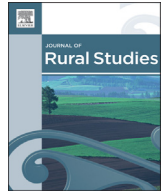




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Rural Studies

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jrurstud

Creating the good life? A wellbeing perspective on cultural value in rural development

Karen Scott ^{a, *}, Frances Rowe ^b, Venda Pollock ^c

^a Department of Politics, Exeter University, Cornwall Campus, Penryn, TR10 9FE, United Kingdom

^b Centre for Rural Economy, School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, University of Newcastle, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU, United Kingdom

^c School of Arts and Culture, University of Newcastle, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 August 2015

Received in revised form

24 March 2016

Accepted 2 July 2016

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Rural development

Culture

Capabilities approach

Wellbeing

Policy

ABSTRACT

In the last two decades academic and policy interest in the economic growth potential of the cultural sector has risen sharply in UK, as well as in other OECD countries. Alongside this there has been a shift in cultural policies away from a focus on the public value of culture to the economic value of creativity. Where public funds are allocated to arts and culture this is heavily and increasingly skewed towards London. Although there is wide recognition of the intrinsic value of the arts and the inequalities of provision, culture is increasingly invoked as a narrowly instrumental concept for other policy aims. The new discourses of creative economies have been slow to reach rural studies and where discussions of the 'creative countryside' have taken place, notions of rural cultural value remain largely within an instrumentalist discourse. This paper is an attempt to shift the discussion to new ground by exploring cultural value through the lens of a social justice approach to wellbeing, based on the capabilities approach, using material from an AHRC funded year-long knowledge exchange project with rural arts organisations in Northumberland. The paper argues against the narrow instrumentalism of culture as a delivery mechanism for other policy agendas and offers a different conceptual framework based on social justice for considering the value of culture in conceptions of a 'good life'. It finds that using such an approach allows a different conceptual space and a clearer normative basis for understanding and arguing for the intrinsic value of culture in rural development.

© 2016 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

1. Introduction

In his seminal text *The Country and the City* (1973) Raymond Williams highlights the persistent construction of the urban as a site of enlightenment, advancement and cosmopolitanism, and the rural as a retreat into a traditional, idyllic existence with little worldly outlook. As others have pointed out this dichotomous rhetoric underpinned the 'Creative City' and 'Creative Class' discourses (Landry, 2000; Florida, 2002), had a determining influence on regeneration policy in the last decades - particularly within a post-industrial urban context (Bell and Jayne, 2010; Woods, 2012) - and left rural advocates claiming a bias of funding opportunities towards urban-based culture (see, for example, Rural Cultural Forum, 2010). The 'creativity' on which this economic growth was

predicated extended beyond arts-based activity to include high growth areas like advertising and IT, and thus creativity was subsumed into a wider narrative of innovation and entrepreneurialism (Oakley et al., 2013; Garnham, 2006; Pratt and Jeffcutt, 2009) which seemed to further push the rural into 'the "silent majority" of non-creative places' (Rantisi et al., 2006, 1794).

However, more recently rural arts and culture has risen up the political and policy agenda in the UK as austerity policies have impacted on public investment in the arts. In an increasingly hostile policy environment Arts Council England (ACE) have been criticised for the unfairness in the way it allocates its funding investments (House of Commons 2014). Although 85% of the UK population live outside London, since 1980 public spend has been more centralised on the capital, and cultural spend per head is £68.99 compared to £4.58 outside London, despite a lower take up of cultural offer in the capital than the national average (Stark et al., 2013). Earlier concerns over lack of rural cultural spend resurfaced, with ACE responding with a *Rural Position Statement* (March 2014a, 2004b)

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: k.e.scott@exeter.ac.uk (K. Scott), f.rowe@ncl.ac.uk (F. Rowe), venda.pollock@ncl.ac.uk (V. Pollock).

and their *Rural Data and Evidence Review* (May 2015). These reports highlight higher rates of arts participation per head in rural areas compared to urban ones and, although falling short of a rural arts strategy, ACE have recognised the particularities of rural cultural production and advocate a partnership approach with rural agencies to invest in the arts and deliver arts programmes.

In the light of such concerns and disparities, and in an increasingly constrained financial climate, discussions have intensified about the need to effectively demonstrate cultural value. It is in this context that the Arts and Humanities Research Council's (AHRC) two year long multi-disciplinary research programme to 'advance the way in which we talk about the value of cultural engagement and the methods by which we evaluate that value' was launched (AHRC, 2013a; AHRC, 2013b). They were grappling with a long-standing conundrum: how to research and articulate the value of culture in policy relevant ways, a challenge summed up by Tessa Jowell, UK Culture Secretary in 2004, in a much-quoted personal essay entitled 'Government and the Value of Culture'. She argued against debating culture in terms of its 'instrumental benefits to other agendas' and rather for culture to be recognised as an important public good and therefore worthy of public spending in its own right:

Complex cultural activity is not just a pleasurable hinterland for the public, a fall back after the important things – work and paying tax – are done. It is at the heart of what it means to be a fully developed human being.

(Tessa Jowell, 2004, 7)

In the last decade there has also been an increased focus on what it means to be 'a fully developed human being' with a dramatic rise in academic and policy interest in human flourishing or wellbeing (Scott, 2012). Interest in wellbeing is linked closely to an international drive to seek alternative paradigms of development, which intensified after the 2008 financial crisis, and this has been manifested in various ways, mainly across the OECD countries, but usually results in a set of wellbeing measurements or indicators. In 2010 the UK Prime Minister David Cameron announced a 'national debate' about wellbeing and charged the Office of National Statistics to 'measure what matters' (Cameron, 2010). In 2011 a series of national wellbeing measures were developed including a national survey of subjective wellbeing. The UK wellbeing agenda has been critiqued for its focus on individual responsibility for, rather than structural determinants of, wellbeing relative to other EU countries (Tomlinson and Kelly, 2013) and the way that individual wellbeing is used instrumentally to promote other policy agendas, such as localism (Scott, 2015). In addition, the view of wellbeing as a static set of 'components' or as individual 'happiness' limits discussion about relational and dynamic constructions (Atkinson, 2013). As Oman (2017, forthcoming) cautions, evaluating the arts in relation to subjective wellbeing could potentially compromise articulations of their more complex value. So, although recent interest in wellbeing offers potential to shift narratives about cultural value, this would depend on the construct and model of wellbeing used.

Our interest in this paper is in exploring a conceptualisation of cultural value within a *social justice* model of wellbeing, rather than one focussed on subjective wellbeing, as a response to current critiques of how both the concepts of culture and wellbeing have been operationalised. These are key concepts for policy, yet vulnerable to reductionism, instrumentalism and co-option by other agendas. This has a particular effect on the way they are framed, studied and the sorts of evidence produced to inform development options (Raw et al., 2012; Scott, 2012; Jordan, 2008).

Here we attempt to shift the discussion to different ground by articulating rural cultural value through a capabilities approach drawing on our knowledge exchange¹ work with two rural arts organisations. The capabilities approach (Sen, 1980) focuses on what people are able to do and to be, and what freedoms they have to access a range of personal, social and material resources rather than a narrow focus on the resources themselves. As we argue later, a focus on freedoms can open up important conceptual spaces for considering the role of cultural value in development.

Therefore our aim is threefold: a) to forward thinking about the rural in wider dialogues on culture; b) to offer a different conceptual framework for considering the value of culture and in so doing broaden debate on what culture *of itself* may contribute to 'the good life'; and c) to challenge the narrow instrumentalism of culture as a delivery mechanism for other policy agendas. We do this by firstly fleshing out the above rationale for the paper with further reference to the literature and policy regarding cultural value and the capabilities approach. Thereafter we describe the methodological approach, introducing two rural arts case studies and how the capabilities approach has been used; the third section discusses the conceptual mapping using Martha Nussbaum's Central Human Capabilities framework. We close by discussing some implications of the conceptual mapping to create a framework for cultural value within an expanded social justice account of wellbeing.

1.1. Defining cultural value

Raymond Williams famously described culture as 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English Language' (Williams, 1976, 76). That such a task remains unfinished is highlighted by the failure of policy makers to define culture in ways that resonate with peoples' experience of it rather than in administrative terms (Holden, 2006). So how might culture and the related concept of cultural value be understood? Throsby (2001) argues that for something to qualify as 'cultural' it must not only be creative, but also generate and communicate symbolic meaning. Holden meanwhile takes a narrower view of culture as 'the arts, museums, libraries and heritage that receive public funding' (Holden, 2006). In this paper, we use culture in the sense that Throsby intends it, as a set of (in this case) artistic practices undertaken by creative individuals in the context of rural places and communities which generate meaning. We also take the view that, following the ideas of Dewey (1934), art conveys meaning through experience. That meaning may be made through experiencing art in the gallery (eg Newman et al., 2012) and in the fabric of everyday life. In rural settings these can become one and the same thing when the gallery is the village shop, community hall or pub. This experience is conditioned by the 'set of attitudes, beliefs, mores, customs, values and practices that are common to, or shared by any group' substantiated by 'signs, symbols, texts, artefacts' and so on that convey a sense of shared identity (Throsby, 2001, 4). Cultural value, then, can be taken as something arising out of experiencing art, a way of understanding what cultural experience means

¹ Knowledge exchange (KE) in this context refers to the sharing of learning, ideas and experiences between academics and other individuals and organisations. It is a major strategy of most UK research funders for increasing the appropriateness and impact of research. Particular streams of funding are available for KE projects as opposed to research. The Arts and Humanities Research Council who funded this KE project seeks to 'increase opportunities for all researchers to develop their work in collaboration with public, private and third sector partners that increase the flow, value, and impact of world-class arts and humanities research from academia to the UK's wider creative economy and beyond.' AHRC website accessed 10/8/2016.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6545313>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6545313>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)