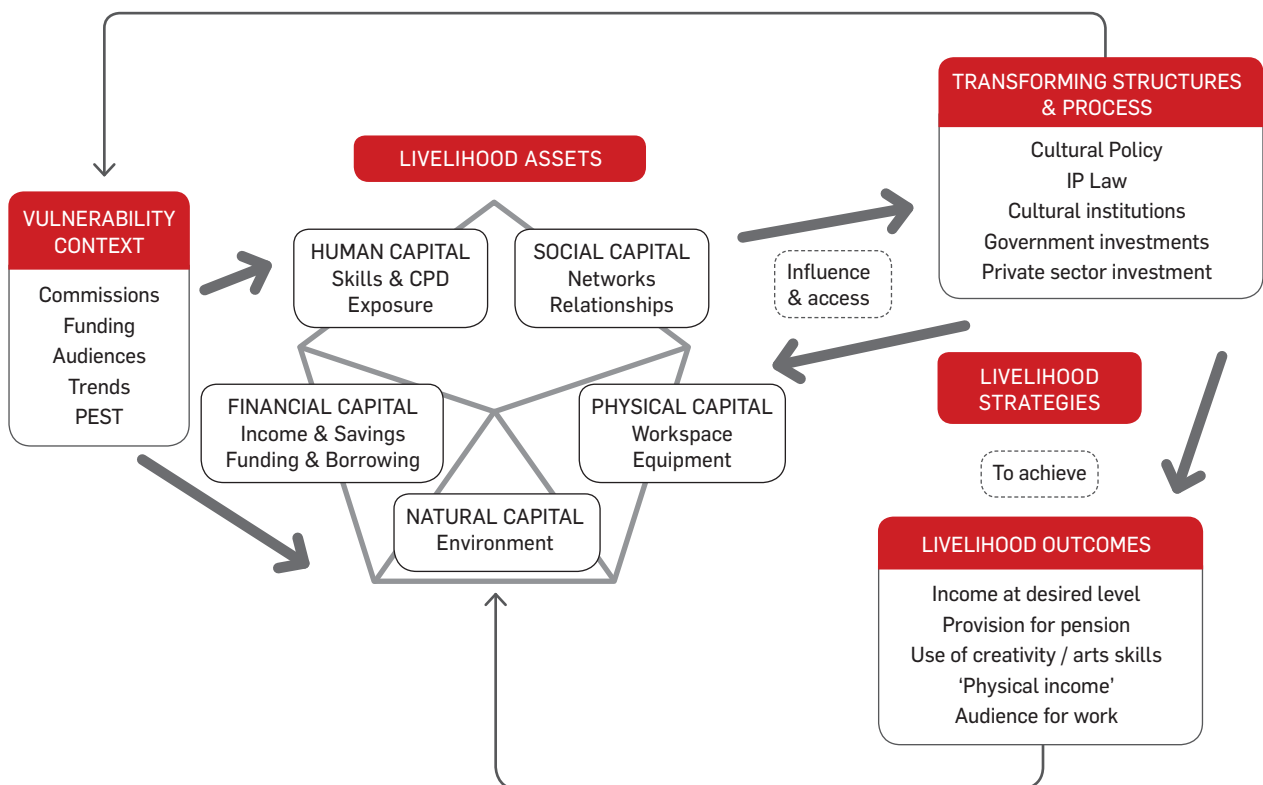


Figure 2: Sustainable Livelihoods for Artists and creative practitioners

With further definition it may be possible to extend this 'system' to incorporate readings of the adaptive resilience of sectors or sub-sectors and the overall resilience of regions (incorporating as most frameworks do vulnerability to natural and economic turbulence alongside social and economic factors), and the outcomes which a particular city wishes to prioritise. This may look something like Figure 3.

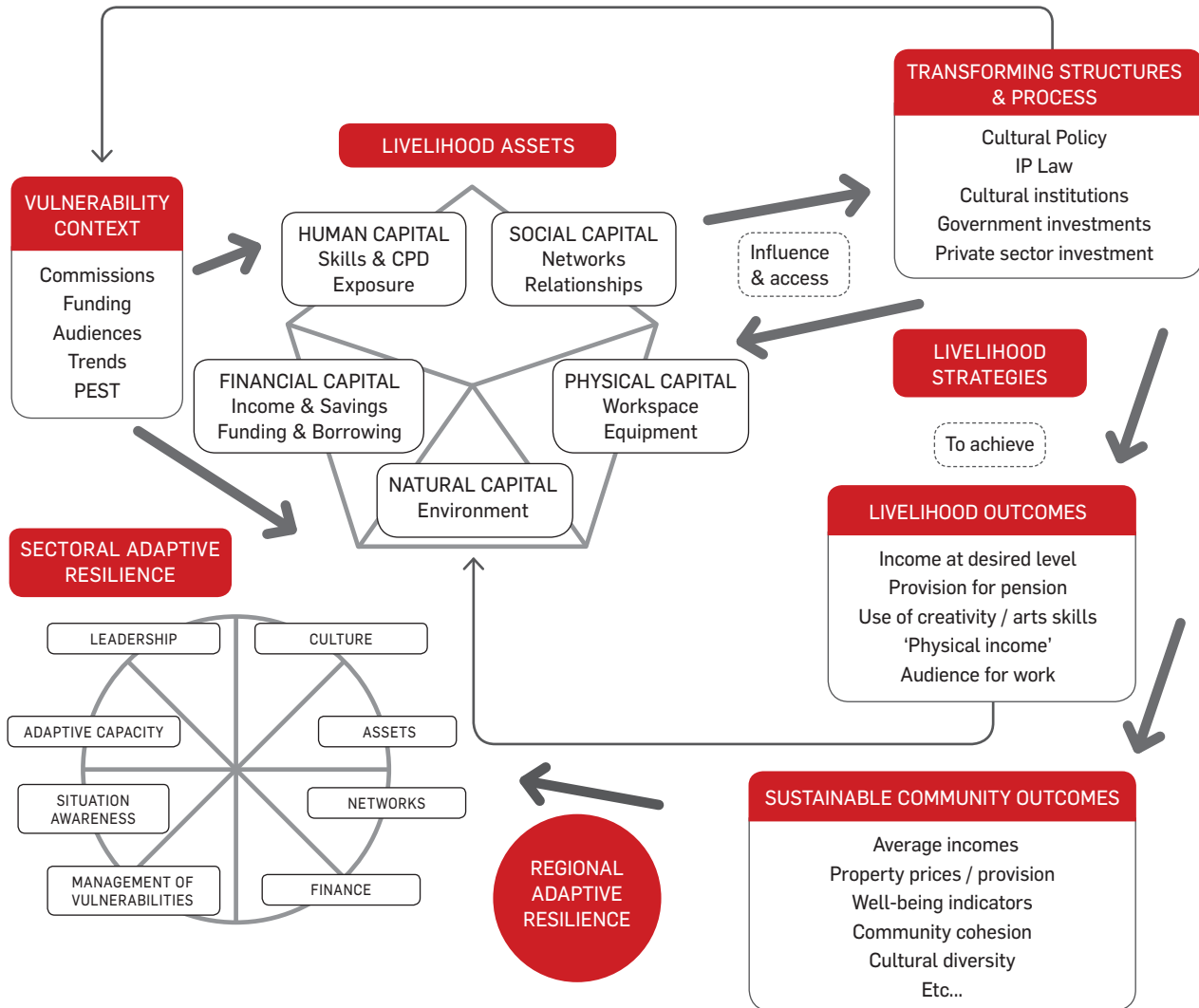


Figure 3: Sustainable livelihoods in overall outcomes and resilience

Section 2: A Theory of Change

'Culture-led development includes benefits such as social inclusiveness and rootedness, resilience, innovation...for communities and the use of local resources, skills and knowledge'

UNESCO, Culture: a driver and enabler of sustainable development

So far this paper has explored the role of arts and culture within sustainable economic development and how artists and other creative practitioners could adopt a sustainable development theory. But what would applying some of this understanding mean in a particular place for a group of artists and creative practitioners? What outcomes and values beyond the traditionally economic are artists and creative practitioners bringing to their local area? What alternative indicators of progress can they help provide? This section recounts the process of, developing a 'Theory of Change' with Exchange in the North East of England.

Theory of change is a methodological approach used to understand how change occurs. It is often employed by organisations or groups to support their understanding of what journey they need to go on and what steps they need to take in order for their long-term goal to be attained. To this end, it explores the causal links between particular activities and the results of these activities (outcomes/ values).

Theory of change is built on what matters to stakeholders and is expressed in their voice. Voices are often captured through facilitated workshops so the partners in this report collaborated in a one-day interactive theory of change workshop in Newcastle. The workshop was attended by emergent independent artists, people from local government established arts institutions and 'fringe' arts institutions and other relevant practitioners in the field.

The workshop was intended to engender debate and capture a range of voices from different standpoints but also to reach consensus where possible on what vision is desired and possible in terms of the role of arts in creative and cultural regeneration and how it can practically be attained. The stakeholders who attended spoke on behalf of themselves but also the networks and communities with which they are involved.

A vision for a thriving community of artists within a more sustainable community

The stakeholders at the workshop valued the opportunity to reflect on what a thriving community of artists and creative practitioners might look like. They suggested that it would involve artists consciously thinking about what they want to achieve artistically, socially and economically, both individually and collectively. Linked to this was belief in the value of artists and creative practitioners proactively shaping discourses in the local area. The potential for practical concerns, such as funding worries, to stand in the way of discourse and engagement was acknowledged; such funding concerns (including access to up-front investment and impacts on stress and innovation) should not be overlooked but should equally not be at the expense of introspection.

The stakeholders at the workshop identified certain factors (outlined below) which would characterise their practical vision of a thriving community of emergent independent artists that plays an active role in developing the area:

The values and ethos of the community

- Questioning (and driving) debate on what we mean by prosperity and what we value
- Striving to be better, questioning what they want to be.
- Driving what happens next in the locality
- At ease with risk taking and constant change, diversity and variety

Attributes of the artists and creative practitioners themselves

- Culturally Diverse
- Critical and Analytical
- Mixed age: people do not drop out of profession as they get older
- Broad minded and outward looking and international in outlook
- Socially inclusive - not just those that can afford to do an internship or go to university

Places they live and work

- The artists and creative practitioners have access to spaces
- The artists and creative practitioners have workspaces to connect to other artists and creative practitioners
- The community is both online and offline
- The community is fluid - people come and go: some people have always been in the area; some people leave the area; some people come to the area and stay; some people come to the area to visit
- It is somewhere to call home

Networks and links within the community

- A supportive community of artists and creative practitioners rather than simply isolated artists and creative practitioners working in different areas
- It is not just individual "groups"/ "organisations"/ "buildings" etc doing their own thing
- There is a network of artists and creative practitioners - different art forms come together to meet and share ideas

- The community and people in it learn from others – for example through apprenticeships and champions
- The community of artists and creative practitioners is integrated with the local area:
 - Artists and creative practitioners socialize not just with other artists
 - It is not just artists and creative practitioners in the “community” who are involved but other skills/ trades e.g. welding
 - Artists and creative practitioners themselves are involved in the local area in other ways
 - There is a network of champions (to support, advocate and disseminate the ideas of artists in the community)
 - The community is made up of individuals and companies
 - Established and emergent artists support each other
 - There is ‘power sharing’ between independents and institutions rather than having a power problem and deficit
 - Independent artists value institutions and institutions value independents, rather than there being tension. Artists and creative practitioners and institutions support each other and work for ‘bigger than self’ ends.

The work/ job

- Some suggested that being an artist/creative practitioner should be recognised as a “legitimate” job. It is not necessary to use the term “professional artists”, as “artist/creative practitioner” speaks for itself as a profession
- At the same time others called for the need to breakdown the professional vs. non-professional boundary i.e. anyone can be an artist (whether in the “profession” or not).
- Being a professional artist/creative practitioner is not just about getting paid – there would be an understanding of what the profession means in terms of standards, behaviours, ongoing development, responsibilities and rights
- The community takes responsibility for work

This detailed practical vision can be translated as being a set of short to long term aims that would be exhibited (in the opinion of the stakeholders) if artists and creative practitioners were placed at the heart of sustainable development.

Through this vision...what outcomes and values beyond the traditionally economic are artists bringing to their local area?

The stakeholders identified that their ‘practical vision’ would result in outcomes for three main groups:

- 1 **Artists and creative practitioners and their immediate networks:**
 - Emergent independent artists themselves
 - Their families; partners and support networks etc

2 The wider community in Tyneside:

Residents

Visitors

Particular sectors: education; health; social care; media

3 Wider society:

'mainstream' economy and small artisan industries and freelancers

Public and private funders; providers

Voluntary sector

Arts infrastructure and staff

Government and politicians

These three groups would be positively affected by a shift to the vision above, and could therefore usefully be involved in supporting the implementation of that vision. The stakeholders at the workshop discussed and examined what activities would need to be in place now and in what ways these would impact on the different stakeholders in order to work towards there being a thriving community of artists and creative practitioners contributing to cultural regeneration. They also identified the outcomes/ value generated for these three groups in the medium term. The value generated was defined both in the traditional economic sense (e.g. increased revenue at performances) but also through alternative indicators of value (such as increased well-being and connection to place).

The diagram on the next page outlines and summarises the steps along the journey to reaching the overarching vision/ aim as identified by the stakeholders. It shows how immediate activities can lead to specific outcomes/ values for different groups which will all in turn support the achievement of the vision.

This diagram illustrates the stakeholders' vision of how different pathways can lead to their ultimate aims being met, and the outcomes/ value generated for different groups along the way. For example, having greater access to affordable space will mean that artists and creative practitioners have greater opportunities to network; share ideas and collaborate. This interaction will strengthen the community of artists and creative practitioners meaning they will be better placed to both counter and partner with established institutions in a way that builds cultural capital. This will eventually result in artists and creative practitioners leading more creative partnerships in the area with the ultimate effect of artists and creative practitioners being active in shaping and sharing the values and ethos of the local community.

To follow the top pathway; a smarter use of resources on the part of public and private funders will allow time for artists and creative practitioners to develop and improve their work. Raising the quality of work will mean artists and creative practitioners are better equipped to meaningfully engage with the local audience. This engagement will lead to stronger social connections in the local area which would in turn lead to the outcomes of higher well-being and self-esteem. Increases in these health related factors are likely to assist in attracting a more diverse range of funding sources which will perpetuate the virtuous cycle of a smarter use of resources by public and private funders.

The Theory of Change diagram (figure 4) also serves as a device to consider the consequences of certain steps in the pathway not being achieved. What would happen for example if supportive infrastructure such as spaces are not open and amenable? What would the likely consequences be for the ability of artists to network and grow stronger – and what would be the knock on effects of that in turn?

Immediate activities

Immediate activities

Long-term aims / vision

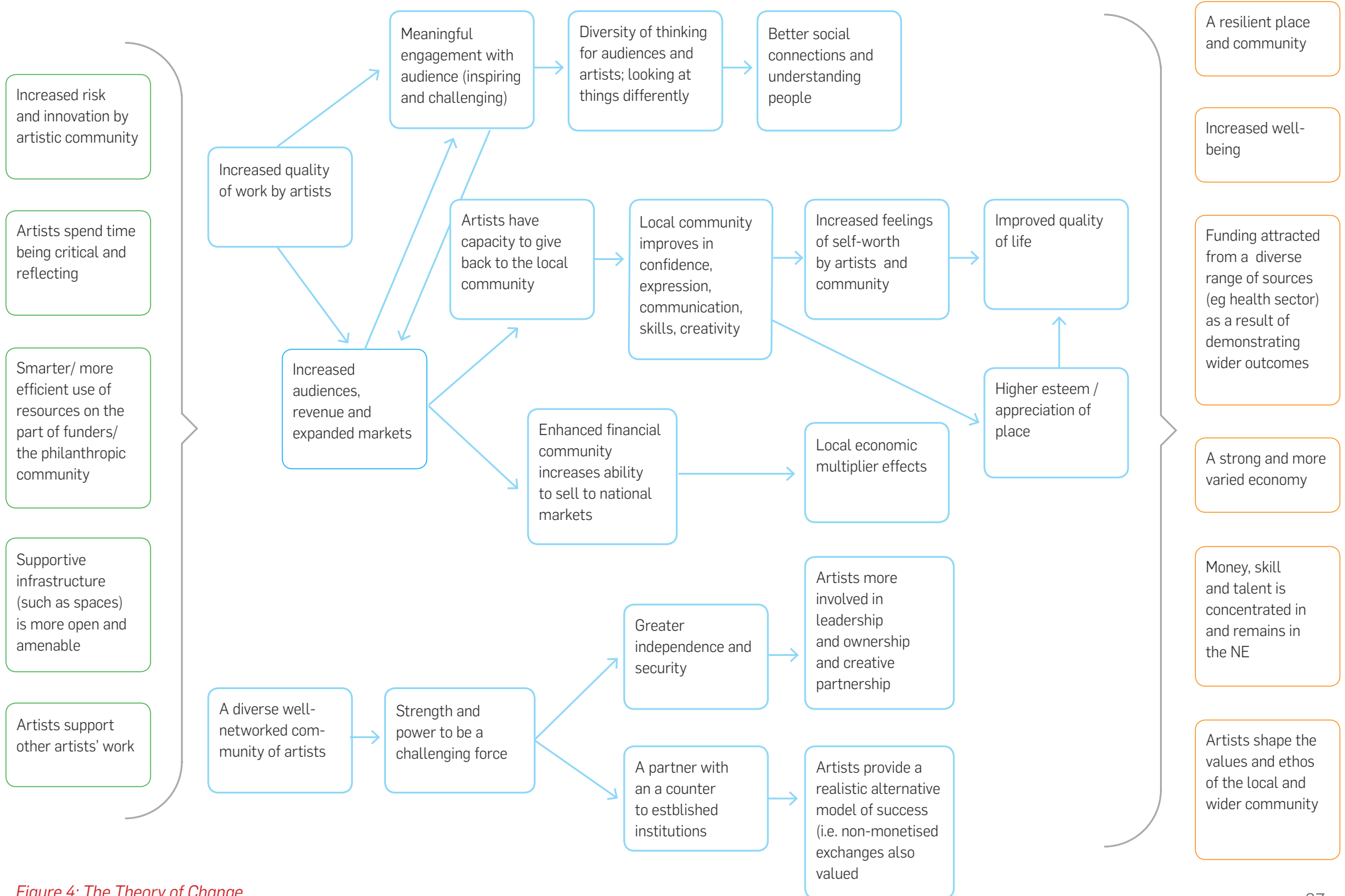


Figure 4: The Theory of Change

Section 3: Learning the Art of Living Dangerously

'While the management of specific risks is an important and commonly understood professional skill, the strategic protection of the ability to take risks – the wellspring of artistic renewal – is a neglected area.' **Adrian Ellis**

So far we have identified a new way of framing the role of arts and culture in sustainable economic development, and considered how that understanding would translate into an approach to changing the role of culture in a region. This hypothetical framework maps against a bleaker present-day reality.

This section looks at what artists and creative practitioners can do now and what policy makers and public and private funders can do to help them, in order to transition to the new framework - an art of living dangerously.

3.1 Practising the Art of Living Dangerously

The purpose of working with a systemic and integrated framework for the development of arts and culture is to help to reframe the way we value artists and creative practitioners' role, in creating a more socially just, economically viable, environmentally sound, high-well-being community and locality. This requires change across the whole system. The stakeholders in the workshops identified three practices that need to be supported. These can only be achieved by collaboration between artists, institutions and an intelligent funding ecology that creates mutual support.

Practising Livelihoods: Artists coming together with other creative practitioners and the support of funders to critically reflect on how they create and maintain livelihoods.

Pooling Risk: Ways for artists and creative practitioners to share the risks of new financial, operational and creative endeavours and models of working.

Utilising Space: Ways for artists and creative practitioners to access, animate and use unused space in towns and cities.

We'll now take each of these in turn looking in greater detail at why they are important, and what artists, funders and policy makers can do to facilitate their development. We will also look at indicators that might tell us what development has taken place.

3.1.1 Practising Livelihoods

For artists and creative practitioners to develop sustainable livelihoods and inform those of others they need to develop ways of reflecting critically, not just on the art they make, but on how they're able to make it and sustain their practice. This is a shared problem, so solving it requires shared activity. Artists and creative practitioners instinctively think in communities and collectives, informing the development of styles and vogues, but this can lead to stylistic 'turfism' and cliques. We need groupings that can overcome artistic differences to think about creating strategies to support self-sustaining and shared livelihoods. From artists who have found themselves cut-out of the funding system, to artists inspired and motivated by ideals to others who are simply trying to 'opt-out' of traditional structures, there are currently many different constituencies who would benefit from coming together.

This exchange of knowledge and tactic-sharing should be a part of all artists' formal education, supported by venues and institutions and should be facilitated by local networks; encouraged through funding and supported through further professional development opportunities. There are a few places we see this starting to happen - in the theatre forum Devoted and Disgruntled, the Imagine2020 network, in Occupy Museums, Live Art Development Agency, a-n The Artist Information Company, Artquest, Revolution and others.

The availability of opportunities to participate in such networks, and their take up by artists could offer an indicator to assess whether or not progress is being made.

3.1.2 Pooling Risk

Artists and creative practitioners often say yes to work that comes along because there is a fear about when the next commission may materialise. This brings risks. Financial risks of late-payment and being in arrears. Task-based risks of not being able to realise an unprecedented and untried artistic project. Operational risks associated with time management and capacity.

Collaboration between artists could establish a 'safety net' for different kinds of risks. Some devices and models for achieving this already exist. They include: joint purchasing schemes, online skills exchange platforms like the about-to-be-launched Backscratchers, the services of SmartEU, and timebanking structures for the pooling of skills. More detail on the mechanisms to enable this are set out in a previous MMM report Capital Matters.²²

When artists of national and international standing come into the local area to perform or work in local settings for instance, there should also be a heavy focus on skill sharing with local artists so that their visit can benefit and enhance the capacities of local artists and creative practitioners.

Greater levels of collaboration achieved through such tools could mean that the burden of too much work can be shared and provide a potential to collaborate when one's own work is low. It could also bring a sense of safety and security and in turn lead to enhanced self-reported wellbeing by the artists and creative practitioners.

22 Capital Matters, MMM, 2011: <http://www.missionmodelsmoney.org.uk/programme/capital-matters/>

An indicator could be improvements in well-being as reported through an interrogation of national ONS well-being data over time. Similarly, an increase in social media activity between artists and creative practitioners; an increase in artists and creative practitioners working for other artists and creative practitioners or even an increase in artists and creative practitioners going to each other's shows could all represent the local value that is being generated.

3.1.3 Opening up space

Access to affordable, amenable and flexible space is critical to supporting artists and creative practitioners in developing their own work. More than this stakeholders believed it was also an essential way of encouraging the networking and collaboration between artists and creative practitioners described above.

There was a sense that positive change would occur if the community of artists and creative practitioners had access to space and platforms to network, organise, speak with 'one voice' and forge champions within the community. It was felt that these open spaces could be a place where artists and creative practitioners could base themselves and develop their own networks. This cause could be supported by the active promotion of examples where emergent artists and creative practitioners have successfully come together and collaborated through a space.

There is clearly a question as to where this space would come from. There is no need for new spaces to be created rather that existing space is used to the maximum. Organisations could perhaps collaborate to list their spaces (and events that will take place there) and even make it possible to hire available spaces online either at low cost or through a barter exchange. In this way artists and creative practitioners can become exemplars in the sustainable use of resources. Public bodies could audit space within the community (both artistic and cultural as well as civic and social) and providing low-cost or free use of empty space. The creation of a 'system' or web platform to crowd-source and redistribute these assets would be essential, the US site OurGoods²³, self-described as 'a barter network for the creative community', is a useful model but there are many other possibilities. More equal collaborations can then replace unbalanced power relationships, leading to more creative and powerful work.

Based on this sustainable use of space, there are some alternative indicators that can be used to help assess whether cultural value is being attained. For example the number of events and social activities on offer in local cultural spaces; a reduction of "official" networking events in spaces as artists and creative practitioners are holding their own. Taking this further would be assessing to what extent other spaces available in the community are being accessed by artists and creative practitioners.

Furthermore being able to demonstrate the wider outcomes of a thriving community of artists and creative practitioners was seen as vital (e.g. well-being; quality of life or social cohesion outcomes for both artists and creative practitioners and the community). Indicators for these qualities could be cross-referenced with evidence of communities with a higher than average concentration of artists and creative practitioners to evidence correlation.

3.2 New imperatives and trade-offs for funders

Practising livelihoods, pooling risk and opening up space require public and private funders, arts and cultural organisations and artists and creative practitioners to root their work in the principles of

²³ OurGoogs, <https://ourgoods.org/>

sustainable development and not simply production and consumption of cultural products.

This means new choices and shifting funding priorities from subsidy to sustainable investment strategies. Much of the public investment that has been made over previous decades into bricks and mortar and infrastructure of cultural and arts organisations could be released by requiring all organisations that work with arts and culture to develop strategies that contribute to sustainable livelihoods for the artists and creative practitioners with which they work or who could benefit from accessing their platforms.

Public and private funders can create a greater diversity of financing mechanisms, including ones which help artists and creative practitioners plan for and develop sustainable livelihoods so that society benefits from increased levels of and diversity of artistic and creative practice and enhances its innovative capacity. This might mean not only funding a festival but also under-writing a bank loan for a housing co-operative to provide combined rehearsal/living for artists; not only funding major commissions but also providing a service to artists to help them negotiate the difficult process of acquiring unused space; not only providing individual material or equipment grants but also negotiating directly with suppliers for group discounts or creating a readily accessible shared resource; not only subsidising professional development for artists in the region but also supporting time banks that make it easier to exchange and support knowledge and skills that already exist; and it could also mean structuring funding in ways that necessitate collaborating with other 'non-arts' or community-based organisations.

Supporting artists lives at the points they touch the real world, in this way, should ultimately lead to a better public understanding and appreciation of the arts - it should be less necessary to be constantly 'making the case'. A record of the number of artists working and volunteering in the community outside and within their main area of activity (both in terms of the hours of time spent and the range of ways of donating time/ resources) could also illustrate the extent to which artists are currently collaborating with others. Primary research using standard national indicators from the Place Survey and/ or Citizenship Survey would help support an understanding as to whether there has been a local improvement in community connection and understanding.

But there remains a critical role for public and private funders and organisations to collaborate in developing and disseminating evidence of impact across the whole range of values identified and to incentivise the opening up of existing assets and infrastructure. Evidence of impact, we suggest, should shift understanding from isolated institutional outcomes towards a systemic approach to sustainable development based on an active theory of change and drawing on understandings from environmental economics, international development and creative placemaking.

Conclusion

We would like to imagine a future where there is a virtuous connection between art and culture and the sustainability of places. Where a key indicator of a vibrant, thriving community would be the number of artists and creative practitioners in it. Where the institutional support for arts focuses on maintaining the livelihood of artists, and the livelihoods of artists strengthens the institutions and day-to-day life of the places they live and shows that a place has become collectively better, stronger and wiser.

This is a distant vision. At worst, policy drivers today frame art only as valuable in as far as it contributes to the quest for economic growth, or as a luxury, growth affords.²⁴ This logic creates a popular folk-wisdom about artists and creative practitioners, which says that expensive art is important art and that an artist is like any other producer - without a moral, political or spiritual role. As public understanding of what art is narrows, the public become less interested in who gets to make it and less concerned about cuts to funding streams that sustain it. As the idea and purpose of art is impoverished, so too are the livelihoods of the artists who struggle not to conform to it.

In a 2012 television debate about arts funding in Ireland, artist Sean O'Sullivan made the point from the audience that 'we live in a society, not an economy'. He expressed a sentiment that many artists feel, not just because the system of funding that sustained their work is being dismantled, and the politicians' arguments for solidarity have withered, but because the values behind so much artistic and creative practice go against so much prevailing prescriptions. Art can be more than simply a pretext for the spending and circulation of money, it can be a pretext for the circulation of stories, arguments and dilemmas and a social occasion for meeting friends and neighbours, family and lovers. Its production breathes life into the public, helps communities see what they have and the pretext for exchanging ideas and values. In other words it demonstrates ways to be within, and beyond prevailing market logic.

If our future is to grasp the challenges of climate change, resource scarcity and social injustice and the need for a transition to a more sensible way of living, we need to find better ways to define and evaluate the peculiar set of values which culture inhabits and its potential to work across the full spectrum of outcomes necessary for the sustainable well-being of community or society. These values, which can be measured using the kinds of indicators suggested and developed by nef amongst others, encompass personal development and well-being; awareness and action on 'bigger than self' concerns; the collective building of social and cultural capital in the shape of habits of engagement and beneficial networks. We could do much more to gather evidence and examples, we need to practice the art of living dangerously.

²⁴ Culture Secretary Maria Miller, *Testing Times speech*, DCMS, April 2013: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/testing-times-fighting-cultures-corner-in-an-age-of-austerity>

What Next?

We hope this report and the suggestions it puts forward take us a little further than simply rehearsing the well-known poverty of most artists, or the question marks over which comes first, the arts or the growth.

Within the Exchange/MMM/nef project we have brought together a diverse set of interests and ideas. Our work in creating this provocation has been itself an exercise in living dangerously, pushing ourselves beyond our usual positions and practices. The ideas here are intended to be contested and constructively and creatively developed. As we said at the beginning of this paper, it is an incomplete picture, the start of telling a new story and one we hope will be discussed, contested, critiqued and added to. It is our hope that it is a provocation to all of us that fuels and encourages further enquiry and research in the UK and elsewhere.

To begin that process of enquiry, we are proposing ten questions to define practical answers to.

Ten questions for the art of living dangerously:

How can everyone working with arts and culture:

- 1 Develop a more holistic view of the impacts of arts and culture, exploring the diversity of values and views *so that people benefit from the full spectrum of impacts arts and culture can have, leading to improved quality of life for individuals and communities?*
- 2 Take risks in what they do, and how they do it *so that everyone involved continues to learn, innovate and influence society as a whole?*

What will incentivise public and private funders and all those involved in making and influencing policy to:

- 3 Create a greater diversity of financing mechanisms, including ones which help artists and creative practitioners plan for and develop sustainable livelihoods *so that society benefits from increased levels of and diversity of artistic and creative practice and enhances its innovative capacity?*
- 4 Root their work in the principals of sustainable development not simply production and consumption of cultural products *so that arts and culture supports artists and creative practitioners and local communities' wellbeing, ultimately leading to healthier, more resilient people and places?*
- 5 Ensure infrastructure, policies and decisions contribute to artists' sustainable livelihoods *so that artists can develop their lives and practice in more effective ways, leading to better work with more impact?*
- 6 Require all organisations that work with arts and culture to develop strategies that contribute to sustainable livelihoods for the professional artists they work with *so that equal collaborations can replace unbalanced power relationships, leading to more creative and powerful work?*

How can more artists, creative practitioners and arts and cultural organisations:

- 7 Actively plan to develop sustainable livelihoods and income streams as well as their artistic practice *so that they can make positive choices and not compromise life for art or art for the bills?*

- 8 Spend time together reflecting on both their livelihoods and their practice and share conclusions *so that they can learn from diverse experiences and ideas and ultimately make better work with greater impact on where they live and work?*
- 9 Collaborate to make sure all available physical spaces and digital platforms are used well so *that they become exemplars in sustainable use of resources to be widely copied?*
- 10 Work with their artistic communities and audiences to develop plans for improving the sustainability of artists and creative practitioners *so that all involved can contribute to well-being on an equitable footing, benefitting from genuinely diverse ways of thinking and doing?*

To help us all learn the art of living dangerously, the partners involved in this report, Exchange, MMM and nef call for:

- No more unused spaces that could be available for creative or community use
- More engagement between artists and creative practitioners, arts and cultural organisations and the well-being of communities and places
- More risk taking made possible
- More shared learning from every risk taken to shape the next thing
- A whole-hearted, whole-system embrace of the full range of things that culture can do - not just instrumental, not just intrinsic, not just aesthetic, not just social, not just tourism and entertainment, not just 'great', not just artists, not just audiences, but - arts and culture for all of our sake.