Social Sciences and the Cultural Sector in England

A Commentary on the Literature

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■ **ABSTRACT:** Drawing on a literature review of over two hundred items, this commentary describes what drove the English cultural sector's interest in the social sciences from the 1980s, and the social sciences' interest in the cultural sector. The social sciences offered the cultural sector the means to evidence and advocate its assertions of social and economic impact in line with government requirements. Their economic valuations and sociological analyses of its patterns of employment were both written on commission and independently. But despite the potential for complementary collaborations, the relationship between the social sciences and the cultural sector has been subject to the conflicting interests of the various constituencies involved. Various economists have commented on the costs of financial value being held in higher regard than human value. Perhaps this will mark a moment when cultural policy and those activities that the state-supports will become more unequivocally celebrated for adding value to society.

■ **KEYWORDS:** advocacy, English cultural sector, evidence, government requirements, social science, value

Much has been written about New Labour imposing its performance regime on the cultural sector. Nevertheless, these imperatives waned after its third administration. By 2005 it was evident that the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport's (DCMS) targets were being missed (Selwood 2002), as were those across government in general. The focus on "outcomes," the social and economic results of services provided, gave way to targets fixated on processes, milestones, and actual service delivery. These were specified by the Departmental Business Plans introduced by the 2010 Conservative government (Talbot 2017). If anything, performance management accounts were superseded by even more prominent advocacy. Marshaling the necessary arguments depended on better understanding of the sector's impacts. This not only reignited the sector's relationship with social scientists but also presented it with various challenges.

This article explores how the social sciences' relationship with the cultural sector is represented in the literature. Based on more than two hundred items, it considers the social and economic values attributed to the sector and the involvement of different social science and cultural sector constituencies, and it deliberates on the perceived incompatibilities between them.

Working Definitions

Social sciences. Cho et al.'s (2018) systematic and quantitative review of more than one thousand peer-reviewed articles on the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) found these to be dominated by publications in business, economics, and geography journals. In contrast, much of the literature referred to here is from sociology and economics publications. This article recognizes those professionally engaged in the social sciences, or publishing in peer-reviewed social science journals, as social scientists.

The cultural sector is broadly understood to embrace the built heritage, film, libraries, literature, museums and galleries, performing arts, broadcasting and the visual arts—areas of activity that fall within the remit of DCMS. However, the term itself is problematic (O'Connor 2010). This is hardly surprising: DCMS's own definitions of the cultural sector vary. In 2004, for example, in an attempt "to generate a robust and reliable evidence-base on which to develop future policies," the department described its understanding of "cultural" activities as mobile and changing. In those circumstances, it included visual art, performance, audio-visual, books and press, sport, and heritage and tourism (DCMS 2004: 10). Twelve years later, its *Culture White Paper* described the cultural sector as synonymous with the arts and heritage. This is related to its funding of the sector on the basis of its "nourishing effects," its "rejuvenation of society and of our national and local economies" and its "power" to enhance the country's international standing (DCMS 2016: 6, 10).

References are commonly made, as they are here, to the *cultural and the creative industries* (CCIs)—another term subject to extensive conjecture and debate (Campbell et al. 2019). In principle, DCMS distinguishes between the cultural and the creative industries—defining the former as "those industries with a cultural object at the centre of the industry" and the latter as "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (DCMS 2019). In the late 1980s, their relationship was illustrated by a model of concentric circles, with the creative arts at its core and economic goods and services grouped around them (Gorham and Partners 1987). Thirty years later, Kate Oakley and Justin O'Connor (2015) were concerned to defend the importance of cultural production and consumption against the purely economic imperatives associated with the creative industries.

Scope

This article primarily refers to those parts of the cultural sector in receipt of central government funding, or subject to its policy objectives. Given that the scale of literature on the arts considerably outweighs that of other cultural activities, they represent a major reference point here.¹ Nevertheless, DCMS and its agencies' reports and strategies attest to broadly similar assumptions being made about the economic and social impacts of archives (Horton and Spence 2006), public libraries (Fujiwara et al. 2015a), museums (TBR et al. 2015) and heritage (Historic England (2019). Peter Taylor et al. (2015: 9) criticized the literature on those domains as generally "more aspirational than evidential" and as lagging considerably behind the quality and quantity of evidence on the arts' social capital, education, and well-being impacts.

Sources

There is a considerable English language literature on several of the issues addressed here that crosses theoretical, applied, and empirical research. While this article focuses on the English cultural sector, it inevitably draws on intellectual exchanges with the United States and Australasia, in particular research commissioned by Arts Council England (ACE) from American experts (Carnwath and Brown 2014) and those engaged in Australian initiatives (Chappell and Knell, 2012).

By definition, this article refers to a number of literature reviews. Summaries of the sociological research on the culture sector feature in Peter Campbell et al. (2019) and Emma Casey and Dave O'Brien (2020). ACE, DCMS, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) commissioned accounts of empirical research—some summarized by Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kaszynska (2016: Annex 2). ACE's own literature reviews of empirical research highlight gaps in the available intelligence (Jermyn 2001; Reeves 2002; Keaney 2006) and have informed its strategic developments (Bunting 2010). Literature reviews provide background for consultancy reports and describe the current state of play with regard to particular issues (DC Research 2016). Some are more critical than others. Material used here was collected from a range of online sources, including Google Scholar, the Web of Science, the EThOS index of doctoral theses, and the AHRC's and Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) websites. Particular attention was paid to the contents of specific academic journals, including *Sociology* and *Cultural Sociology* (both official journals of the British Sociological Association), *Journal of Cultural Economy*, *Journal of Cultural Economics*, *Cultural Trends*, and *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, as well as the trade-journal, *Arts Professional*.

This article is presented in three sections that are broadly consecutive historically: Part 1 reflects on the cultural sector's interest in the social sciences, the imperative for evidence, the approaches employed, and the challenges faced; Part 2 looks at the nature of social scientists' interest in the cultural sector—the burgeoning of social science literature on the cultural sector, the constituencies involved, the ways in which social scientists sought to address problems posed by the cultural sector, and the problems they are perceived as having created for it; Part 3 contemplates the conflicting interests manifest in that relationship as revealed by the literature. These include social science's disciplinary dominance, attempts at compromise, the cultural sector's attitudes to research, and internecine bickering.

Part 1: The Cultural Sector's Interest in the Social Sciences

The United Kingdom's recent governments have consistently held that participation in culture yields positive impacts (Belfiore and Bennett 2008). The recent House of Commons enquiry, for example, assumed that culture contributed to breaking the cycle of crime, creating opportunities through education, improving health and well-being, and regenerating communities (HoC 2019). But how DCMS and its agencies have chosen to articulate such expectations is relatively fluid. Whereas in 2015, for example, DCMS prioritized “quality of life” and “social capital” (Taylor et al. 2015), five years later ACE's main concern was helping people to overcome anxiety, stress, and isolation, generate happiness and fulfillment, and develop people's skills and confidence (ACE 2020: 37).

Indeed, countless instrumental benefits have been, and are, attributed to the arts. Over the last decade alone, other government agencies have cited their contribution to such initiatives as

the Prevent Strategy (Home Office 2011) and social prescribing (Public Health England 2019). Elsewhere, the arts are credited with impacts ranging from the general to the specific—saving the world; instigating social change; contributing to diplomacy; improving social justice, health and well-being; putting an end to arms-dealing as well as shaping reflective, empathic and engaged citizens and peace building.

Evidencing claims

Compared to making claims, evidencing them proved problematic. DCMS's *Review of the Social Impacts of Culture and Sport* (Taylor et al. 2015) was intended to identify which types of data, analysis, research, and resources were most likely to influence policy. It systematically reviewed nearly thirteen thousand items of empirical research on improved health, reduced crime, increased social capital, improved education outcomes, and subjective well-being, using a hierarchy of evidence derived from medical literature—an approach DCMS had sanctioned over a decade earlier (Selwood 2002). The most robust research identified drew on systematic reviews/meta-analyses, randomized controlled trials, and cohort studies; the least robust included case study/program/qualitative evaluations, economic evaluations, narrative reviews, and policy brief expert opinion/scientific statements. The *Review*, thus, privileged research based on objective social science methods, invalidating those conventionally employed by the cultural sector.

Employing those kinds of methodologies across the sector relied on DCMS and its agencies' expanded research departments being staffed by social scientists as well as external consultants—freelancers and those from think tanks, universities, PR companies, lobbyists, even other government departments. They were able to design performance indicators, run surveys, and evaluate organizations' performance. They offered efficiency, value for money, "calculative reason," credibility, and "political agency."

Economic impact valuations

Having to articulate its value in a way that made the most sense to decision-makers represented a fundamental conundrum for the cultural sector. Given that "narratives of cultural value" were unlikely to succeed, cultural agencies looked to "the tools and concepts of economics to fully state their benefits in the prevailing language of policy appraisal and evaluation" (Hasan Bakhshi, Alan Freeman and Graham Hitchen 2009, cited by O'Brien 2010: 4). This meant complying with the valuation methods suggested by HM Treasury's *The Green Book 2*: contingent valuation, choice modeling, hedonic pricing, travel cost, quality-adjusted life years, and multi-criteria analysis. This explains why the British Library, for example, twice emphasized its consultants' use of contingent valuation (Spectrum Strategy Consultants and Indepen 2003; Tessler 2013).

Despite their ubiquity, economic impact valuations were never without critics. Frank Van Puffelen pointed to their abuse in 1996. Nearly twenty years later, DCMS's consultants still regarded them as inappropriate because they were usually "commissioned to legitimize a political position rather than search for economic truth" (TBR and the Cities Institute 2011). The same applies to ACE's annual reports on the contribution of the arts and culture to the national economy. These "showcase the incredible outstanding contribution that arts and culture make to the UK economy"; analyze the "direct" contribution of the arts and culture as measured by such macroeconomic indicators as GVA (gross value added), employment, and household incomes; and estimate the sectors' "indirect" contributions to the wider economy, including the spill-overs of tourism, improvements in national productivity, and their role in developing skills, nurturing

innovation, and fostering growth in the commercial creative industries (CEBR 2013, 2019). The scope of these reports extends far beyond ACE's own portfolio of grantees. Similarly inflated findings also inform Creative Industries Federation (n.d); SDG Economic Development (2017) and NESTA (2008).

Social impact valuations

Since evidencing the social impact of culture is, generally, regarded as more problematic than evidencing economic impact, a common default is to monetize its value. Taylor et al. (2015) singled out DCMS's former non-departmental public body (NDPB), the Museums, Libraries, and Archives Council (MLA), for the absence of credible evidence to support its assumptions. MLA was, however, an early adherent of Social Return on Investment (SROI) (MLA and NEF 2009). This method for measuring social impact alongside economic value was designed in response to the inappropriateness of *The Green Book's* guidance for third sector organizations—typically value-driven and not-for-profit (NEF 2009). Although Taylor et al. (2015) never mentioned it, SROI was already well established within the cultural sector and DCMS itself (Matrix Knowledge Group 2010; Fujiwara et al. 2014b, 2015a). It is still used to justify museums' and galleries' funding (Jackson and McManus 2019).

Monetary equivalents for the impacts of goods and services on people's wellbeing (museum visiting, for example) were also estimated using the so-called "new science of happiness." This emphasized the importance of non-income variables on aggregate happiness, and involved social comparisons, adaptation, and changing tastes. As the then Prime Minister David Cameron, put it:

There's more to life than money and it's time we focused not just on GDP but on GWB—general wellbeing ... Wellbeing can't be measured by money or traded in markets. It's about the beauty of our surroundings, the quality of our culture and, above all, the strength of our relationships. Improving our society's sense of wellbeing is, I believe, the central political challenge of our times (cited by Stratton 2010).

The 2013 *Public Services (Social Value) Act* also encouraged social impact valuations by requiring all public sector commissioning to factor in social as well as economic and environmental benefits. The consultancy, Simetrica, now part of a multi-billion-dollar international partnership, made its name in this market by applying econometrics, contingent valuation, subjective wellbeing, and social impact measurements to existing national survey data sets. Its estimates for the cultural sector generated credibility by corresponding with the approach it had developed for *The Green Book* and government policy-making in general (Fujiwara 2013a: 7).

Simetrica was ubiquitous in the 2010s. Its influence on the cultural sector is evident in the number of commissions received from, or paid for by DCMS and its NDPBs, often in collaboration with others: between 2013 and 2019 it produced some fifteen reports. Its clients included ACE, English Heritage and NESTA (National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts) - sometimes a research partner itself. Its findings were also published in academic journals.³ Simetrica's popularity was, doubtless, associated with the strength of its advocacy and its principle of "articulating all forms of the benefits of culture, using the language of public policy and cultural value, [so] that funding decisions can be made that are acceptable to both central government and the cultural sector" (O'Brien 2010: 5). In short, it delivered "what the cultural sector really wants from research ... the killer evidence that will release dizzying amounts of money into the sector" (Scullion and Garcia 2005:120). This inevitably prompted questions about the veracity of the estimates produced: "Objectivity doesn't exist, but there are degrees of staying truer to, I suppose, well-established research principles, rather than just saying what the

client wants” (Prince 2014: 755). Truths, were, therefore, related to the “mechanical objectivity” of following certain rules, procedures and principles (such as statistically significant sample sizes, using data sets, non-leading interviewing, and transparency about data manipulation and interpretation) and to the “disciplinary objectivity” of recognized expertise (ibid).

Challenges

While DCMS and its agencies directly commissioned social scientists, the majority of cultural organizations had little access to their work. The sector largely comprises small and medium-sized enterprises, with modest budgets and negligible political clout. In order to demonstrate compliance with the department’s economic and social initiatives they were reliant on toolkits and other forms of guidance provided. These typically consisted of a “one-size-fits-all model” (Belfiore and Bennett 2010) comprising replicable DIY impact indicators that could be aggregated to produce national and/or sector-wide insights.

In the early 2000s, for example, the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs), devised by Leicester University for MLA, categorized participants’ immediate self-reported changes in terms of “knowledge and understanding: skills, attitudes and values”; “enjoyment, inspiration, creativity”; and “action, behaviour, progression.”⁴ Aggregated results were used to make the case for increased government investment in regional museums and to support discrete funding applications (Graham 2013). Subsequent iterations of the model include ACE’s Generic Social Outcomes and Generic Wellbeing Outcomes. Its current *Impact and Insight Toolkit*⁵ is similarly designed to help organizations self-evaluate, measure their short-term outcomes, and advocate more effectively. Its aggregated data is expected to back the case for the sector’s sustained public support (Selwood 2019). Other self-help manuals produced for the sector explain economic impact studies and describe ways to measure the monetary value of activities (BOP Consulting 2012).

The fact that these toolkits privilege quantitative approaches derived from economics and auditing (Caust 2003) was not necessarily applauded by practitioners. Many objected to cultural value being reduced to instrumental effects “as a tool of social engineering” (Antony Gormley, cited by Thorpe, 2000). They balked at the targets (Hytner 2003) and compared the government’s cultural policies to those of the Soviet Union (Brighton 1999). They denied that economic techniques could address the subjective experience of arts participation, and protested the consequences of the language being used by funding agencies: “Why do we allow the language of the arts to be bogged down in the impenetrable cant of social science?” (John Tusa, cited in *The Jackdaw*, 2004). The then-ACE Chair, Christopher Frayling, lamented arts organizations’ inability to pursue their own agendas (Austin 2005). Various DCMS secretaries of state and ministers agreed. By emphasizing the instrumental benefits of culture they acknowledged having evaded “the more difficult approach of investigating, questioning and celebrating what culture actually does in and of itself” and were left wondering how to “best capture the value of culture” (Jowell 2004:18). They had used the wrong language to express the value of culture (Morris 2003: 3–4), even if they had knowingly done so to attract increased Treasury funding (Smith 2003). Their tactics were over-determined and the system of accountability they had rolled out across the sector was inappropriate.

Compromise briefly seemed possible. In 2003, the think tank Demos speculated that the demands of producing evidence likely to convince the Treasury, whilst simultaneously respecting the cultural sector’s best interests, could be reconciled by marrying the “intrinsic” and the “instrumental” (Holden 2004). The concept of “cultural value” that emerged was closely associated

with the notion of public value that the BBC, the National Trust, ACE, and HLF were using to describe their contributions to society (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016: 129ff) and which was also applied to museums (Scott 2013). For its part, DCMS considered the “Balanced Scorecard”: a management technique that evaluates organizations’ performance by combining financial indicators with less tangible, qualitative, and more “subjective” measures of their institutional culture, processes, and innovations (Morris, Hargreaves, MacIntyre 2007). But ultimately, the business case pursued by its own Culture and Sport Evidence program won out (Walmsey 2012).

Part 2: Social Science’s Interest in the Cultural Sector

The Evolution of the Literature

The burgeoning of social science literature on the cultural sector is evident in the content of journals dedicated to cultural sociology and cultural economy. The AHRC and ESRC both encourage research across those disciplines; several British universities have created schools and faculties of the arts *and* social sciences, launched hybrid courses,⁶ and endorsed staff undertaking empirical commissions as a way of diversifying their institution’s income (Garland 2019). LSE’s (London School of Economics) work with Simetrica is one such example (Fujiwara et al. 2014a, 2014b, 2015a).

Social science research on cultural activities falls into distinct phases, although these are characterized differently. Susan Oman and Mark Taylor (2018), for instance, identify these as focused on data collection and analysis,⁷ the economic impacts of events and modeling of local data,⁸ and the empirical analysis of large national sets.⁹ DCMS and its agencies’ commissioning of academic research (DCMS 2014) contributed to substantial traffic between universities, creative economy policy, and advocacy (Munro 2016: 45). Such contracts were often prompted by extant, independent research: Tak Wing Chan’s and John H. Goldthorpe’s work on social stratification (2004) and on ONS’s survey of *Arts in England* preceded their work that ultimately informed ACE’s strategic framework (Bunting 2010).

Perhaps the most significant aspect of social scientists’ work on the cultural sector was the shift towards their own interests, and the creation of new knowledge free from the constraints and expectations of commissioned empirical research. Between 2012 and 2019, AHRC committed over £5 million to an investigation of cultural value and the establishment of a Centre for Culture Value (AHRC 2018). That funding supported the work of Andrew Miles and Alice Sullivan (2012), Mark Taylor (2016), and Adrian Leguina and Andrew Miles’s (2017) secondary analyses of DCMS’s *Taking Part* data.¹⁰ These researchers exposed a deficit model created by the survey’s focus on participation in highbrow, state-supported cultural activities, and its implications for cultural policy.

As a result, the relationship between the cultural sector and the social sciences became somewhat less straightforward. A recent review of the sociology literature revealingly framed the CCIIs as a problem for sociology, and sociology as a problem for the CCIIs (Casey and O’Brien 2020). What follows extends that premise to investigate the nature of the relationship.

Problems Posed by the Cultural and Creative Industries for Social Sciences

Economists’ approaches to addressing the CCIIs’ problems appear straightforward. They could help cultural institutions “demonstrate in quantitative terms the value that they create for society in a manner that is consistent with best-practice methodology within government” (Bakhshi et

al. 2015: 5). Their valuations could explore how economic and cultural values interact (Angelini and Castellani 2019), measure “the intrinsic as well as instrumental value of art in a way that is commensurable with other calls on the public purse” (Bakhshi et al. 2009) and quantify how much happiness the arts generate (Hand 2018). Some recommendations, however, come close to breaching ethical guidelines, including the suggestion that museums should decommission their collections to survive (di Gaetano and Mazza 2017).

Sociologists’ approaches contextualize and critique the CCIs (Casey and O’Brien 2020). Their literature, often still framed in reference to Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984), is characteristically preoccupied with patterns of consumption, participation and social inequalities (Bennett et al., 2020). It is suggested that cultural value exacerbates disparities around race, class, and gender (Oakley and O’Brien 2016; Brook et al. 2020; Campbell et al., 2019), and that CCI occupations and changing models of employment represent, rather than challenge, broader social trends (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; O’Brien et al., 2017).

Problems Posed by the Social Sciences for the Cultural and Creative Industries

DCMS’s definitions of the CCIs largely relate to it “conjoining or demarcating the creative and the cultural” (Casey and O’Brien, 2020: 443). As suggested above, the department and its agencies’ willful blurring of the distinctions between the cultural and creative industries has been apparent for some time (Garnham 2005). Nevertheless, DCMS’s *Sector Economic Estimates Methodology* (2019) continues to conflate them (without explanation). This is thought to have harmed policy for both the cultural and creative industries in the United Kingdom (Bakhshi and Cunningham 2016). Sociologists explain this as symptomatic of “the relative instability of the CCIs” and of these “apparently natural, or taken-for-granted, categories” being “contingent and constructed” (Casey and O’Brien 2020: 445), intimating something of the “controversial social life” of the CCIs.

Several cultural policy researchers cited in this article refer to the “social life of methods” (Miles and Gibson 2017; Oman and Taylor 2018; Campbell et al. 2017). This suggests that methodologies are not only shaped by the social contexts in which they are developed, but shape those contexts in turn. It implies that research methods cannot be regarded as impartial (Carrigan 2014) and denies the neutrality of both the evidence base and evidence-based policy (Campbell et al. 2017; O’Brien 2016). *Taking Part*’s critics, for example, claim that it reduces the cultural field to a partial and specific set of quantitative indicators that represent, and reinforce, particular understandings of participation (see Bunting et al. 2019; Taylor 2016). By the same token, the concept of cultural value is thought to have contributed to the prevailing “deficit model of participation” set against perceptions of “legitimate” culture by those typically well off, well-educated, and white (Miles and Gibson 2017). Expectations of activities promoting wellbeing are similarly problematized (Miles and Sullivan 2012; Oman 2016; Taylor 2016).

By definition, the social life of methods implicates those who undertake such research as neither “disinterested nor value neutral” (Donovan and O’Brien 2016: 33). The same applies to those who commission and use it. Cultural organizations appear similarly biased: “... any organization that is not working to break down barriers to access is actively maintaining them” (Mark O’Neill, cited in Gibson, 2008).

It is significant that these debates focus on the CCIs, rather than core, cultural activities. Their ambiguity contributes to their reputation as the most “seductive” part of the sector (Casey and O’Brien 2020: 444). They generate the best data; fall within the remit of the government’s industrial strategy (HM Government 2017); receive major research support (AHRC 2018); inform academic agendas; and offer “soft power” benefits and high financial returns (DCMS 2020).

Casey and O'Brien (2020: 456) describe the CCIs as being "as much a product of academic industry as it is government policy" and their own interest in them as prompted by "the reshaping of conceptions of social activity grounded in what does and what does not count as a CCI" (op. cit. 446).

As things currently stand, the prospects for social science research on the cultural sectors look poor. The financial situation may result in universities focusing on courses expected to generate higher earnings. This would have huge ramifications for some universities' enthusiasm for offering both arts and social sciences courses.

Part 3: Conflicting Interests

While the literature reveals social scientists' approach to the cultural sector as both theoretical and focused on the creative industries, debates about cultural value largely relate to the pragmatics of state-supported cultural activities. The tensions created are explored below.

Disciplinary Dominance

Crossick and Kaszynska (2016: 127) maintained that "hybrid" research was widely adopted, despite little being written about it. While many assume that the arts and social sciences should be complementary (Bakhshi, et al. 2009: 9), actual collaborations have been described as insufficiently focused on constructive cooperation (Bakhshi 2012: 213). Exceptionally, Andrew Newman et al. (2016) retrospectively reflected on a large-scale multidisciplinary project across the arts, humanities and social sciences, admitting to the difficulties of overcoming entrenched research methods. Writers looking to future partnerships tend to be optimistic (Clarke 2014).

Social scientists are represented as dominating the relationship with the cultural sector, bolstered by the cumulative nature and effective dissemination of their research findings (de la Fuente 2010; Zolberg 2015). In stark contrast, arts researchers are characterized as detached, if not idiosyncratic (Bakhshi et al. 2009). While arts and design techniques are occasionally advocated in the context of interdisciplinary work, social scientists reportedly struggle with "creative methods" (Lyon and Carabelli 2016). This prompts questions about what counts as knowledge, whether arts' outputs will always be secondary, and if methodological practice might change (Clarke 2014; Tarr et al. 2018).

Nevertheless, various criticisms have been leveled at social science research about the cultural sector. Despite twenty years' worth of research funding and advocacy, calls for more research, "the academic's favoured cliché," persist (O'Brien and Lockley 2015). According to AHRC's latest impact report (2017: 30) indicators pertaining to policy and practice were the least cited in reports measuring research impact. Anecdotal accounts suggest that academics' knowledge exchange with the cultural economy was not always effective (Munro 2016: 50).

These difficulties may mirror the bigger picture. Academic social scientists are known to complain about the government ignoring their research (Shaw 2015). Indeed, the government seems to be highly selective about which social science constituencies it works with. Simon Bastow et al. (2014a) found that the majority of implementation-specific social science research was commissioned from consultancies. Compared with them, universities' social science departments appeared stultified (Christakis 2013). Academic practice may well be disadvantaged outside the academy: persistent investigations of certain topics arguably generate diminishing returns: "repeatedly observing these phenomena does not help us fix them" (ibid). No allowances are made for research that is untimely or inapplicable (Bastow et al. 2014b), for publications that

are jargon-ridden, lack quality, or are based on incomprehensible methodologies (Alvesson et al. 2017). Sociology's associations with deconstruction, criticism, defeatism, and lack of constructive encouragement possibly make it the most criticized of the social sciences (Dingwall, et al. 2018).

Proposed Compromises

Cultural sector constituencies have responded differently to social scientists' proposals. Some were galvanized by the prospect of using the Treasury's terminology; others, not. Cultural studies academics have disparaged the sector's use of social scientists for defensive and advocacy purposes (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016), and some economists and social scientists have acknowledged their limitations (Hughes 1989; O'Brien 2015). Attempts to address "the black hole" of instrumental versus intrinsic values, thought to have "paralyzed" the arts (Rylance 2012: 211), came to little. Holden (2006) proposed extending the binary to embrace *institutional* values, whereas Gibson (2008) defended instrumentality as *the* way for cultural programs to deliver "real social and political effects."

Revisiting the concept of cultural value proved controversial. Some commentators found it incoherent and sometimes contradictory (O'Brien and Lockley 2015: 101). They questioned the lack of a more nuanced understanding of cultural values and funding decisions. This prompted the AHRC to launch "one of the most in-depth attempts yet made to understand the value of the arts and culture—the difference that they make to individuals and to society" (Thompson 2016: 4). Some of those associated with the project thought it could be mobilized to address the imbalances of power and authority in the sector through consensual decision-making, participatory evaluation, social justice and cultural democracy (Jeffers and Moriarty 2017; Wilson et al. 2017). Despite those principles being endorsed by ACE (Serota 2018), discussions about cultural democracy are considered to have revived tensions in the Arts Council as old as the institution itself (Hadley and Belfiore 2018).

The Cultural Sector's Attitude to Research

The cultural sector is conventionally wary of research. This may relate to its reluctance to acknowledge failure, which may prompt funding cuts, and is markedly reluctant to commission evaluations beyond the short term. ACE's strategy 2020–2030 typically emphasizes building on past successes, rather than learning from past failures.¹¹ Although it periodically acknowledges gaps in its evidence-base, ACE assumes that the research it commissions will feed its advocacy. The call for its 2015 to 2018 Research Grants program, for instance, asked applicants to "help us prove that arts and culture matter."¹²

At best, ACE's position on social science research appears conciliatory. Its adherence to the intrinsic *and* the instrumental is tenacious: it appreciates that the arts and culture have measurable, instrumental impacts "on our economy, health and wellbeing, society and education," while simultaneously acknowledging what matters most to its constituents: "When we talk about the value of arts and culture to society, we always start with its intrinsic value: how arts and culture can illuminate our inner lives and enrich our emotional world" (ACE 2014).

DCMS is similarly conflicted. A recent parliamentary enquiry into the social impact of cultural participation recorded the department's disinclination to use research to affect policy practice and behavior (HoC 2019). Ecorys (2014) raised issues about the quality of the local economic impact reports it investigated on its behalf, in particular their limited explorations of key economic concepts and inconsistent methodologies. This was evidently awkward, and Ecorys's report was only released in response to a Freedom of Information request (Romer 2016).

Oman and Taylor (2018) were disturbed to find that research by Simetrica's director (Fujiwara 2013a) was non-replicable. This implied that the authority vested in the consultancy had not only enabled it to generate representations of reality, but the realities themselves. The authors suggested that "public institutions are apparently unaware of this when investing in models with assertive positive results." They also doubted that those citing the data fully understood it (Oman and Taylor 2018: 240, 229).

Interneccine Bickering

The literature review undertaken for this article found several criticisms of particular constituencies. The cultural bureaucracy is an obvious target. Samuel Ladkin (2014), for example, proposed that "the arts' greatest possible value has been, and might continue to be, to oppose, rigorously and constitutively, dominant and dominating ascriptions of value." Drawing on Harry Frankfurt's (2005) academic respectability, Eleonora Belfiore (2009: 344) characterized the political rhetoric of New Labour's secretaries of state and ministers for Culture, Media, and Sport as "lying and bullshitting." The type of social science statistics they relied on have been similarly condemned as "bullshit that comes clad in the trappings of scholarly discourse. Traditionally, such highbrow nonsense has come couched in big words and fancy rhetoric, but more and more we see it presented instead in the guise of big data and fancy algorithms."¹³

For Steven Hadley and Clive Gray (2017), the trajectory of cultural policies is "hyperinstrumentalist," if not oxymoronic, in that the extreme logic of instrumentalizing the cultural sector is that there is no point in having it. A less myopic view acknowledges that the arts have no monopoly in helping people "become more alive, alert, engaged, and able to make good public choices ..." Access to varied meanings—through arts, education, scientific inquiry, and other forms of experience—is crucial" (Jensen 2003). Simetrica notably ranked "intimacy, making love" and "birdwatching, nature watching" above cultural activities in terms of impacting survey respondents' happiness and relaxation (Fujiwara and MacKerron 2015: 27).

Criticisms are also leveled at the nature of research *per se*, if not at researchers. Crossick and Kaszynska (2016: 120ff), for example, identified tensions between theoretical and empirical, pure and applied research. Oman and Taylor (2018) fixated on the issues arising from academics' partnerships with commercial consultants. They regarded these collaborations, often conceived to generate income, as flouting "fluid claims to authority [that] allow experimental econometric models and measures to perform across the cultural economy as if ratified" and exercising greater flexibility than peer review allows. They should be subject to greater scrutiny and "academic consideration" (op. cit., 225, 240).

Last but not least, the cultural sector itself is represented as reluctant to comply with social and economic impact imperatives. Analysis of the British Social Attitudes and British Election Study Internet Panel surveys found that CCI workers are among the most left wing, liberal and pro-welfare of any occupations and industries (McAndrew et al. 2020). This is considered to contribute to the sector's "social closure" and relative intolerance of those with other viewpoints (Redmund 2020; Hill 2020). Indeed, it is suggested that the dominant representations of cultural value within official discourses run counter to those of cultural practitioners themselves (Newsinger and Green 2016).

Conclusion

While the cultural sector initially looked to social scientists to research its evidence base and support its advocacy, the sector itself became the subject of economists' and sociologists' own studies. The literature highlights some of the challenges facing both communities, without revealing how, or to what degree, either changed as a result of the relationship. If ACE responses to COVID are anything to go by, its priorities remain resolutely focused on organizations, venues, and individual artists: courses, with only one small program, its Thriving Communities Fund made possible by the National Academy for Social Prescribing, are dedicated to those communities most impacted by the pandemic.¹⁴

By definition, this article reflects the views of those who contributed to the literature. It necessarily reflects the work of a small number of researchers, with few degrees of separation between them, who have pursued the subject conscientiously. Eleonore Belfiore, Andrew Miles, and Mark Taylor, for example, contributed to the AHRC-funded project *Understanding Everyday Participation: Articulating Cultural Values* (2012–2017).¹⁵ This was based at the University of Manchester, home to research on the social life of methods (fundamental to several arguments reiterated here).¹⁶ Others cited here include Hasan Bakhshi, Daniel Fujiwara, and Dave O'Brien, who contributed to AHRC's *Cultural Value Project* (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016: Annex 2) and have co-authored pieces with each other and those identified above. In the absence of a comparable body of work by other writers, these writers, with AHRC's support, have exerted a major influence on our understanding about the relationship between the social sciences and the cultural sector.

However niche, or myopic, their concerns might appear, the ramifications of the issues they raise go far beyond the cultural sector. Various economists have recently commented on the consequences of financial value being held in higher regard than human value and as having contributed to the climate and COVID crises, inequality, and democracy crises (Carney 2020; Stiglitz et al. 2019). Mariana Mazzucato (2019) pinpointed the extraction of value, rather than its creation, as causing us to lose sight of what value really means and forego the possibility of learning what really matters. But the fact that these concerns are being aired at a time when the mendacity of the government and its disregard for conflicts of interest has become blatantly conspicuous does not inspire optimism (Mount 2021). Perhaps, this marks a moment when cultural policy and those activities that the state supports will be unequivocally celebrated for adding value to society.

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NOTES

1. A Google search (17 July 2020) generated over one billion results on the “social impact of the arts,” considerably more than the social impacts of heritage, museums, and archives.
2. This refers to guidance on how to appraise and evaluate policies, projects and programmes. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-government/the-green-book-2020>
3. These items are listed in the References and the Supplementary Bibliography under the names of their first authors: Mandy Barnett, Daniel Fujiwara and Hasan Bakhshi
4. Toolkits: Advice and Guidance Library, Arts Council England website: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance-library/toolkits> (accessed 1 March 2021).
5. Impact and Insight Toolkit, Arts Council England website: <https://impactandinsight.co.uk/> (accessed 15 March 2021).
6. For example, Newcastle University’s *Qualitative Methodologies in the Arts, Humanities and Social Science*, 2018.
7. Characterized by research produced by, or for, cultural agencies including, Bridgewood and Skelton (2000), Sumsion (2001) and Baxter (2002).
8. Typified by studies of Liverpool as European Capital of Culture 2008 (Garcia et al., 2010; Cox and O’Brien, 2012), and the London 2012 Olympics (Grant Thornton et al., 2013).
9. Encouraged by Lilly and Moore (2013). The re-analyses of existing data sets covered DCMS’s *Taking Part*, ONS’s *Labour Force Survey*, *Annual Population Survey*, and *Longitudinal Study*, as well as BBC’s *Great British Class Survey*, Nat Cen Social Research’s *British Social Attitudes*, and the ESRC-funded *British Election Study* (Brook et al. 2020; Leguina and Miles 2016; Miles and Sullivan 2010, 2012; McAndrew et al. 2020; O’Brien et al 2016; Taylor 2016).
10. *Taking Part* is DCMS’ continuous face to face household survey of adults and children in England. It has run since 2005 and is the main evidence source for the Department and its sectors. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-survey#the-taking-part-survey>
11. Cultural Participation: Failsafe, Research project blog: <https://www.culturalparticipation.co.uk/FailSpace> (accessed 1 March 2021). NESTA’s strategy of reflecting on its past is exceptional. See: Matt Seden, “Reflecting on our past, learnings for our future,” Nesta blog: https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/reflecting-our-past-learnings-our-future/?utm_source=Nesta+Weekly+Newsletter&utm_campaign=b234307295-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_05_26_11_41_COPY_03&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d17364114d-b234307295-181185561 (accessed 30 March 2021).
12. “Help us prove that arts and culture matter: New research grants programme open now,” Arts Council England: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/news/help-us-prove-arts-and-culture-matter-new-research-grants-programme-open-now> (accessed 15 April 2021).
13. Calling Bullshit: Data Reasoning in a Digital World: <https://www.callingbullshit.org/> (accessed 1 April 2021).
14. Thriving Communities Fund: Arts Council England: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/thriving-communities-fund#section-1> (accessed 1 June 2021).
15. Understanding Everyday Participation: Articulating Cultural Values, Research project website: <http://www.everydayparticipation.org/> (accessed 15 May 2021).
16. “Social Life of Methods,” CRESC website: <https://www.cresc.ac.uk/research/social-life-of-methods/> (accessed 1 May 2021).

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