

National Cultural Policy Submission

Institute for Social Change, University of Tasmania

Submitted: On behalf of an organisation with arts-components (e.g. community organisation, tourism, venue, health, education etc)



Workforce miscategorisation and sector wellbeing

NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY SUBMISSION

17 August 2022 |

Dr Kathleen Williams, Director, Creative Curriculum, School of Creative Arts and Media, University of Tasmania

Dr Ami Seivwright, Postdoctoral Researcher, Institute for Social Change, University of Tasmania

Professor Libby Lester, Director, Institute for Social Change, University of Tasmania

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MIS CATEGORISATION AND SECTOR WELLBEING

1. Summary

It is known that the extent and nature of the cultural and creative sector has been poorly measured and documented, with its value remaining relatively opaque within a policy making framework. Measurement and understanding of the structure and nature of work in the sector is particularly complex, with standard economic measures ill-equipped to capture common work phenomena in the industry, such as multiple jobs, creative jobs in non-creative sectors (and vice versa), self-employment, and seasonal and gig work. With the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020, serious consequences of this poor categorisation and articulation of employment in the sector emerged, with many creative and cultural workers missing out on crucial financial and other support. This submission is based on findings of a study of the impacts of COVID-19 on Tasmania's cultural and creative sector, including on financial sustainability, health and wellbeing, and future work (Williams, Lester and Seivwright 2022). The study was supported by Arts Tasmania and the Tasmanian Department of State Growth.

Using a combination of survey data and interviews, we found the reliance on standard industry and occupation categories when defining the workforce and measuring the economic contributions of the sector was more than problematic, and instead we provided an analysis of the sector through an approach based on self-describing work, work identities and perceived contributions. We found that those who were financially supported during the pandemic were able to shift or adapt their creative practice and had a higher sense of health and wellbeing, whereas those who did not receive government or philanthropic funding experienced significant negative impacts on their health and creative practice. These findings reinforce the urgency of embedding new methods for describing and valuing the sector for policy makers, and in turn, the sector's participants.

2. Background

Understanding the economic composition, contribution and effect of the sector is difficult. In this study, we have drawn upon multiple reports and datasets to understand the different ways the sector is represented, and to highlight the limitations of those approaches. Differing definitions of 'cultural' or 'creative' lead to inflation of employment figures, particularly when it comes to manufacturing, tourism, sport and Information Communications Technology (ICT). Even those receiving regular income from a salaried position hold very different positions in the sector: ranging from being embedded within a non-sector company or organisation, through to those who have a support role ensuring delivery of creative work such as gallery attendants (Higgs et al 2008). Given that many creatives such as artists and musicians are self-employed, the number of people employed in the cultural and creative industries is unclear.

Understanding this complex workforce is difficult enough without a pandemic, let alone during one – where economic impact can amplify existing inequalities or representative gaps in data, and those who are not normally included in the sector continue to remain outside of recovery initiatives. However, combined, this produced a critical moment to examine not only the impact of COVID-19, but the impact of poor measurement tools. Thus, rather than contributing to existing debates over what the GDP contribution of the sector is, we used this moment to build a picture of the workforce on their terms, allowing for further speculation and comparative study with current statistics. We used Tasmania, with its nationally and internationally prominent creative and cultural activities, as an apt site to more deeply explore cultural and creative work and the impacts of COVID-19 on that work.

In seeking to more accurately capture the broad practices, income streams and modes of employment, researchers at the Institute for Social Change investigated the sector in four ways:

- extant administrative data (ABS Census and Labour Force Survey).
- a survey specifically designed for those who identified as working in or with the cultural and creative industries in Tasmania (August 2020, n=291). Topics included creative practice, employment, sources of income, degree of unpaid work, and COVID-19 impacts on employment, creative practice and wellbeing.
- a series of long semi-structured interviews with a subsample of survey respondents in order to better understand their experiences during the pandemic and their views on the future of the Tasmanian sector (August 2020, n=19);
- broader population surveys seeking to understand participation in and value of cultural and creative industries, as well as overall wellbeing (June 2020, n=1258).

3. Findings and implications

Industry categories (ANZSIC) group creative and cultural industries into the broad category of Arts and Recreation Services, comprised of Sports and Recreation Activities, Gambling Activities, Heritage Activities, and Creative and Performing Arts Activities. Such a broad categorisation of the creative and cultural workforce will provide an inflated and skewed picture. This indeed plays out in the data for Tasmania: 57% of those employed in the Arts and Recreation Services in Tasmania at the 2016 Census were employed in Sports and Recreation Activities or Gambling Activities (ABS 2018a). A similar story is present in occupational categories. For instance, 26% of those employed in Arts and Recreation Services in Tasmania at the 2016 Census were Community and Personal Services Workers (ABS 2018a). We are not suggesting that this occupation is not part of creative and cultural employment, but rather use the example to illustrate that administrative data does not always produce a workforce profile that is reflective of the reality 'on the ground'

Collecting more nuanced data made clear that attempts to measure the sector as a whole drastically flatten the experiences of sole operators. Even when individuals rely in part on larger organisations, many of these organisations are ad hoc in their structures, or have flexible approaches to hiring based on demand, such as festivals, events and productions. As one technician put it, 'I need events to happen. No festivals and no theatre means no work. It really hurts' (Survey response to Part 2 Question 7, August 2020). Sectioning off parts of the sector to aid in recovery misses the complexity of creative work that the technician describes. In a sector like Tasmania's, festivals and theatre are often inseparable in terms of work. If either suffers or closes, then employment cannot remain the same. This is crucial in identifying who is in need.

Perhaps reflecting the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the sector, creative and cultural sector workers in Tasmania reported markedly higher dissatisfaction with all elements of their lives compared to a survey of the general Tasmanian public conducted within the same three-month period. In some cases, the levels of extreme dissatisfaction were up to 4-5 percentage points higher (life opportunities, finances, feeling safe, amount of free time). Dissatisfaction rates were at times 10+ percentage points higher than the general sample average (life opportunities, finances and health).

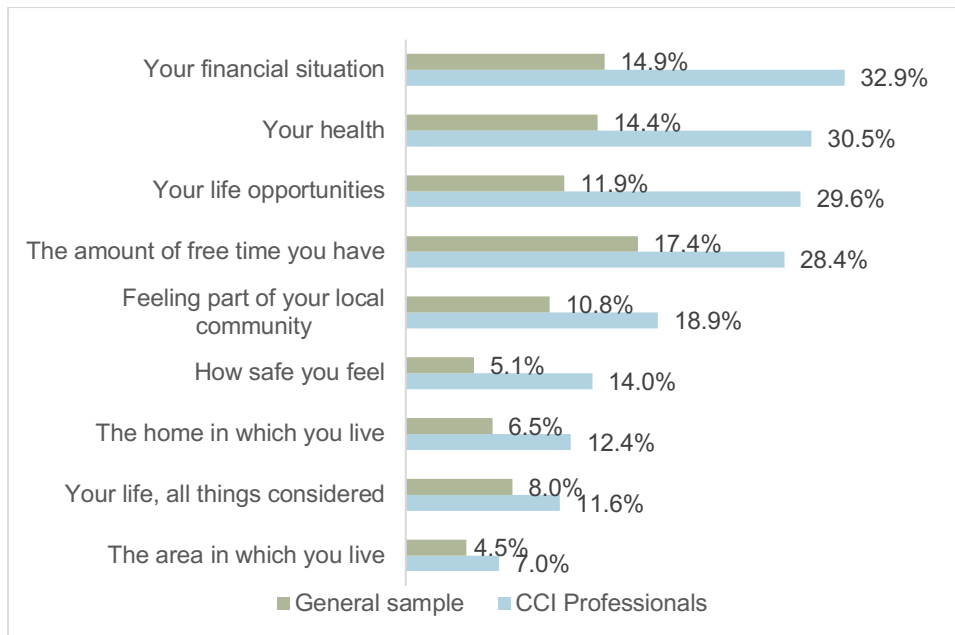


Figure: Proportion of sector professionals who were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with different aspects of life

For some in the sector, this is time critical. For the organisations and individuals that received government funding or support, our research suggested that funding gave them the space and time to figure out new ways to engage with their audiences online, through sharing content unique to their platform of choice, and sometimes by conducting classes or workshops. This kept audiences interested, helped to retain connections between sector workers and their audiences, and added events to indoor cultural calendars. These endeavours were effectively a result of the overarching funding. How does this translate to a long-term model for those in the sector most impacted by social distancing in an uncertain future? Some of our participants in the performing arts described how the Tasmanian sector was not able to survive on ticket sales alone. Given that, for many venues, it is not commercially viable to open to a smaller audience without inflating ticket prices, and once overheads are considered, this puts some performing arts venues in increasingly precarious positions (Vincent 2020) and the impact on employment and wellbeing of sector workers even more critical to understand.

We argue that, in order to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on creative workers, we need to move beyond the inflated data categories that typically include many elements of the sector that do not necessarily include creative work. A detailed and nuanced understandings of how people work within the sector is important in order to make decisions about short-term responses, mid-term recovery and the longer-term future of that work. Moreover, it is clear that many creative workers self-subsidise their participation in the sector through employment in another area/s, suggesting even more nuance is required in how we map impact and support beyond COVID-19. The pandemic has brought to fore existing concerns and frustrations with how creative work is financially funded and developed, and that many in the sector want to design new ways of funding and distributing creative and cultural work.

Despite being relatively free of the health impacts of COVID-19 to date, the Tasmanian community experienced the financial precarity felt by many as national and global influences changed our social and economic lives. The impact on individuals' wellbeing was stark, with Tasmanian sector workers expressing lower satisfaction with their lives than their general population counterparts. The entanglement between financial security, creative expression and wellbeing was expressed by our participants; those who were able to take risks in adapting their creative practice because of financial security were more optimistic about their future.

Taken together, these results have implications for policy and advocacy in the cultural and creative industries generally, as well as particular insights for Tasmania. The differences in the story about cultural and creative work told by administrative data versus workers themselves indicates that developing policy and strategy that meets the needs (and leverages the strengths) of a given region's cultural and creative industries requires an understanding that is more nuanced than can be provided by administrative data. To this end, policy makers can ensure they undertake broad, transparent and meaningful consultation in both the design and implementation phases. Perhaps more ambitiously, governments and other major funders could commission research focused on developing more robust methods of measuring the cultural and creative industries' workforce and activities and applying them to build localised knowledge of the industries. With regard to Tasmania, our results suggest that future research should seek to better understand the interdependence of Tasmania's cultural and creative industries and the intersection, via workers, of creative and cultural industries with other sectors. This would enhance planning and strategic development across sectors, facilitating sustainable growth and greater resilience in the face of shocks such as the pandemic and their considerable aftermaths.

In terms of advocacy, the findings of this (and other) research that the pandemic has made the value of the cultural and creative industries more apparent to the public and, in some cases, governments make the pandemic recovery period an ideal time to advocate to address the issues raised in this research and by the pandemic more broadly, such as the benefit of financial security and the mental health impacts of precarity. These arguments by advocates could have particular resonance given the role that cultural and creative industries have had in driving local social and economic recovery after natural disasters and economic recessions (Noonan, 2021; National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2021).

In sum, Tasmania's cultural and creative workers represent a workforce and community that self-funds, participates in philanthropy of their own sector, cobbles together income from multiple sources. Yet, it is miscategorised by administrative data, leading to poor understanding of creative work. If we are to strive to protect the health and wellbeing of those who create the cultural outputs valued by our community, a greater understanding of the make-up of this sector and its embeddedness in the financial success of others is vital. Even as restrictions have eased and we return to life pre-COVID, when will the next crisis uncover the same invisible architecture?

References

- Higgs, P., Cunningham, S and Bakhshi, H. 2008. *Beyond the creative industries: Mapping the creative economy in the United Kingdom*, London: National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. Retrieved from http://www.nesta.org.uk/assets/pdf/beyond_creative_industries_report_NESTA.pdf
- National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. (2021). *Creative Economies and Economic Recovery. Key findings*. February 2021.
- Noonan, D. (2021). *The Arts and Culture Sector's Contributions to Economic Recovery and Resiliency in the United States. Key findings*. January 2021.
- Vincent, C. 2020, *Giving it away for free – why the performing arts risks making the same mistake newspapers did*. *The Conversation*, 4 June. Retrieved from: <https://theconversation.com/giving-it-away-for-free-why-the-performing-arts-risks-making-the-same-mistake-newspapers-did-139671>
- Williams, K., Lester, L. and Seivwright, A., 2022. *The invisible architecture of creative and cultural work: the relationship between miscategorisation and sector wellbeing during COVID-19*. *Creative Industries Journal*, pp.1-19.
- Williams, K., Lester, L., and Seivwright, A., 2021. *COVID-19 and the Cultural and Creative Workforce in Tasmania*, Institute for Social Change, Tasmania, Hobart. Report to Department of State Growth, Tasmania.