

Measuring Cultural Engagement:

A Quest for New Terms, Tools, and Techniques




Summary of a Joint Research Symposium titled “Measuring Cultural Engagement amid Confounding Variables: A Reality Check,” held at the Gallup headquarters in Washington, DC, June 2–3, 2014.

Co-sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Arts & Humanities Research Council's Cultural Value Project.



Arts & Humanities Research Council



Front cover photo: *Manganiyar Seduction* by
Roysten Abel, performing at the WOMAD Festival
in the United Kingdom. Photo by Matt Crossick

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This symposium summary was prepared by Mary Lou Rife, Damaris King, Samuel Thomas, and Rose Li, Rose Li and Associates, Inc.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym	Definition
ACA	Australia Council for the Arts
AHRC	Arts & Humanities Research Council
ATUS	American Time Use Survey
CAPACOA	Canadian Arts Presenting Association
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GNP	Gross National Product
IFACCA	International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies
LNS	La Nouvelle Scene
NEA	National Endowment for the Arts
PSM	Propensity Score Matching
SIAP	Social Impact of the Arts Project
SPPA	Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

Preface


In both the United States and the United Kingdom, arts administrators and leaders of arts organizations find themselves increasingly seeking models for understanding and articulating their work's relevance to populations, fields, and sectors much broader than those in the past. For some organizations or agencies, this quest carries a fiduciary burden: part of the routine case-making that justifies public or commercial support, or that fuels more effective marketing and outreach.

But the quest is not obligatory. In recent years, arts practitioners and funders in both countries have innovated across multiple domains, whether to enlist the arts in healthcare delivery, to engage artists in energizing and developing communities, to bring arts practice into prisons, or to enable research projects involving arts, science, and technology. In theory if not always in practice, many of these activities now resist facile dichotomies such as formal/informal art or high/low culture. Instead, they often strive to accommodate new, neglected, or hybrid art forms, genres, and activities favored by distinct sectors of the population. The emergence of the digital space for arts consumption, production, and co-creation deepens this fragmentation and diversity still further.

Given the broader context shaping the work of today's cultural policymakers, it is natural to want to revisit how they track individual, everyday transactions with arts and culture. In the U.S., the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has collaborated with the U.S. Census Bureau since 1982 to measure adults' arts participation rates over various 12-month periods. Since 2005, the UK Department for Culture, Media & Sport and three partner agencies have co-sponsored an annual survey of adults' and children's engagement with arts, sports, and heritage activities. Similar surveys are maintained by other countries, notably Canada and Australia, as discussed in this report, as well as through Eurobarometer for the 27 states of the European Union.

The prospect of rallying cultural agencies and departments that conduct such surveys—of hosting them for a two-day meeting to talk shop and trade notes—would have been a satisfying objective in itself. But the resulting symposium, held on June 2–3, 2014, in Washington, DC, gained greater purpose thanks to a congruence in the missions of two quite distinct sponsoring bodies: the NEA's Office of Research & Analysis and the Cultural Value Project (CVP) of the UK's Arts & Humanities Research Council.

In 2012, the CVP was launched as a targeted research initiative to investigate the value that arts and culture bring to individuals and to society. The CVP has now supported nearly 70 academically based research projects of various kinds, the outcomes of which are poised to contribute a substantive knowledge base to this growing international discourse. Also in 2012, the NEA's Office of Research & Analysis made inaugural awards to projects under its Research: Art Works grants program, designed to support studies that examine the value and/or impact of the arts in American life. As with the CVP, the NEA's grants program observes a distinction in studying the benefits for individuals and for society as a whole.



In jointly planning a research symposium, therefore, both the CVP and the NEA did not want simply to explore the methodological challenges confronting surveys of arts participation. We also wanted to probe the motivations for fielding such surveys in the first place, to ask whether they are keeping pace with demographic and technological trends affecting both cultural practice and research, and to consider how and under what conditions such data collection might prove more useful—and faithful—to the populations whose activities they are intended to capture.

A lively and sophisticated reckoning of these topics is apparent on each page of the present report. For this, we have the speakers, moderators, and other participants to thank, especially as they came to Washington, DC, from far-flung places to share their knowledge and expertise. If there are no consensus recommendations here, they were never a goal of the symposium. Rather, the report offers sometimes provocative and frequently evidence-based opinions in response to hefty challenges framed by the event's sponsors and moderators. We know it will serve as a platform for further research and pragmatic inquiry, just as we hope it may augur future collaborations between the NEA and the Arts & Humanities Research Council.

In closing, we would like to extend a special thanks to the Gallup Corporation for hosting the event at its Washington, DC, headquarters, and to Patrycja Kaszynska of the CVP, to the staff of Research Councils UK, and to Ellen Grantham of the NEA.

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Executive Summary



The Houston Symphony performing at Houston Methodist. Photo courtesy of Houston Methodist


Governments and cultural institutions often measure public engagement in the arts, though it is a costly endeavor whose purpose is not always clear. Innovative artistic media and changes in audience demographics and behavior patterns present new methodological challenges. Rising costs of household surveys, the availability of big data, and fresh doubts about traditional assumptions add to the need to develop new approaches.

To explore these topics, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Cultural Value Project (CVP) of the United Kingdom’s Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) convened a symposium of leading researchers, practitioners, and policymakers from a handful of countries. The event aimed to challenge assumptions about how and why public involvement in arts and culture is measured and to identify research needs and opportunities to promote more meaningful measurement.

The symposium was organized into five sessions over two days:

1. Why measure cultural participation, and for and by whom?
2. What do we mean by cultural participation? Scrutinizing activities and genres
3. The challenge of encompassing new media- and technology-driven forms of participation
4. New ways of knowing: alternative data sources, methodologies, and units of analysis
5. Beyond participation rates: understanding motivations, barriers, and outcomes

At the start of each day, a keynote speaker set the tone for subsequent sessions. For example, acknowledging that it is increasingly difficult to fund high-quality sample surveys, former U.S. Census Bureau director Robert Groves (2009–2012) discussed challenges and opportunities of what he called “organic data”—large, “naturally occurring” datasets such as Tweets and credit-card transactions—that are not designed by researchers but are easily accessible and can be mined for a range of insights.



Organic data are produced at very high frequency and allow researchers to detect trends that are not observable through traditional research methods. At the same time, organic datasets often contain few, poorly defined variables. Linking organic datasets to well-designed sample surveys may be the key to unlocking their potential utility for social and cultural analysis.


Jon Clifton, the other keynote speaker, described the innovative Gallup World Poll, which is based on in-person interviews asking, among other questions, “How are you doing?” and “Where will you be in five years?” Responses are recorded as numbers from 0 to 10. By applying this simple methodology on a global scale, currently reaching 163 countries, Gallup is able to quantify and track historical trends and make international comparisons. Gallup’s big-picture vision and the instrument’s scalability may inspire the arts and culture community as it explores new ways to measure cultural engagement—especially if the aim is to make global comparisons.

In the first session, presenters identified reasons *why* arts institutions, governments, and researchers collect population-level arts participation data. They also addressed challenges of measuring participation so that the results are meaningful for multiple stakeholders. Discussion focused on identifying end-users of participation data and on asking whether the output of data collection meets their needs.

Concurrent with demographic shifts and technological and artistic innovation, the range of cultural activities in which the public participates has greatly expanded. New approaches are needed to accurately measure public involvement in the full range of cultural and artistic activities while avoiding biases such as emphases on particular artistic modes.

Large, organic datasets provide a wealth of such information but must be linked with other types of well-defined data to be broadly useful. In general, more effort is needed to develop appropriate methodologies to measure participation, and which meet the needs of different users. Data analysts also must find cost-effective ways to understand relationships among disparate sources and to learn from the experiences of others.

Session Two focused on defining cultural participation with the goal of ensuring that measurement methodologies capture the full scope of cultural and artistic activities. Informal “everyday culture,” art-making, and digital production and consumption are examples of cultural participation for which there often are less reliable trend data than for attendance at many specific types of arts event. Each presenter shared a case study that highlighted alternative methods for measuring participation, calling attention to the potential breadth of activities that can be considered cultural or artistic participation.




Ethnographic profiles provide rich narratives of individuals and communities and can reveal arts participation disguised as everyday activities. Mixed methods research that incorporates historical data, surveys, qualitative research, and field-work can similarly elucidate everyday arts participation as well as the places, forms or genres, and persons involved. By capturing a broader scope of activities and outcomes, mixed methods research may find greater cultural participation in a given locality than do conventional surveys alone. Another approach is to ask survey respondents to define arts and culture and the activities they encompass.

The third session examined the roles of new media and technology platforms—both in arts participation and in the measurement of it. The Internet and other media platforms are blazing new avenues for arts and cultural expression, from viral videos to crowdsourcing. From a measurement perspective, the chief opportunity represented is an abundance of multiple types of easy-to-collect data at relatively low cost. Collection of web-based observational data does require, however, an understanding that the datasets may not be useful in raw form. Curation and extensive data-cleaning are often necessary.

Given the self-selected samples in many of these collections, statistical techniques such as propensity score matching can eliminate a fair amount of bias. Researchers at the Norman Lear Center of the University of Southern California, for example, used propensity score matching to mitigate sampling bias in a social media-based study that examined the outcomes of watching a certain film. While such statistical techniques can control for sampling bias, other challenges include research ethics and privacy concerns, and standardization of data-scrubbing protocols.

The fourth session featured examples of projects using new data sources and methodologies, often borrowed from fields such as economics and demography, to measure cultural participation. These projects exemplified challenges already identified with large organic datasets, such as data-cleaning and statistical biases. An ongoing study by Hasan Bakhshi, director of creative economy in policy and research at Nesta, tapped a database of daily box-office ticket sales for multiple venues to investigate the impact of live broadcasts on future theater attendance in England.

While preliminary results in this case were positive—there was no evidence that live broadcasts decrease subsequent theater attendance—unforeseen methodological challenges slowed the pace of research and complicated analytical efforts. Another significant challenge was the fact that using organic data introduced uncertainty into the research questions themselves. Such difficulties highlight the continued importance of investing in traditional surveys, at least until robust and validated methods for analyzing organic datasets are more widely available.



The final session weighed the assumption that looking at factors “beyond participation rates” would provide more value for arts and cultural organizations when confronting survey data. Managers of cultural institutions want to understand the motivations, barriers, and outcomes related to arts participation, not just the level or frequency of activity.

Symposium participants acknowledged that there is currently no consensus around which arts-related variables to measure beyond participation itself. In policy contexts, economic impact is often emphasized at the expense of other measures. Aligning research priorities across multiple stakeholders is a significant challenge, especially in a limited budget environment and at a time when research costs in particular are rising.

Partnerships with organizations outside the arts may also be fruitful for assessing social outcomes of cultural engagement, such as health, well-being, and economic impact. Working with researchers and organizations in psychology, sociology, and consumer sciences may offer insights into motivation and outcomes, and may lead to the development and adoption of new qualitative tools for the arts sector.

Before concluding the symposium, participants engaged in a group brainstorming session about making comparisons across countries. They generally agreed on the value of international comparisons by arts sector and the need for better standardization of metrics overall. International surveys may be valuable, but language and cultural differences render it impossible to obtain exact parity in phrasing.

One approach to mitigate this problem is to develop a module of core questions that each country can add to existing surveys to facilitate comparisons of cultural participation globally. In addition to the notion of comparing cultural participation across countries, participants expressed interest in comparing public policies and investigating relationships among policy, participation, and outcomes such as social well-being. Such research could build from existing efforts such as the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies’ (IFACCA) International Database of Cultural Policies.

The symposium was a significant step forward in conceptualizing how cultural engagement can be measured in a rapidly evolving landscape. It brought together international experts from multiple disciplines, clarified different reasons for collecting cultural participation data, and identified key areas of focus for future research. A variety of practitioners and researchers had the opportunity to learn from each other’s experiences working with alternative data sources and methodologies. Government agencies and other designers of large surveys received candid feedback from end-users of their products. Finally, the symposium set the stage for future collaborations among AHRC, the NEA, and many other organizations to innovate strategies to foster and measure cultural engagement.

Full Meeting Summary



Storefront for Art and Architecture and Praxis are representing the U.S. at this year's Venice Biennale with OfficeUS, a working office space and library focused on the American influence on global architecture over the past 100 years. Photo by David Sundberg-Esto

Background and Introduction

For many national governments tasked with funding arts and culture, surveying the public about their participation levels has become routine. Yet it remains a costly proposition. In addition to the technical and logistical challenges of any large-scale survey, the enterprise is beset by a wave of disruptive factors. Problems arise, for example, from competing definitions of arts and culture and, indeed, of participation itself. Other issues stem from overt or hidden assumptions about which types of activities, art forms, or cultural assets are privileged in survey questionnaires and which populations or subgroups are envisioned as users of the survey data and for what purpose or agenda.

The original, policy-based motives for undertaking such data collections often go unexamined long after the systems are set in motion. Shifting policy imperatives are often articulated in pragmatic changes to survey questions and the presentation of results. One vexing question for the future of measuring cultural participation is whether current instruments and methodologies are flexible enough to accommodate rapidly evolving art forms, changes in demographics, and emergent technology platforms.

There is a further dilemma: how can the descriptive statistics culled from such data be linked compellingly with research (including other data sources) about the value and impact of arts and culture? For that matter, do periodic, cross-sectional surveys remain effective tools for learning about public participation?

To examine these issues, the NEA and the Cultural Value Project (CVP) of AHRC convened a symposium on June 2–3, 2014 to bring together leading researchers and practitioners from both the United States and the United Kingdom—as well as from other parts of Europe, and from Australia and Canada—to conduct a “reality check” of the landscape of cultural participation metrics.

The CVP’s and the NEA’s research agendas concerning the value and impact of the arts have strong parallels. Both aim to define artistic and/or cultural experience and to examine its impact on individuals and communities.

The goals of this particular event were to probe assumptions about how and why we measure public involvement in arts and culture, to confront any orthodoxies implicit in how cultural participation is reported, and to chart a path toward more durable and meaningful measurement. Finally, the symposium aimed to identify research questions and opportunities for standardizing certain data fields internationally. (See Appendices 1: Agenda and 2: List of Participants.)

To facilitate its own research, the NEA collects data through multiple mechanisms. Since 1982, the NEA has worked with the U.S. Census Bureau to field the largest nationally representative survey of cultural engagement: the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA).¹ The SPPA has been conducted every ten years since its inception in 1982, and otherwise at irregular intervals. In 2013, the NEA launched the Annual Arts Benchmarking Survey, a shorter version with more generic questions about arts attendance and arts creation.

The NEA also assists in efforts to study more specific subpopulations. For example, in the National Children’s Study’s vanguard phase of data collection, the NEA asked about arts exposure and learning among children aged 0 to 5. Similarly, questions in the 2014 Health and Retirement Study (HRS) asked the nation’s older Americans about their engagement with arts and culture.

Findings from the 2012 SPPA show that arts participation rates in the U.S., as measured by specific art form, are often relatively low. And yet, when researchers aggregate rates across different *modes* of arts participation (e.g., attendance at an art event of any type, creating or performing any type of artwork, or accessing art via any type of media), the numbers start to become impressive. According to the NEA data, for example, roughly half of U.S. adults attended at least one visual or performing arts event in the most recent 12-month period. Similarly large numbers created and performed artworks. Arts consumption via electronic media emerged as the leading mode of arts participation in 2012.

1. See NEA, *How a Nation Engages with Art: Highlights from the 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* (2013), <http://arts.gov/publications/highlights-from-2012-sppa>.

The NEA's new measurement-and-reporting strategies around arts participation are rooted in concerns shared by the AHRC's Cultural Value Project. At the outset of the joint research symposium, the CVP's director, Geoffrey Crossick, outlined key questions:

- 1. *How well do we use surveys to capture the value people get from participating?*** Is it feasible to use national or local participation surveys to answer questions about well-being, about what people get from engagement? Can longitudinal studies accomplish this?
- 2. *How can we shape discourse around access to and exclusion from participation?*** Exclusion is often expressed in terms of social class and race/ethnicity, but is this definition too narrow? While this has been discussed in the United States for 25 years, little study has been done in the United Kingdom within ethnic communities that often have an arts culture with a vitality and vibrancy of its own.
- 3. *How can we capture digital cultural engagement that goes beyond accessing websites?*** How well do we document online consumption of video games, creative co-production in the digital space, as well as films and music experienced in the home environment?

For his part, Sunil Iyengar, director of the NEA's Office of Research & Analysis, suggested related topics that would benefit from further inquiry. They included:

- 1. *Survey costs and sustainability.*** Measuring arts and culture is a costly proposition that requires a great deal of resources to sustain it, especially when considering all the factors impinging on the availability of reliable, representative data.
- 2. *Alternatives to traditional sources, survey methods, and units of measurement.***
- 3. *Relevance and utility of research questions and instruments.*** Who is most likely to benefit, and for what purpose?
- 4. *International exchange of information and lessons learned.*** We have an opportunity to learn from other countries about approaches that may prove worth implementing, or avoiding, in the context of our own nations.

The remainder of this document highlights the main themes from the presentations and ensuing dialogue.

Keynote Talk: An Evolving World of Personal and Household Data

Sample surveys—historically the cornerstone of cultural participation measurements—are undergoing dynamic changes. Georgetown University Provost Robert Groves, a keynote speaker and director of the U.S. Census Bureau from 2009 to 2012, observed five factors challenging traditional surveys of culture and arts engagement:

- 1. Cost.** The costs of self-report measurement through traditional sample surveys are growing more rapidly than the rate of inflation.
- 2. Demand.** Business, state, and local community leaders depend increasingly on timely statistics about their populations; consequently, there is a need to present evidence that is accessible to large populations and understandable by leaders and decision-makers.
- 3. New technology.** New and more dynamic platforms for data collection have made it more convenient for the public to report its behavior in various ways, providing large “organic data” resources.
- 4. Digitization.** In addition to data sources from Internet-enabled technologies, almost all record systems of large bureaucracies are now digitized, making it easier to keep track of activities.
- 5. Declining budgets.** Central government budgets devoted to these sorts of measurement systems are flat or declining in real terms.

Due to these factors, especially cost, sample surveys are declining in quality. At the same time, there is a gigantic increase in data resources that are not being designed by researchers but are being created naturally from the current environment. Leveraging organic datasets by linking them to researcher-designed sample surveys will prove critical for measuring public engagement in arts in the future.

The major difference between researcher-generated datasets and organic datasets is their design: sample surveys are designed by researchers who choose every measurement parameter, whereas organic datasets are not designed at all but rather comprise human actions. Some examples of organic data include:

- Google search terms (e.g., Google Flu)
- Scraped data from websites (information extracted for specific purposes)
- Tweets
- Closed-circuit television (CCTV) traffic camera data
- Retail scan data
- Credit card transaction data
- Data.gov portal (in the United States, data sources from the federal government that were once the administrative data within agencies are now publicly available)

“Higher costs, yet more demand for timely statistics, and new technologies, new data resources, but no new money—that is indeed the combination of observations that makes my [colleagues] heavily focused on how to reinvent how we keep track of and study human behavior and thought.”

| Robert Groves

Organic data track behaviors that are often intriguing for social scientists. The high frequency of these data collections allow analysts to detect trends not otherwise observable through surveying periodic samples. For example, Dr. Groves noted that in the three days following Lehman Brothers' collapse, Google Flu, a web-scraping project, showed drastic drops in product prices on websites but was able to document their recovery in three or four days. The Consumer Price Index could not reveal this information because the events occurred between the two months of government reporting, he said.

The downside to organic datasets is that they often measure few variables, which are sometimes poorly defined. In order for organic datasets to yield useful results for social scientists, they must be linked to more established, deliberately designed, and validated data. Using statistical models to blend large organic datasets with smaller, well-designed sample surveys may produce powerful new tools to measure arts engagement.

Linking multiple datasets comes with distinct challenges, such as:

- *Privacy and confidentiality.* Many are concerned that any use of personal data that flows through the Internet can generate harm. Developments by computer scientists and government statistical agencies to allow access to data, while preserving the confidentiality of the records system, are promising and warrant greater investment. Work is needed to link organic datasets with sample surveys while protecting the privacy of individuals.
- *Massive datasets.* Very large organic datasets cannot be analyzed on a desktop or laptop but rather require high-throughput computing and vast storage resources. Increasingly, datasets are so large that they cannot feasibly be moved from where they are; Ebay™, for example, took six months to move its data farm, according to Dr. Groves.
- *Data access.* Data cannot be collected and analyzed at home; instead, researchers will need to negotiate access rights to these larger datasets, which will remain where they are, and legal agreements with data-holders will be required.
- *New types of statistical modeling.* Collecting and linking multiple types of new data require innovations in statistical methods. Too few people are working in this area, and there are too few in the pipeline to serve future needs.

“I was and I remain very concerned about the future of federal statistics, which I believe are the cornerstone of our democracy.”

| Robert Groves

Session 1: Why Measure Cultural Participation, and For and By Whom?

What is cultural participation? Who are cultural participants? Who should measure participation and who are the end-users of such data? These were overarching questions of the two-day event and its inaugural session.

Recognizing Demographic Changes

Audience demographics are rapidly changing, yet according to Josephine Ramirez, program director at the James Irvine Foundation, some arts institutions have been slow to recognize changing interests and demands. Based on U.S. Census data, the proportion of whites in California dropped from 69 percent in 1980 to 59 percent in 2000 and is projected to dip below 50 percent in the coming decades.

Such large demographic changes, which have resulted primarily from immigration, have significant implications for the role of arts, and for whom cultural participation is measured. Yet cultural institutions have been slow to recognize this demographic shift; the nonprofit arts audience, as traditionally defined, often looks like the population in 1980.

Because of its interest in bridging and bonding diverse populations, the Irvine Foundation commissioned an innovative survey that asked Californians about areas of importance in interacting with the arts, rather than which artistic performances they attended. The findings indicate that Californians report being very engaged in the arts, but in a variety of ways. A new cultural paradigm has emerged in which *participation*, broadly defined, has greatly expanded the range of activities that people engage in beyond *attendance* of traditionally defined cultural events occurring in traditionally recognized cultural settings.²

Making Survey Data More Relevant for the Arts Community

Arts organizations and researchers are important end-users of participation surveys. Diane Ragsdale, of Erasmus University in Rotterdam, suggested that the NEA could make its survey data more relevant to arts practitioners. She urged the NEA to continue the SPPA, a significant data source widely used by arts researchers; abandoning the SPPA would be a significant setback for this field. Yet Ms. Ragsdale also cautioned the NEA to change the way it presents its data if one of its primary audiences is intended to be arts organizations and if the agency's goal is for organizations to actively use the data in improving their work.

² See NEA, *Beyond Attendance: A Multi-Modal Understanding of Arts Participation* (2011), <http://arts.gov/publications/beyond-attendance-multi-modal-understanding-arts-participation>.

For instance, the 2012 SPPA found that participation rates for non-musical plays were down by 12 percent and musicals by 9 percent, over a five-year time period.³ The finding drew negative press from the news media. Based on the field's responses to this finding, Ms. Ragsdale suggested that (1) many people conflate arts participation rates with attendance figures and seem confused about how to interpret SPPA findings; and (2) the SPPA tends to put the field in a defensive position when highlighting declines in participation rates. She argued that it is insufficient for the NEA to present descriptive data without substantial interpretation. In particular, Ms. Ragsdale was concerned that few arts organizations read the full report, reacting to the brief summary instead of probing the raw data.

For future surveys, Ms. Ragsdale questioned the value of publishing a large narrative report. She recommended that the NEA share findings through an interactive website or produce a series of small research briefs addressing targeted research questions, with the goal of promoting discussion and curbing defensiveness from the arts field.

Data Needs of Arts Organizations

Artists and arts organizations require data to assess performance internally, externally, and within local communities. According to Andrew Taylor, assistant professor of arts management at American University, time-series data in particular can be useful for organizations in understanding factors related to their health and vitality.

Beyond collecting data, Mr. Taylor said it is critical for arts organizations to understand relationships among data. This is becoming increasingly important with the rise of easy-to-access but often hard-to-interpret organic data. Because small arts institutions and individual artists may not have first-hand experience interpreting relationships among disparate data sources, it may be useful to learn from the experiences of others. Art collectives, or collaborations between multiple artists or arts institutions, can provide a cost-effective platform for such information exchange.

Case Study: A Successful Traditional Survey's Need to Adapt

The "Taking Part" survey in England is a government survey that measures cultural participation by sector and is widely used by policy officials, academics, the private sector, and charities. The survey is based on interviews of about 10,000 adults and 1,000 children living in private households in England, and it covers a variety of topics, including sports, libraries, museums, arts, heritage, and volunteering. The survey costs £1.4 million and has a response rate of about 65 percent. Some of the key findings related to arts and culture include:

- Nearly three quarters (73 percent) of adults visited a heritage site in 2013, a significant increase of three percentage points since 2005.

³ See NEA, *How a Nation Engages with Art: Highlights from the 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* (2013), <http://arts.gov/publications/highlights-from-2012-sppa>.

- More than half of adults (54 percent) had visited a museum or gallery in the last year, significantly higher than in any previous survey and showing an upward trend.
- 78 percent of adults attended or participated in the arts in the previous year, a significant increase since 2005 (76 percent).

A study by the London School of Economics used “Taking Part” data to explore the impact of sports and cultural participation on measures of subjective well-being. Controlling for a range of factors, the analysis found that sports and culture were associated with relatively high levels of well-being. When monetized, the value of additional well-being linked with arts engagement was £1,084 per person per year.

Despite the successes of “Taking Part,” political and economic circumstances are changing and may necessitate new data collection methods. Some areas under review are:

- Modernization of measurements to capture all types of engagement (e.g., digital engagement)
- Building in more flexibility, including modular sections
- Promotion of survey—does it meet user needs, including those of policymakers?
- Ways to weight the importance of different types of participation
- New methods to quantify and value well-being impacts of sports and culture
- Possibility of incorporating telephone surveys

Discussion

Participants considered the benefits and shortcomings of cultural participation surveys and their relevance to specific types of arts-related professionals and institutions. Arts organizations and others generally use data either for: a) advocacy purposes, to establish benefits for the “common good” or b) for strategic decision-making, including marketing and outreach. In either case, the way aggregated data are currently presented often serves neither function.

Several participants commented, nevertheless, that it is not realistic to expect that any single survey of cultural engagement will be useful in a decision-making context for individuals or organizations. On the other hand, one of the SPPA’s values is as a resource for organizations to check their own local participation rates against the national figures. Regarding advocacy, participants observed that having data enables the government and funders to make the case for the relevance of the arts, but that plans to invest more heavily in the arts are sometimes challenged when participation rates are down.

Mr. Iyengar clarified that the U.S. survey was designed as a resource for research, evidence-based policy, and as a public record of arts-related behavior, and was not expressly for arts advocacy. Feedback from researchers and practitioners about the SPPA’s strengths and drawbacks is often used to improve future versions of the survey.



During their U.S. tour, members of Brazil's Maracatu Nação Estrela Brilhante sew costumes with teens at the Silvermine Arts Center in New Canaan, Connecticut. Photo courtesy of Silvermine Arts Center

Session 2: What Do We Mean by Cultural Participation? Scrutinizing Activities and Genres

There is ambiguity, according to Alan Brown, principal at WolfBrown, about both “why” and “what” cultural engagement measures. This session examined “what” is being measured in terms of specific activities, categories of activity, and modalities of participation. Diversification of modes of participation, Mr. Brown suggested, requires new tools and approaches to measurement.

Defining, Categorizing, and Measuring the Value of Art

New terms are needed to describe and categorize “informal” art, such as *participatory*, *active*, and *everyday*. Data indicate there is widespread participation in arts production and creative expression across the United States and around the globe—from visual arts, poetry, and theater to design and crafts. Alaka Wali, a curator at The Field Museum, reported results from a Field Museum ethnographic study titled *Informal Arts: Finding Cohesion, Capacity and Other Cultural Benefits in Unexpected Places* (2002), a report that included case studies of arts production that support the phenomenon of widespread informal art-making.

“The public’s definition of the form is malleable and changing, and what dance or classical music means now is quite different from what it meant 20–30 years ago.”

| Alan Brown

Participation, according to Dr. Wali, does not exist in single categories but rather along a continuum. This continuum is non-linear with a chaotic structure where people can jump sectors—such as hip-hop dancers who later experience fame as commercial artists, or a well-known expert in the visual arts who may engage in folklore teaching at the grassroots level. Participation can even take the form of cultural or heritage art. For example, indigenous people in the Amazon create objects, such as spoons and baskets, with intricate aesthetic details.

Dr. Wali found that the social networks of newly arrived Mexican immigrants in Chicago are stronger when organizations provided arts and creative expression opportunities. Other research shows vitality among the arts even among earlier immigrants, such as Italians, Polish, and Irish, who are revitalizing their ethnic heritage practices to rebuild a sense of cultural identity. The research of the Chicago Cultural Alliance, a coalition of these heritage-based cultural institutions and organizations, demonstrates close relationships between cultural identity, reclamation of heritage, and arts practices.

A particularly important and as yet unanswered question is how to measure the value of art and, within that context, how to prioritize different art forms to track and study.

Art-making, or creative expression generally, is one of our most prized resources for building capacity for resilience—that is, the capacity of residents to find reservoirs of social strength to help them weather adversity or respond to disaster. Measuring cultural participation, according to Dr. Wali, can be a way of assessing a society’s collective ability to cope with socioeconomic and environmental instability. While it is important to identify adequate metrics for determining participation, it is equally important to interpret what this activity, or its absence, tells us about our relative capacity for resilience.

There is a need to collect data both quantitatively and qualitatively to understand the *why* and *how* and *what* of cultural participation in order to show the relevance for these much broader social issues that we face, she concluded.

“When people don’t pay attention to participation or are cut off from creative expression or don’t see themselves participating in creative activity, is this correlated with rising anxiety, resistance to change, and increased intolerance?”

| Alaka Wali

Understanding Everyday Participation: A Mixed Methods Approach

One way to better understand the full scope of cultural activities is through a mixed methods approach. A research project presented by Abigail Gilmore, senior lecturer at the University of Manchester, “Understanding Everyday Participation—Articulating Cultural Values,” is one such example.

Examining the value of everyday participation, this five-year multidisciplinary study combines historical analyses, survey data, qualitative research, and substantial fieldwork. According to Dr. Gilmore, the project is a radical evaluation of cultural participation that does not begin by defining such activities but rather explores the forms and practices of everyday participation, as well as the places, cultural practices or idioms, and persons taking part. Significantly, throughout the study, interviewees are not handed a definition of culture.

The study team seeks to paint a broader picture of how people’s lives are connected to culture, how communities are formed, and how they connect through participation. The study identifies forms and practices of everyday participation—the cultural, social, political, and economic stakes that people attach to their participation, and the dynamics that structure participation in specific practices and communities. The project also considers how a broader understanding of value in and through participation can be used to inform the development of vibrant communities and creative local economics. Finally, the researchers seek ways to reconnect cultural policy and institutions with everyday participation.

The study includes six field sites in England and Scotland. The first case study site, Cheetham in North Manchester and neighboring Broughton in East Salford, is characterized by high poverty rates, high crime, and populations that tend to move only within similar types of housing within these local areas. These sites also have a high level of cultural diversity: 14 percent of Broughton identify as Jewish; in Cheetham, 48 percent speak a language other than English, including Kurdish, Urdu, Polish, and Italian.

Data are being collected on recognizable formal arts and cultural activities, including crafts, dancing, singing, and dressmaking; however, physical activity and sports are the preferences in these districts. There is much activity within the home, such as video game-playing and TV- or film-viewing, with scant reference to more formal arts and cultural activities, despite the close proximity of such activities.



Through programming by the organization EngAGE, which promotes active, creative aging, a musician shows his skills to the young. Photo courtesy of EngAGE

“Most cultural participation research is concerned more with providing space for critical engagements than improving measurement tools *per se*. . . . If research into the hidden, obscured values of everyday culture challenges assumptions about the capacity of formal arts to reach and transform people, what is the arts policymaker to do about it?”

| Abigail Gilmore

Cultural Participation: Activities and Genres

The Australia Council for the Arts (ACA) measures cultural participation to stimulate thinking about the value of the arts, and to inform policy, social inclusion, and audience development. Bridget Jones, ACA's director of research and strategic analysis, described these efforts and their results.

In 2013, ACA surveyed areas such as theater, dance, music, visual arts, and literature. The qualitative phase found that there was no consensus definition of art among the groups; in fact, some said "it's anti-art to define art." Although it is difficult to define the arts, Ms. Jones asserted that it is necessary for good research and analysis. At the start of the quantitative survey, respondents were asked to think broadly about their engagement in the arts, and then later in the survey were asked about what they had done in relation to pre-defined categories.

The findings indicated that most of those who create also attend the arts. Ninety-four percent of the total population was engaged in receptive arts and 48 percent in creative arts. The creative engagement of groups such as people with disabilities had increased recently, but remained lower relative to the general population.

Survey responses across genres showed increases in creative engagement with visual arts, reading, and music from 2009 to 2013. Visual arts included activities such as visiting art galleries, street arts, painting, and crafts. The two most popular genres were literature and music. Reading was defined as an act of engagement, but listening to music did not count unless it was live entertainment. The definition of music included "mixing," or composing music, which is an arts creation activity that can be done online.

Ms. Jones asserted that ACA is committed to supporting the arts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people. Surveys, therefore, need to be designed appropriately in the context of these cultures and the types of activities in which they participate. A specialized team of researchers at the Australian Bureau of Statistics conducts social surveys on a periodic basis to collect information about the indigenous people of Australia. They include measurements of activities such as attendance at funerals and ceremonies, which are events that involve singing, dancing, and storytelling. The resulting data demonstrate that 63 percent of indigenous people attended at least one selected event in the last year. ACA has commissioned a new study about the demand by Australian audiences for indigenous art to help build sustainability of indigenous art and artists.

Discussion

Symposium participants agreed that the definition of arts participation is expanding. Informal art is increasingly accepted as a mode of cultural engagement, and new technologies facilitate participation in arts creation. The definition of active participation, however, is problematic; for example, some consider everyday photography as an activity to record events but sometimes it has aesthetic intent.

“In Australia, we have a pretty active street art movement, which is included as a definition of participation. We are able to include more cutting-edge forms in our latest survey. But the problem is as new forms start to emerge in coming years, how do we include them without disrupting the continuity of data?”

| Bridget Jones

The overall question is: When does an activity like photography become artistic? How is arts engagement that may be called “amateur,” like singing in a church choir, knitting, or furniture making, to be classified? Do we need to consider newer forms of participation? For example, in the 1980s, graffiti on subway trains was not seen as art, just as Facebook today is often perceived as an erosion of social networking.

One participant claimed that concern about exclusivity and inclusivity of genres relates to why we measure participation. If our goal is to *encourage* greater participation or engagement, then it may be best to draw a wider circle so that people see themselves as part of it. There are examples of projects that could result in huge social benefits, such as media, cooking, and gardening that may not be supported by current arts policies. Whether public policy should be changed to support such activities depends on adopting a broad definition of cultural engagement.

“Is the end-game greater engagement by people in all of these activities—regardless of policy implications, or whatever the government or organizational issues are?”

| Christopher Caltagirone

A 3D-printed Denby sugar bowl. Photo courtesy of the University of the West of England



Session 3: The Challenge of Encompassing New Media- and Technology-driven Forms of Participation

A fundamental issue for organizations striving to capture social and behavioral data is that traditional survey methodology cannot keep pace with changing technology. Traditional sample surveys about cultural participation require months of careful construction and do not adapt easily to new platforms used in arts engagement.

Four questions provided a framework for the panel to examine the impact of changing technologies on data collection and analysis:

1. How do we ensure that the metrics for arts engagement track with new media and technologies?
2. To what extent has the new media disrupted our ideas about cultural engagement?
3. What are the implications of this new media and technology on our measurement systems?
4. What opportunities do new technologies provide for improving how we measure cultural participation?

“At Pew Internet, the challenge we have faced for 14 years is how to measure a constantly moving target, the impact of new technology on our social and civic lives, to do it well and to do it in a way that produces quality trending.”

| Kristen Purcell

Kristen Purcell of Pew Research Center identified three challenges that arise from the impact of changing technologies on data collection and analysis.⁴

The first challenge to measuring participation accurately is to define it. In the past, participation has been measured as a discrete act, such as attending a show, reading a book, or buying a ticket. However, new technology has created a variety of ways people can participate in arts and culture, obscuring traditional definitions. Does there have to be intent to participate or does unintentional participation count? Should the focus be on measuring behavior (attendance, social media interaction) or its implied impact (identification with the organization, awareness of programs)?

4 Because Kristen Purcell was unable to attend the symposium, Mr. Iyengar (NEA) gave her prepared remarks.

Another distinction is a difference between participation and engagement. Dr. Purcell contended that, in a digital world, we should measure engagement. Engagement, however, can be defined as either engagement with the *organization*, such as following it on Twitter or Facebook, or engagement with the *content*, enjoying a virtual or in-person exhibit or learning about a new artist. Arts organizations are noticing the impact of digital tools on their business outcomes.

In a survey that Pew researchers administered to former NEA grantees, 56 percent of arts organizations considered digital tools to have had a major impact in boosting the organization's public profile, and 53 percent witnessed a major impact on their overall engagement with the public.⁵ Beyond the public's engagement with such organizations, however, it is not apparent that the technologies have increased exposure to arts programming. Only 27 percent of organizations saw digital tools having a major impact on audience engagement with artistic content.

The second challenge confronting cultural researchers, when it comes to measuring participation, is that people can engage in the same behavior via multiple modes or media. As a result, decisions must be made about how to frame data collection. Should one ask about the behavior first, and then the medium? Or should one ask about the medium, and then what it is used to do?

Measuring reading is an example. One method is to ask how many books an individual read in a given week and using what media or platform. In this case, reading tends to be underreported, as people may count only print books and not books read on their mobile devices. Another method is to ask how many media or platforms individuals use and then ask whether they have used them to read a book in the past week. In this scenario, reported reading levels tend to be higher. Individuals are even likely to over-report or over-estimate their reading if first asked on what medium they read a book.

As Dr. Purcell explained, the third challenge affecting measurements of cultural engagement is the ubiquity of digital behavior in people's lives. The Internet has evolved from a unique destination to background activity. Because digital behavior often occurs without much premeditated effort, individuals may not give accurate answers to questions about online participation in general.

⁵ See Pew Research Center, *Arts Organizations and Digital Technologies* (2013), <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/01/04/arts-organizations-and-digital-technologies>.

Source attribution is another factor that can affect data collection. Media convergence, constant partial attention, and digital multi-tasking are all contributing factors, making it difficult to isolate a single behavior or experience. Can we expect people to accurately report *where* they learned/heard something? Did they catch it on Facebook, Twitter, a text alert, or on TV? One solution is to measure moment-to-moment behavioral change through mobile time diaries. Recently 20/20 Research, a major research technology firm, has begun marketing mobile time app diaries that ask users specific questions about their digital behavior.

“More and more at Pew Internet, we have come to think that the future of measuring digital activity lies less and less in surveys, and more and more in 1) analyzing big data, and 2) time diaries. The latter in particular has great promise to get respondents to focus on a particular behavior while they are engaged in it.”

| Kristen Purcell


Douglas Noonan, director of research at the Indiana University Public Policy Institute, argued that surveys have been and always will be inherently limited. The key issue is: are we asking the right questions? And are we taking into account response rates and biases?

Dr. Noonan advised comparison of two large national surveys that allow researchers to understand arts engagement patterns in the United States: the NEA's SPPA and the U.S. Department of Labor's American Time Use Survey (ATUS).

The SPPA gathers data on art and cultural activities in the past 12 months, while the ATUS examines the minutes spent on arts or cultural activities on a given day. Given its longer timeframe, the SPPA faces greater challenges of memory recall. The two surveys also differ with respect to measuring intensity or frequency. The SPPA yields data on the frequency of arts engagement whereas ATUS reveals the intensity of participants' experiences.

Under either scenario, Dr. Noonan suggested, further study is needed on *how* consumers use the tools available to them. In using the Internet, do users drill deeper or do they search more widely? The answer is key to understanding and measuring arts and cultural engagement in a media- and tech-driven environment.

Another challenge identified by Dr. Noonan is the constantly changing nature of technology itself. New media, platforms, and modes will always be evolving. The focus should be less on what is new today and more on what will come out next week. Crowdsourcing, flash mobs, mash-ups, and “viral” videos have changed the way we experience culture. The costs of production and distribution are diminishing as the Internet creates new avenues for arts and cultural expression. These frequently varying modes of participation pose serious challenges for designing measurement tools that can keep pace with technology.



Individuals are now engaging in arts in new ways and, as a consequence, it is harder, according to Dr. Noonan, for survey respondents to remember or identify an activity as “cultural.” This is arguably a consequence of the success of cultural sectors, which are becoming more deeply integrated into the economic and social fabric. Much of this participation is not fundamentally new. Online graffiti, for example, is just a digital form of an old medium.

Several other forms of engagement, such as amateur dance, video editing, group art, and remixing, fall into the same category: digital versions of previously existing arts and cultural expression. The key difference is that these events can now be measured more easily. Broadcasts of performances and viewing collections online further expand the opportunities to measure arts engagement. The new technologies, in turn, can lower survey costs. Vast amounts of administrative data are easier to collect, share, and analyze. The challenge lies in establishing quality standards of how to collect and use the abundance of administrative data.

The availability of low-cost data can enable measurement of participation without the use of surveys. Several recent studies exemplify this trend. For example, one study used Foursquare to map cultural food boundaries in London, New York City, and Tokyo. Using geo-tagged Flickr photos, another study tracked the activity of tourists and locals in Budapest. The researchers were able to distinguish between tourists who stayed for one versus ten days without conducting interviews. When combined with photos from Picasa, Flickr data enabled another research group to measure the urbanity of neighborhoods in Berlin and London. Another recent study used geo-tagged Tweets to generate demand maps for visiting museums in Yorkshire.

Dr. Noonan said that advances in technology and the explosion of social media allow researchers to examine new data sources such as browsing histories, cookies, and tracking “hits,” usage, memberships, and websites. Shifting surveys’ focus to parameters not easily measured in other ways is key, particularly under tighter budgets. Survey tools can be foregone altogether, Dr. Noonan suggested, in conditions where behavior can be tracked by observation. Measurement of qualitative attributes, however, still require surveys.

Propensity Score Matching: A Method for Measuring Impact

Dr. Johanna Blakley, the lead researcher for The Norman Lear Center at the University of Southern California, argued that a key challenge to studying the impact of art on people’s lives is self-selection bias: individuals who attend specific cultural events may be inherently predisposed to the “message” of the event and so there is a strong need for a control group. Conclusions from research that does not address self-selection bias might be considered by many to be suspect. A new methodology is needed that can create adequate control groups at low cost and be applied to a wide variety of artistic events and installations.


Propensity Score Matching (PSM), while generally used to correct for bias in online samples, can be used to construct control groups. Drawing from the use of controls in the pharmaceutical industry, researchers at The Norman Lear Center adapted PSM to evaluate the impact of media and arts programming. The idea is to isolate a piece of media or arts programming to assess whether audience members who were exposed to it were more likely to demonstrate a shift in knowledge, attitude, or behavior compared to very similar people who did *not* encounter the programming.

There are two phases of PSM. In Phase One, researchers find and identify factors that predict the likelihood of a subject being exposed to programming under study. A model based on these predictors is then created using logistic regression. In Phase Two, propensity scores are assigned to each survey respondent. Finally, the scores of those exposed to the programming are compared to those unexposed. By creating two groups of people, exposed and unexposed, with exactly the same range of scores and therefore the same likelihood of experiencing the programming, researchers can determine the impact of the programming on exposed audience members.

Dr. Blakley used PSM in a study of *Food, Inc.*, a documentary that was a “scathing indictment of agribusiness in the United States.” Because of its topic, the film’s audience was not likely to be a large, representative sample of the general United States population. Because it would be prohibitively expensive to find viewers of this niche documentary through a national phone survey, the research team distributed the surveys through social media groups and email lists affiliated with the film and its production company, Participant Media. The survey invitation did not indicate that the focus was on the documentary, *Food, Inc.* in order to ensure that people who had not seen the film (control group members) would also respond.

Seventeen statistically significant variables were identified that predicted the likelihood of seeing a film like *Food, Inc.* Of these, only three were demographic. This surprised the film’s marketing team as demographics usually form the basis of film marketing. The three variables focused on whether a survey participant was employed in certain industries or had children. Individuals were more likely to see the film if they did not have children. This was contrary to what the marketers expected.

The survey yielded approximately 20,000 respondents, a subset of whom were assigned propensity scores. Then the scores of those who had seen the film were matched with those who had not seen the film. The results showed that those who had seen the film were more knowledgeable about topics addressed in the film, were more likely to encourage friends and family to learn about food safety, were more likely to frequent farmers’ markets, and were more likely to eat more healthfully than very similar people who had not seen the film.



Dr. Blakley argued that there are several advantages to using PSM to evaluate the impact of arts programming. Using PSM does not require a traditional representative sample, which can be very expensive (and sometimes impossible) to create for programming that attracts niche audiences. By leveraging the use of social networks, PSM offers a more cost-effective survey method. Another advantage is that PSM allows researchers to control for multiple variables, which is preferable to weighting schemes. Also, by eliminating the time lapse that is necessary in pre-post testing, priming survey respondents to the subject matter of the programming is avoided. Removing the time lapse also eliminates the need and high cost of administering the survey twice to the same population.

The main disadvantage of PSM is that it requires a relatively large sample size; however, the Lear Center has been able to produce well-matched groups with a survey population as small as 1,000, and the sample does not have to be representative. If an organization has a healthy, robust social network, PSM offers an inexpensive way to locate respondents as well as a higher likelihood of finding individuals who were exposed to the programming. The likelihood of finding a large number of similar individuals who did *not* see the programming also increases because they have opted into the same social network.

One key problem in measuring cultural engagement is confusing outputs with outcomes. It is easier to tell funders how many seats or tickets were sold or the number of “likes” on Facebook than whether a particular arts or cultural event had a substantial impact on an individual or a community. Since many cultural agencies and organizations, including the NEA, talk about the benefit or value of arts and culture to individuals and communities, it is essential that the research community develop pragmatic tools to help these groups demonstrate that their mission is being accomplished. Using PSM in this way, arts organizations can focus on outcomes instead of outputs, measuring the impact of their work on individuals and communities.

The Importance of Data Curation: A Case Study

The World Cities Culture Forum is a group of 25 cities worldwide that are producing data about cultural offerings and activities in those cities to facilitate evidence-based study of how people interact with arts and culture. The goal, according to Alan Freeman, special advisor to the Forum, is to produce a set of indicators by the interaction between peer groups of cities that will allow those cities to make policy decisions regarding cultural programs. Due to the need for standardized information, data curation is at the core of this endeavor.

Specifically, free-flowing data will be shared and curated in a manner similar to what Wikipedia has done for documents, thus encouraging collaborative use of data. Additionally, peer groups are likely to produce better data if the groups have incentives. For example, grid psychology posits that if how individuals see themselves (e.g., friendly/outgoing; happy/neurotic) differs greatly from how they are perceived by their peers, there is an incentive to align others' perceptions with one's own self-perception.

There are two groups who collect data about arts participation: arts venues and attendees themselves. Mr. Freeman suggested that comparing data generated by these two groups for specific arts and cultural events would produce a robust new data source. For example, Tweets from venues announcing performances can be compared to Tweets from participants about the performance. By reconciling any differences in an open forum, a community of users could help generate a new standard for cultural data.

“Culture and cultural output is inherently collective. The audience is always present in any cultural interaction.”

| Alan Freeman

Other innovative data-collection methods already exist. The organization MyCake, for example, provides both online book-keeping and benchmarking capability to small and medium-sized creative entrepreneurs, but it also offers a benchmarking service that can be used by large and small nonprofit arts organizations alike. The data thus collected are compiled into annual benchmark reports, which enable clients to compare their peers in terms of sales, attendance, and other indicators, according to MyCake. The benchmarking data can be parsed by genre, type, geography, and turnover range. The service's added value provides the incentive to raise data quality.

Discussion

Participants noted that PSM has important limitations; for example, there are a limited number of factors that can be used before the model thus generated becomes too large and consequently less useful. This concern is generally not a factor when PSM is used with online surveys, which often are short by design. PSM used in social media may be problematic because it is biased toward populations that use social media more often. Some people question the utility of PSM as too narrowly focused for arts research because, for example, past studies have shown small differences between audience groups that, while statistically significant, may not be meaningful for practical purposes.

Participants agreed that using social media data for arts participation research has advantages and drawbacks. While it is easy to access large amounts of geo-tagged data, abundant data-cleaning is often necessary. Further, it is not clear whether it is possible to obtain representative samples; plus, samples may be difficult to characterize. On the other hand, there are several ongoing efforts to use social media data for cultural participation studies. As tools are refined, data quality will improve and such data can become an excellent source of information on social and economic behavior.

Several new approaches to data curation are being examined and tested. Collaborative data may be one answer to give data meaning beyond a particular study. For the time being, adequate data curation is often very time-consuming. At the federal level in the United States, data management plans are being encouraged or required of research grant recipients to promote archiving of data for future use.

The abundance of social media data, in the view of some participants, may mean that someday surveys will no longer be needed to measure behavior. Research on attitudes and outcomes may still require surveys, however. Budget and technology limitations place further constraints on the use of data and on its curation. The debate continues over whether these new technology-driven data sources can be used instead of traditional survey methods to capture attitudes and outcomes of experiences.

Session 4: New Ways of Knowing: Alternative Data Sources, Methodologies, and Units of Analysis

This session showcased examples of projects that use new data sources and methodologies to assess public participation in arts and culture. The speakers presented diverse research projects, each utilizing big data coupled with methodologies borrowed from fields such as economics and demography.

Respondent-Driven Sampling: An Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Joan Jeffri, director and founder of the Research Center for the Arts and Culture, illustrated the benefits of learning from fields outside the arts by discussing her experience with respondent-driven sampling—a non-probability sampling technique first developed for health care research.

In 2000, her research center began collaboration with Douglas Heckathorn, of Cornell University, to apply respondent-driven sampling to arts and culture research. The study generated a detailed understanding of the lives of jazz artists and became the first research method, other than that used by the U.S. Census, to reliably estimate the number of artists in a population. Future collaboration with non-arts fields may lead to similar advances in arts and culture research.

When exploring new data sources and methodologies, it is important to reflect on present challenges. The arts and culture community has long sought to understand the behaviors, habits, and preferences of users before, during, and after the arts experience. However, understanding user preferences is becoming increasingly complex due to the contemporary heterogeneity of audiences and their preferences. This complexity has shifted research efforts away from audience studies and toward participation studies. There is now a growing need for standardization of metrics across participation studies, particularly at the international level, because different governing bodies define and track different categories of arts participation.



The opening of *Yellow Terror: The Collections and Paintings of Roger Shimomura* exhibit at the Wing Luke Museum in Seattle. Photo courtesy of Wing Luke Museum

“We as researchers need to know more about the behaviors, habits, tastes and preferences of those users before, during, and after the arts experience. We need to understand that the business model of charting consumer behavior, creating a prototype, and creating the product that the most consumers desire is often antithetical to artists’ desires for innovation: to create that experience you didn’t know you wanted until you had it.”

| Joan Jeffri

Cultural institutions are grappling with how to collect, analyze, and use big data without neglecting the insights of small, local data. There is also an imminent need to preserve open access to widely used datasets that may soon charge user fees. Finally, Ms. Jeffri urged that as new challenges, questions, and solutions arise, the tasks of collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data, and convening stakeholders, should not become solely governmental functions.

Impact of Live Broadcasts on Theater Attendance

Hasan Bakhshi, director of creative economy in policy and research at Nesta, presented preliminary results of an ongoing study that uses an alternative dataset to investigate the effects of live broadcasts on theater attendance. Live broadcasts aim to expand the audience capacity of traditional performing arts media by screening live performances in local cinemas.

For example, on February 27, 2014, more than 150,000 people viewed live broadcasts of a single performance of *War Horse* staged in the New London Theatre, which has a seating capacity of approximately 1,000. While the use of live broadcasts is growing rapidly, their impact on theater attendance is unknown: do live broadcasts engage new audiences and prompt them to subsequently attend traditional theater performances, or do they reduce theater attendance by providing an alternative outlet for cultural engagement?

“When you approach a traditional research project as an economist you have a very clear research question and hypothesis. You identify a data strategy. You then do the analysis and draw some conclusions. And if you’re honest you state the lack of confidence you have in those results and try to quantify that. What you find with these organic datasets is that you have a prior idea as to what your research question is, but there’s actually uncertainty about the research question. And then you go into the data and you discover something about the data, which in some cases ... violently takes research in another direction. And it just means a different way of doing research. Now I know what data-mining in a good sense means.”

| Hasan Bakhshi

A preliminary study by Dr. Bakhshi and Dr. David Throsby found that one live broadcast by the National Theatre in London might have increased ticket sales in its own box office. The finding of this small study prompted Dr. Bakhshi and Dr. Andrew Whitby to investigate the impact of live broadcasts on theater attendance more generally. However, it was not feasible to conduct a randomized controlled study tracking theater attendance of individuals before and after a live broadcast event. Instead, Dr. Bakhshi used a large dataset of 16 million box office transactions to assess the effects of 37 National Theatre Live events on subsequent attendance of theater and non-theater performances.

The dataset, compiled by Audiences Agency, represented 44 million tickets sold for theater and non-theater performances at 54 venues across England. Sales data were reported on a daily basis and included postal codes, which in the UK identify a small group of buildings, resulting in high temporal and spatial resolution. Dr. Bakhshi used the data to track ticket purchases of groups of similar individuals before and after the National Theatre Live events, as well as to estimate the likelihood that the patrons attended the live broadcasts. To control for endogeneity biases, he conducted extensive spatial and temporal sensitivity analyses using a fixed-effects panel model.

The preliminary results showed no evidence that live broadcasts led to a decline in subsequent theater attendance. In London there was a mild increase in attendance of both theater and non-theater performances following live broadcast events, with the effect increasing with proximity to National Theatre Live performances. However, outside of London no significant effects were found.

Dr. Bakhshi discussed several methodological challenges facing his study. First, data-cleaning proved far more time-consuming than expected. Each ticket transaction was coded based on its art form. Additionally, since the data were aggregated from multiple box offices, data fields required reconciliation. Statistical challenges also arose, including the need to control for confounding effects, such as endogeneity, through multiple sensitivity analyses. Dr. Bakhshi also mentioned that it is difficult to ascertain how much of the variation is explained by the model because traditional “goodness of fit” statistics, such as r-squared, are not valid for this type of model.

Additionally, the use of organic datasets introduces uncertainty in the research questions themselves, as research questions can evolve based on unexpected patterns and nuances observed in the data. This is in stark contrast to data from traditional surveys, which are deliberately collected to answer well-defined questions. On this basis, Dr. Bakhshi strongly cautioned against divestment from traditional surveys, at least until methodologies to analyze and validly interpret organic data are sufficiently refined.

“[Participation surveys] can helpfully make clear that culture is a fuzzy concept, that definitions are inevitably imprecise, and that cultural classification is actually a probabilistic, not a deterministic, exercise.”

| Hasan Bakhshi

Responding to questions from symposium attendees, Dr. Bakhshi reiterated that the study is a work in progress. He noted that the National Theatre takes research seriously and may attempt to leverage the benefits of its live broadcasts through collaborations with local theaters, depending on the final study results. Ongoing research will attempt to understand differential effects of live broadcasts on attendance of performances at different types of cultural institutions, as well as the effects of non-live showings on attendance of subsequent live screenings.

Finally, Dr. Bakhshi mentioned two other ongoing research projects of interest to the audience: a study using social media to identify ways to improve Chinese participation in British cultural products, and an attempt to empirically validate the existence of theorized cultural participation groups. Both these studies employ cultural groups, rather than cultural events, as the units of analysis.

Counting What Counts: Big Data in the Arts

Anthony Lilley, founder of Magic Lantern Productions and a digital media practitioner, professor, and regulator, spoke broadly about potential uses and challenges of big data in the arts and described several of his ongoing and upcoming projects. He shared insights from his recent report, “Counting What Counts: What Big Data Can Do for the Cultural Sector,” co-authored by Professor Paul Moore, which asked the question: how might the arts sector use data, especially big data, better?

Mr. Lilley emphasized that it is not the data that matters, but how they are used. Big data enables non-hypothesis driven research that identifies interesting and useful connections through looking at the data itself. Enormous volume and variety, and the velocity at which they reach users, characterize big data. For example, digital pedometers generate big data by producing a new variety of data in large volumes that are available instantly to the user.

While big data enables non-hypothesis driven research, it is dangerous to assume that simply unleashing large amounts of data will help solve problems. There are always methodological challenges and there are challenges in gaining useful insights from big data. In addition, making sense of big data often means linking big data with small-scale datasets that are more easily understood. Furthermore, the data collection systems at most cultural institutions are suboptimal and have not kept pace with technological advances.

Mr. Lilley concluded by describing some of his ongoing and upcoming projects related to big data in the arts. Of particular interest to the audience was the “Arts Data Impact Project,” which will place data scientists with no artistic background into three major cultural institutions to help these institutions connect the data they generate to larger datasets. The goals are for the institutions to learn how to better use their own data and to promote interdisciplinary collaboration with non-arts fields. The project will also fund digital ethnographers who will attempt to understand the cultural change issues that arise from increased use of data.

“Actually, it’s not the data that matters—it’s what you do with it. It’s that if you let the data speak ... and you don’t simply work on the basis of a hypothesis you are trying to prove then interesting connections may occur.”

| Anthony Lilley

Another small-scale project seeks to understand how young composers and musicians use digital social networks to promote their work. Mr. Lilley is also working on an interdisciplinary collaboration to develop a wider research agenda that will bring together the arts, technical disciplines, and institutions of higher education. Finally, Mr. Lilley is beginning to explore

where the arts and cultural sector can find measurements of value in big data, such as social media data. He has observed that, whereas there are many analytical tools available for these types of data, they are not designed for cultural data and they are not yet useful for asking and answering important questions for cultural policy. For example, foresighting tools used in the retail sector are not yet suited for the arts. Adapting existing tools for analyzing big data may help increase the value generated by the arts and culture sector.

“Data is only ever looking in the rear-view mirror. And drivers who drive entirely by looking in the rear-view mirror tend to have extremely short journeys.”

| Anthony Lilley

Why Neighborhood Effects Matter

Mark Stern, principal investigator of the Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP) at the University of Pennsylvania, presented SIAP’s research on the effects of the arts on social well-being using neighborhoods as the unit of analysis. In particular, SIAP compares neighborhood-level cultural participation rates with various other cultural indicators. The project aims to compile these relationships to create an index of social well-being.

Traditional surveys have inadequate sampling density to enable studying effects at a neighborhood level. Even the SPPA, a nationally representative survey conducted jointly by the U.S. Census Bureau and NEA, resolves only to metropolitan areas and is about 200 times too small to produce the minimum resolution required by SIAP for neighborhood-level research. Instead, SIAP uses administrative data: aggregated sign-up sheets and lists of participants from different cultural institutions in the greater Philadelphia area. SIAP researchers geocode and map the data and aggregate them to neighborhood-level blocks. Afterward, Dr. Stern and his colleagues are able to link the neighborhood data to other data sources and examine relationships between cultural participation and other cultural indicators.

Using neighborhoods as the unit of analysis, SIAP found a strong linear relationship between participation rates and the percentage of adult residents with a BA or higher education. Its results also suggested a link between the number of artists residing in a given neighborhood and the cultural participation rate of the neighborhood as a whole. Finally, SIAP applied the data to identify neighborhoods in Philadelphia where participation rates have increased over time.

From 1997 to 2011, SIAP collected data on the “mortality” rate of cultural nonprofit institutions. The highest rates of institutional mortality were found in low-income neighborhoods. While SIAP also collects information on “birth” rates of cultural nonprofits, Dr. Stern cautioned that these data are less accurate than the mortality rates. Nonetheless, he noted that SIAP observed a net loss of cultural institutions in low-income neighborhoods during the study period. It is currently unknown how the mortality rate of cultural nonprofits compares to the mortality rate of nonprofits in general in these neighborhoods.

Examining data at a neighborhood level is important because it helps policymakers and academics from other fields understand fine-scale trends in familiar terms. Neighborhood data also often tells a very different and more nuanced story than city-level data. Despite the demonstrated utility of neighborhood-level data, Dr. Stern identified two growing threats to SIAP's methods.

“It’s a good idea if the ways you measure stuff and the data you decide to collect are based on the questions you want to ask.”

| Mark Stern

First, cultural institutions are increasingly viewing place-based data, such as physical addresses, as irrelevant and are only collecting e-mail addresses and social media from their participants. Secondly, as neighborhood data become more valuable for marketing purposes, it is likely that they will become more difficult for researchers to access freely. For the time being, however, SIAP's neighborhood data are available in the form of a free online GIS application called CultureBlocks, which is funded by the NEA.

Keynote Talk: Measuring Well-Being through the Gallup World Poll

A decade ago, Gallup launched the Gallup World Poll aimed as a better way than gross domestic product (GDP) to quantify global well-being. Keynote speaker Jon Clifton, Managing Director of Gallup World Poll, explained that Gallup made a massive investment, engaged with thought leaders, and started quantifying. Critics asked why Gallup was measuring happiness, rather than other endpoints; for example, content related to real world events. Gallup, however, thought that capturing how people are doing was a worthy cause, and, in addition, found that these data did connect to world events.



Traditional Omaha singer and NEA National Heritage Fellow Rufus White, at back, provides vocals for Omaha dancers at the 2014 NEA National Heritage Fellowships Concert. Photo by Michael G. Stewart

For example, data on GDP per capita in Egypt, Tunisia, and Bahrain grew in perfect linear fashion until the Arab Spring. The Human Development Index of the United Nations saw the same trend. The World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Competitiveness found that in 2010, Tunisia was the 11th highest-ranked country in terms of gains from 2009 to 2010. But the self-immolation of a young man in Tunisia, who just wanted to work, sparked political and social protests that caused a severe downward trend.

The Gallup World Poll asks, on a scale from 0 to 10, "How are you doing?" and "Where will you be in five years?" In Egypt, in 2001, about 29 percent of the population rated their current lives at 7 or higher and rated the next five years an 8, a score that correlated with their GDP and other economic indicators. However, the actual trend over the next five years showed a collapse to 12 percent and 9 percent and still remains below 10 percent. The 12 percent rating in Egypt was on par with Tunisia and Bahrain, a country which began with a rating of 44 percent as country with the 34th-highest GDP, but which fell to 11 percent. These examples illustrate how and why real-world events are tied into this information.

Using its methodology, Gallup can track historical trends and make cross-country comparisons. In fact, it currently conducts the World Poll in 163 countries and is aiming to reach 166. Every year, Gallup reaches 140 countries. Eight to 12 persons are interviewed in each primary sampling unit within each country, totaling roughly 1,000 interviews for every country in the world. Somalia is an example of a challenge for face-to-face interviews. Approximately 80 percent of all interviews are conducted in person, with all the same questions, which adhere to issues of context and comparability, being asked in the same way. Response rates are about 9 to 15 percent in developing countries, while in the developed world the rates are up to 80 to 90 percent for one-hour, face-to-face interviews. Cultural context and regional issues may warrant modifying or adding specific questions; for example, bed nets may be a point of discussion in Africa only.

The same trends are followed in every decade in almost every country. Two countries where Gallup has not been able to collect data are North Korea and Papua New Guinea, the latter has proven cost-prohibitive due to that fact that it has 1,000 different spoken languages.

Many experts initially thought that people would report their lives as being better than they are. This concern, however, was unsubstantiated, as exemplified by residents of Haiti and Palestine, who both rate themselves as 4. In Canada and Denmark, scores of 7 to 9 are typical and in South Africa, 8.

"If you want to know how a country is doing, you don't go to the capital city but to the experts, 'the people who live there.' They track their community, household, and their own lives, so it's easy to get accurate figures."

| Jon Clifton

There are public uses of the Gallup World Poll; for example, in indexes, white papers, and other types of research. Others ask Gallup to conduct surveys for them. Some organizations that have used it include:

- The World Bank's Global Findex
- The United Nations' Human Development Report
- The Legatum Prosperity Index
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Better Life Index

One example of a specific client project involved determining the percentage of people, by country, who have a bank account, credit card, and access to micro-financing—data that previously did not exist. With funding from the Gates Foundation, the World Bank commissioned Gallup to conduct a survey that resulted in the most downloaded micro-dataset used by staff to understand financial inclusion and its effect on people's lives.

A second major Gallup project was with Healthways, an organization that helps individuals increase well-being at the workplace. This project identified five main drivers of well-being:

- Career/Purpose (the latter reflecting those not in a job, such as housewives or students)
- Physical (healthy eating and regular physical activity)
- Social (time with friends and family)
- Financial (income, debts, etc.)
- Community (being part of a community)

Gallup has tested these drivers in the United States and will launch a survey in the fall in other countries. A book entitled *Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements* by Tom Rath and James K. Harter, published in 2010, explains these drivers in detail.

According to Jon Clifton, Gallup is working to add new capabilities to improve its World Poll. For example, the poll could someday be used as a predictive tool to provide early warnings of geopolitical conflicts. The model does not yet include qualitative or categorical variables, nor does it yet incorporate social media data. There are user fees for all Gallup data to offset survey costs. For a fee, researchers can access the data in numerous ways or commission Gallup to conduct a survey on their behalf.

Session 5: Beyond Participation Rates: Understanding Motivations, Barriers, and Outcomes

The purpose of the symposium’s final session was to go beyond thinking about participation rates and focus on whether and how one might understand the motivations and benefits of arts participation and the barriers that keep some people from experiencing those benefits. Can standardized, national studies of arts participation rates also be used to illuminate motivations, barriers, and outcomes, or do we need more qualitative methods? Could the tools of marketing research help us here? Does offering certain kinds of art activities or certain opportunities in the marketplace lead to greater or broader participation or stronger outcomes?

Peter Linett, a partner at Slover Linett Audience Research and founder of Culture Kettle, introduced this interactive session by noting that the previous day’s discussion had raised fundamental questions about what we mean by both “arts” and “participation.” Those questions complicate any conversation about barriers (i.e., to *what*, exactly: traditional, presentational arts experiences, or more socially participatory ones?), motivations (*to what?*), and outcomes (*from what*, and *among whom?*).

Measuring motivations, barriers, and outcomes is important because such information can have practical value to arts managers. In isolation, participation statistics are not useful to those whose job is to improve them; arts managers do not know how to increase participation unless they know what drives people (motivations and desired outcomes) and what keeps them away (barriers).

Mr. Linett invited all of the symposium participants to break into small groups to discuss the following question: “In a world of ever-tightening resources, should [cultural agencies] try to measure motivation, barriers, and outcomes? If so, which ones, and how?” This led to an energetic discussion about how to make data and outcomes more accessible and useful to arts and cultural organizations; how to avoid “deficit model” thinking when looking at barriers; and whether the field is ready to engage in more normative (“should,” “ought”) diagnostics in addition to descriptive diagnostics like participation rates.



American, *Memory jar*, 20th century, High Museum of Art. Photo courtesy of the High Museum of Art

“The utility of the participation data is wrapped up in the context: why people seek out arts experiences, what happens when they do, and why others don’t.”

| Peter Linett

Some participants wondered what the public policy purpose of examining outcomes would be. Is there a correlation between arts participation and well-being, for example? And rather than dwelling on the barriers, Mr. Linett further asked, should the focus be on finding effective interventions to remove barriers?

Assuming that sort of expansion of the purview of participation studies is desirable, how would it work? Attendees noted that integrating participation surveys with other datasets, such as behavioral studies, would expand the picture and add nuance to what is collected in arts survey research. National and local partnerships would mitigate resource limitations while focusing effort on collective priorities.

Building partnerships could facilitate collaborative work between academics, consultants, and public agencies. For example, the Wellcome Trust has an initiative that aims to tighten links between researchers and practitioners. It draws a practitioner, a program officer, and a researcher together to formulate questions for surveys. Such integration provides feedback loops that can enhance existing data collection efforts and focus the analysis on the needs of end-users.

Challenges to Outcomes and Motivation Research

There are many projects examining the outcomes of arts participation at the individual and community levels. Hill Strategies Research conducted a study titled “The Arts and Individual Well-Being in Canada” to examine whether connections exist between arts participation and an individual’s sense of well-being.

In the study, six cultural activities (art gallery visits, theater attendance, classical music attendance, pop music attendance, cultural festivals attendance, and reading books) were used to predict three self-identified social outcomes (better health, stronger satisfaction with life, and higher volunteer rates) in separate logistic regression estimations. Sixteen of the 18 estimated regression coefficients indicate positive correlations between cultural activities and social outcomes. In other words, 16 were “good news” indicators for arts participation, according to Kelly Hill, president of Hill Strategies. The correlations were based on data from Statistics Canada’s *General Social Survey—2010 Overview of the Time Use of Canadians*, which asked people about 18 different arts, culture, and heritage activities.

There is a growing interest in the social and civic outcomes of arts participation. But many arts organizations find it challenging to evaluate these kinds of outcomes and understand their relationship to the organizational strategy, programming, and funding. Mr. Hill posed several questions about arts outcomes research:

- Is evidence of correlation good enough?
- Do other forms of participation (e.g., sports) have the same, different, or better outcomes?
- Can datasets be created, collected, and preserved in the face of increasing budget constraints?
- How can arts organizations respond to the challenges presented by evaluations of broader outcomes? Can funders play a role?

Budget constraints are an increasing problem facing arts data collection worldwide. In Canada, media reports have indicated that the national statistical agency has experienced a workforce reduction of more than 30 percent in the last five to seven years. The mandatory Statistics Canada long-form National Household Survey was replaced in 2011 with a voluntary survey, raising questions about the reliability and sustainability of the data. The current National Household Survey does not include questions relating to motivations or barriers to arts and cultural participation.

Understanding why people participate is, in Mr. Hill's view, a major challenge. Some custom surveys have been conducted and several performing arts motivation studies have been published. Two of these studies, conducted for the Canadian Arts Presenting Association (CAPACOA) and La Nouvelle Scène (LNS), both by Hill Strategies, showed that "entertainment" is the highest-ranked motivation for performing arts attendance. Other high-ranking motivations were enjoyment, inspiration, and socialization.

Studies have found no clear consensus about the factors that motivate individuals to participate in the arts. Common findings of motivation studies include: entertaining, enjoyable experience, learning, socializing, stimulating, emotionally rewarding experiences, high-quality experiences, and becoming more creative.

Motivation research in arts participation presents several challenges. Custom studies are usually smaller scale and are often not generalizable to larger populations. Many methodological variables may affect results: survey goals, location of respondents, arts disciplines, survey questionnaires, and response options. The questions asked may be different, leading to different responses. Additionally, motivations for individual respondents may vary from day to day. And self-reported motivation may be different from true motivation.

Questions of Measurement

Outcomes

- Is evidence of correlation good enough?
- Do other forms of participation (e.g., sports) have the same, different, or better outcomes?
- Can the datasets critical to this line of inquiry be created, collected, and preserved in the face of increasing budget constraints?
- How can arts organizations respond to difficulty of evaluating broader outcomes? Can funders play a role?

Motivations

- They are diverse and may vary for different types of organizations, in different locations, and at different times.
- To what extent do motivations explain people's involvement with arts and culture?
- Can researchers better connect the dots between participation statistics and motivating factors?

Looking Beyond Participation Rates

Maria Rosario Jackson, senior advisor at The Kresge Foundation, claimed that the technical approach to measure arts participation is strongly tied to what we value—and therein lies a problem. The challenges to measuring participation rates are preceded by challenges of structural relationships, policies, or a lack of policies. There is a gap between the nonprofit arts world, which still relies on audience participation as the dominant form of engagement, and new studies of other indicators that appear more robust and significant than previously thought. Historically, Dr. Jackson noted, the barometer of the health of the field has been participation research data rather than more outward-looking indicators designed to provide insights about the world outside of the arts realm.

Current research is moving beyond the limited sets of presumptions of how arts participation surveys work and should be organized, in Dr. Jackson's view. The NEA has tried to create cross-sector partnerships and collaborations with the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Agriculture, and Defense, for example.

There is also evidence of a shift at the local level where a wide range of organizations and initiatives have begun to incorporate the arts. For example, The California Endowment, a health funder, has initiated a project focused on heritage-based cultural participation in neighborhoods around the state. The theory being tested is that engagement in these heritage-based art forms (festivals, parades, or art-making activities) is part of what leads to healthier environments and individual health outcomes. In some cases, there is a direct impact in terms of reducing stress.

In other cases, artwork may be used as political action to effect change in the community. If the engagement arises as a reaction to an issue in affordable housing, for example, the artwork may become a kind of political or civic campaign. Alternatively, the art activity may be focused on outcomes like building social cohesion. Under these circumstances, the issue becomes more complicated, particularly in terms of the outcome, because there are multiple intentions for the activity.

In looking beyond participation rates and trying to understand motivations, barriers, and outcomes, Dr. Jackson posed the following questions for further discussion:

- What do we really need to know?
- How do we use the information?
- Who should be collecting the information in addition to NEA and other stakeholders?
- Who should be using it?
- How should it be used?


Reassessing Assumptions about Culture

The basic premise underlying this symposium was that art and culture can have a positive influence on the individual and on society. But according to Nanna Kann-Rasmussen, associate professor at the University of Copenhagen, the transformative powers of culture lie in the aesthetic experience. Attitudes and motivations have an enormous influence on what happens in the encounter between the participant and the cultural event. Therefore, the outcomes we tend to seek do not come solely from exposing people to great art. The transformative effects of the arts do not dwell in the artifacts or performances themselves.

Dr. Kann-Rasmussen said that not all kinds of culture have the ability to draw large arts-participation numbers. Analyzing surveys and policy documents shows that the very arts programming that is less appealing to the general public is often the high culture, non-commercial offerings of state-funded institutions. Dr. Kann-Rasmussen asserted that the justification for funding these kinds of arts and culture should not come from participation rates, but because they are desired by society.

In the latest Danish survey on arts participation, qualitative questions about why people do not participate in the arts were included for the first time, allowing measurement beyond participation rates. It showed that the main reason given for not attending was lack of interest. Dr. Kann-Rasmussen believes the power of transformation lies in the state of the experience; therefore, the attitudes towards arts and culture as well as aesthetic experience are vital to the understanding of any outcomes. If the experience has no impact on the individual because he or she is not interested, it cannot create the potential for the benefits and outcomes associated with arts and culture.

According to Dr. Kann-Rasmussen, the knowledge of where and how the aesthetic experience takes place can serve as a gateway to knowledge of a culture's values, as well as barriers, motivations, and attitudes to cultural institutions and art forms. By broadening the area of interest beyond participation rates and correlations between them and the desired outcomes, different questions can be asked in a manner that does not limit the outcome to things we can measure. When we ask people their reasons for *not* attending a cultural event, we should also ask them what they *are* interested in.



Recent analysis of historical Danish arts participation surveys from the 1960s and 1970s showed that these surveys were designed to measure leisure time activities in terms of both the *amount* of leisure time and *how* it was used. The survey asked about the priorities of citizens and their knowledge and opinion of government spending on culture. While these surveys are outdated, they highlight the need to ask questions that help us understand motivations, since they are important to the experience of culture. Looking at leisure time and how it is spent broadens our perspective and offers better opportunities to map cultural activities that are based in a non-institutional context.

Discussion


One theme that emerged from this session was the need for qualitative approaches to examine motivations, barriers, and outcomes that incorporate humanistic inquiry about how culture fits into people's lives. Several philosophical and practical considerations were raised, as well as the issue of whether the goals of researchers and practitioners can be aligned throughout the measurement and reporting process.

Participants agreed that the interaction of policy and research presents challenges in terms of focus and budget. In the United States, there is not a strong policy edict that determines the focus of survey research. The de facto focus has been on the historical form. In Canada, a broader spectrum of data has been lost due to budget constraints. It was argued that the research side has a broader agenda than the policy and grant-making side.

In addition to the different views represented by the research and policy agendas, there was no consensus definition of culture. Is culture defined by institutions of arts and culture or by the bonds that exist between human beings in a local or global context? Since most Americans do not work in the field as delineated in the second definition, and NEA's existence is predicated on the first definition, how can the competing ideas of culture be navigated? And if there is never going to be support or funding for a broader view of culture, should it receive our attention?

Participants stated that the arts world is undergoing a power shift that is generating a redefinition of who is potentially a stakeholder. There is a high demand among decision-makers for economic impact figures in the arts and less demand for social impact figures. With decreasing levels of funding and shrinking budgets, the challenge is how to align the priorities of different stakeholders.

Government agencies want to improve surveys to better understand the benefits derived from the monies spent on state-funded institutions and how citizens use these institutions. Arts councils and public arts funders are interested in outcomes. Some argued that the study of participation should not be separated from the study of what is meaningful to people, citing the relationship between social well-being



and economic impact. Questions were raised about which factors contributed more to a sense of well-being: wealth, leisure time, or autonomy to choose how to spend leisure time.

It was agreed that the rising cost of research and its implications for data is a serious issue that needs addressing. Three potential sources of research funding were identified: funders, profit/income models (such as Gallup), and nonprofit models (e.g., earned income model for data). Inexpensive ways to advance findings in the field include: comparative analysis, theory building and qualitative methods, and meta-analysis of qualitative findings. Some argued that there is no need for expensive datasets and that the research that has been done can be capitalized upon to advance the field.

Some participants suggested that the fields of consumer psychology, sociology, and consumer sciences may offer insights into understanding motivation and broadening the framework of arts participation research. Examining preference discovery and “taste communities,” and focusing on conversion offer opportunities to expand the understanding of arts participation and its impact.



The 2014 Walk the Talk Parade, an initiative of the Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD). Photo by Austin Hines and Henriëtte Brouwers

Brainstorm Session: Making Comparisons across Countries: UNESCO Perspective

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS) aims to develop sustainable global collection of cultural statistics. According to Lydia Deloumeaux, assistant programme specialist for Culture Statistics at UIS, its strategy has three components: 1) development of new statistical concepts, standards, and methodologies, 2) statistical capacity building, and 3) international databases and data collection. To facilitate its work, UNESCO developed a framework for defining culture with six domains:

- 1.** Cultural and national heritage
- 2.** Performance and celebrations
- 3.** Visual arts and crafts
- 4.** Books and press
- 5.** Audio-visual and interactive media
- 6.** Creative and design services

To improve cultural statistics around the world, UIS provides regional and national training for developing countries to measure different aspects of culture, including cultural participation, with a focus on its economic contribution. UIS produces and distributes for free many resources⁶ to help countries build cultural statistics in different domains. At the end of training, participants have a conceptual model for defining culture and tools for organizing surveys and developing national cultural statistics.

⁶ Examples of UNESCO resources include *Measuring Cultural Participation*, a free handbook available in French, Spanish, and English with a checklist of core questions related to cultural participation surveys, and *Measuring the Economic Contribution of Cultural Industries*, a review of current methods for measuring economic impacts of culture.

National surveys are important but, according to Ms. Deloumeaux, can make international comparisons difficult. The following examples of results of cultural participation surveys in a variety of countries reflect the use of different terms, categories, and activities unique to specific countries.

- **China**—Most people in 2010 (78.1 percent) visited museums, followed by a second category, “agencies of cultural relics preservation” (21.5 percent), with a third category of “scientific and research agencies” accounting for only 0.4 percent of visitors.
- **Colombia**—There were decreases in attendance at cultural spaces in the last 12 months by persons 12 years and older from 2010 to 2012. This survey, which is conducted every two years, is the main source for data on cultural expenditure and attendance.⁷ The survey, however, had problems with comparability due to changes in questions. The top three cultural spaces visited were a) libraries, b) historical monuments, archaeological sites, national monuments, historical centers, and c) museums.
- **Chile**—A key reason for non-attendance to a visual arts exhibition in 2012 was lack of time and not lack of money. However, for international residents, rather than national, cost was a major factor for not attending concerts and live shows of national singers or groups. The issue of perception of a specific group was relevant in this instance.
- **Bhutan**—In lieu of GDP, given that economic growth is not a priority, this country, which is Buddhist, boasts a “Gross National Happiness” index. Their index is based on measures such as psychology, well-being, education, and cultural diversity and resilience, with one of their key domains being cultural participation.
- **Singapore**—Several questions in a survey sponsored by the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts in Singapore focused on awareness and appreciation of arts and culture. For example, over 53 percent of respondents agreed that “exposure to the arts broadens my mind and encourages me to be more creative.” Almost half of respondents responded similarly to questions regarding arts enriching the quality of their lives, including those activities that enhance their sense of nationalism.

⁷ See Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE), *Encuesta de consumo cultural: Año 2012* (2013), <http://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/educacion-cultura-gobierno-alias/consumo-cultural>.


Ms. Deloumeaux stated that the heterogeneity of national culture surveys is a reminder that, while traditional factors affecting cultural participation—such as access—are important, it is also critical to explore new areas including motivations and cultural values, when making international comparisons based on national surveys. Other key considerations include:

- Meaning is influenced by the country context. Structural changes that have occurred in each country need to be taken into account.
- Study the change by quartile (range) not only by volume itself.
- Assess the impact of new technologies in participation rates.
- Ensure use of similar sampling techniques, scope, and timeframes were used.
- Identify common questions across surveys.
- Compare parity of socio-demographic variables used across surveys.

It is essential, in Ms. Deloumeaux's view, to understand historical background, structural changes, levels of income, education of individuals, and other factors to effectively compare differences among countries.

Global surveys offer several advantages to comparing disparate national surveys. For example, global surveys provide harmonized concepts, comparability, a single survey instrument, reliable results, and support for advocacy. On the other hand, global surveys face important challenges, including defining survey objectives, developing common definitions, and defining a series of common practices worldwide. One large global survey, the World Value Survey, includes only one question related to culture, which asks about being an active member of an organization—artistic, musical, or cultural. A possible alternative to global surveys would be modules on cultural participation that could be added to existing national surveys. While specific questions would need to be comparable across countries, such a module would be easier to implement internationally than a new global survey.

UIS, in addition to facilitating development of new national surveys, has its own international data collection effort based on administrative data from cinemas. The survey coverage includes box office, production, and distribution data and survey questions about cultural diversity, such as the language and country where a film was produced. Expanding its data collection, UIS is currently developing a survey on cultural employment to understand the status of persons holding arts and cultural occupations. The survey will measure full-time versus part-time status, job stability, and socioeconomic status—including level of education, and gender. A pilot was completed in February 2014 and the survey will be deployed in 2015.



The Eurobarometer Survey is a European survey of cultural values. Funded by the European Commission, the survey measures cultural participation for a range of activities and uses the information to create cultural activity indexes. Future efforts to develop new global surveys or to make international comparisons of national surveys should build off of such existing efforts.

Discussion

Subsequent dialogue focused on adding cultural participation modules to existing surveys, the challenge of developing robust and relevant questions, and general survey design issues, particularly as related to cross-cultural comparisons. Participants also provided resources related to global culture surveys.

A primary challenge to producing rigorous international surveys is the inability to gain exact parity in phrasing. Participants agreed that creating a module of a core set of questions that every country adopts and adds to existing surveys would minimize this source of bias. A modular approach also eases financial constraints by leveraging existing infrastructure. Two such surveys are currently in use: the U.S. General Social Survey and the European Social Survey.

Some participants expressed concern that standardization of questions can lead to misleading responses based on respondent perception of which answers are most appropriate. Of course, countries have different cultures and obtaining exact comparisons is therefore an impossible task. Participants agreed that the goal was to obtain fairly comparable responses. Comparing surveys between countries may be a useful way for researchers to gain insight into cultural differences and ascertain the best ways to phrase questions for international surveys. Groups that currently produce international surveys, such as UIS, would be best suited to aiding in harmonizing language for new international surveys.

While it may be difficult to compare responses to qualitative questions internationally, it should be possible to compare simpler measures, such as participation by arts sectors. Participants thought that practitioners would be particularly interested in such data because they help them understand the global context of their practice. Some participants were particularly interested in comparing public policy across countries and linking policies to outcomes when possible.

Participants also shared some resources for global arts and culture surveys. The International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA) has developed the International Database of Cultural Policies, a central, web-based, continuously updated database of country-specific profiles of policies related to culture that provides capacity to monitor and analyze global trends in cultural policy. Also, a group of arts education researchers have built a worldwide network in which researchers interested in art education try to find common measures; they have also conducted numerous qualitative studies to develop benchmarks for common indicators.

Summation

The symposium was a unique opportunity for experts from a range of disciplines to convene and discuss the theory and practice of measuring cultural participation. There is an ongoing and significant shift in the collection and use of data in cultural engagement, which will increasingly require effective interdisciplinary collaboration. International collaborations, in particular, will require active and close interaction as well as experimentation with novel methodologies.

Sunil Iyengar from the NEA and Geoffrey Crossick, from the AHRC, thanked participants for valuable insights that will move their research forward.

While there was some observed friction between research and policy during the symposium discussions, many data collectors try to incorporate the concerns of multiple stakeholders. The NEA, for example, tries to make its statistical systems as broadly useful as possible for end-users in arts and culture research as well as for policymakers in many other fields and countries. The participation of a diverse group of end-users of arts and culture statistics in this symposium provided valuable feedback for the NEA, and other designers of large surveys, as well as for the AHRC's Cultural Value Project, which has sought ways to identify the benefits that engagement with the arts brings to people and to society.

The symposium laid the groundwork for future collaborations and should aid participants and others in planning surveys in the context of multiple research approaches. International research collaborations in arts and culture, such as those between the NEA and AHRC, can only be strengthened as a result of this convening.



A still from the film *Act of Killing*. Image courtesy of Dogwoof Productions

Appendix 1: Agenda

Day One: June 2, 2014

Welcome and statement of purpose

- Jon Clifton, Managing Director, Gallup World Poll
- Geoffrey Crossick, Director, Cultural Value Project, AHRC
- Sunil Iyengar, Director, Office of Research & Analysis, NEA

Keynote speech: Bob Groves, Provost, Georgetown University

Session 1: Why measure cultural participation, and for and by whom?

- Speakers:
 - Diane Ragsdale, Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam
 - Andrew Taylor, Assistant Professor of Arts Management, American University
 - Tom Knight, The Department for Culture, Media & Sport, UK
- Moderated by Josephine Ramirez, Program Director, The James Irvine Foundation
- *Potential questions for discussion:* What are the different motivations behind conducting surveys of arts participation at the national level? What sort of information would be most useful for arts practitioners versus policy-makers and the general public? To what extent does a focus on attendance habits pertaining to arts “institutions,” typically those supported by public funds, potentially distort our understanding of participation? Are there any common patterns or trends that demand changes to the ways that arts participation is measured and reported?

Session 2: What do we mean by cultural participation? Scrutinizing activities and genres

- Speakers:
 - Alaka Wali, Curator in Anthropology, The Field Museum
 - Abigail Gilmore, Senior Lecturer, School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, The University of Manchester
 - Bridget Jones, Director, Research & Strategic Analysis, Australia Council for the Arts
- Moderated by Alan Brown, Principal, WolfBrown
- *Potential questions for discussion:* How does one select or prioritize among various visual, literary, performing arts events, including museum-going and other cultural activities (such as creating art or learning an art), for the purpose of constructing a survey about arts participation? What role can arts communities have in helping cultural researchers and policymakers decide which art forms and activities are worth tracking regularly? How do we account adequately for activities related to “cultural heritage” or “culturally specific art forms”? Have policy imperatives in driving participation surveys reinforced an unhelpful hierarchy: subsidized professional, then commercial, and finally amateur arts? How important is it to distinguish between people participating as audience members and as producers?

Session 3: The challenge of encompassing new media- and technology-driven forms of participation

■ Speakers:

Alan Freeman, Special Advisor, World Cities Culture Forum

Johanna Blakley, Managing Director & Director of Research, The Norman Lear Center, University of Southern California

Doug Noonan, Director of Research, Indiana University Public Policy Institute

Moderated by Sunil Iyengar, Director, Office of Research and Analysis, NEA
(on behalf of Kristen Purcell, Associate Director for Research, Pew Research Center's Internet Project)

- *Potential questions for discussion:* What unique measurement issues arise with regard to capturing rates of arts participation via digital media and technologies? Does the ecology of participation change in a more complex world of platforms and new types of engagement? Is there a danger that the genuinely participatory dimension of cultural engagement in a digital cultural world, blurring the conventional distinction between producers and audiences, is not captured by surveys? What relatively new art forms or genres must be accounted for by any comprehensive measurement? How can we ensure that such survey instruments stay current with these media and technologies?

Session 4: New ways of knowing: alternative data sources, methodologies, and units of analysis

■ Speakers:

Mark Stern, Professor of Social Welfare and History, University of Pennsylvania

Hasan Bakhshi, Director, Creative Economy in Policy & Research, Nesta

Anthony Lilley, CEO and Chief Creative Officer, Magic Lantern

Moderated by Joan Jeffri, Director and Founder, Research Center for the Arts & Culture, National Center for Creative Aging

- *Potential questions for discussion:* What methods beyond household and individual surveys currently exist for capturing arts participation rates? How can both public and private (i.e. commercial) data sources be brought together to inform a fuller view of individuals' arts participation habits? Is there a place for "big data" and "open data" in our methods? What is the value of more geographical flexibility in defining the appropriate units (e.g., nation, city, neighborhood or locality) for the objectives of both funding policy and understanding? Which units of time are optimal for taking such measurements, and what periodicity should such data collection methods serve? What potential do time diaries and/or longitudinal study designs extend to such research? How might we introduce arts participation variables into other longitudinal and cohort studies (e.g., epidemiological, health, household expenditures)?

Day Two, June 3, 2014

Welcome and recap, **Geoffrey Crossick, Director, Cultural Value Project, AHRC**

Keynote speech and discussion, **Jon Clifton, Managing Director, Gallup World Poll**

Session 5: Beyond participation rates: understanding motivations, barriers, and outcomes

■ Speakers:

Maria Rosario Jackson, Senior Advisor, The Kresge Foundation

Kelly Hill, Founder and President, Hill Strategies

Nanna Kann-Rasmussen, Royal School of Library and Information Science

Copenhagen

Moderated by Peter Linett, Partner, Slover Linett Audience Research

- *Potential questions for discussion:* How can measurements of arts participation also address changes in resultant outcomes for audiences and communities? How important is the question of motivations, attitudes, and barriers regarding arts participation and how can these variables be captured effectively in a single instrument? Can audience marketing survey practices and methodologies help us here? Is there potential for using social media as another way of capturing “revealed preferences”? What role can subjective well-being studies play in this research?

Guided brainstorm exercise: making comparisons across countries

- Moderated by Lydia Deloumeaux, Assistant Programme Specialist for Culture Statistics, UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Closing remarks and next steps

- Sunil Iyengar
■ Geoffrey Crossick

Appendix 2: List of Participants

- Alicia Adams**, The Kennedy Center
Alexis Andrew, Canada Council for the Arts
Hasan Bakhshi, Nesta
Gitte Balling, Royal School of Library and Information Science, Copenhagen
Johanna Blakley, University of Southern California
Norman Bradburn, NORC at the University of Chicago
Alan Brown, WolfBrown
Christopher Caltagirone, Cultural Data Project
Ben Cameron, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation
Jon Clifton, Gallup World Poll
Randy Cohen, Americans for the Arts
Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, University of Southern California
Antonio Cuyler, Florida State University
Richard Davis, Department of Canadian Heritage
Lydia Deloumeaux, UNESCO Institute for Statistics
Alastair Evans, Creative Scotland
Alexis Frasz, Helicon Collaborative
Alan Freeman, World Cities Culture Forum
Abigail Gilmore, University of Manchester
Robert Groves, Georgetown University
Joaquin Herranz, University of Washington
Peter Hildick-Smith, Codex Group LLC
Kelly Hill, Hill Strategies
Joan Jeffri, National Center for Creative Aging
Bridget Jones, Australia Council for the Arts
Nanna Kann-Rasmussen, University of Copenhagen
Tom Knight, UK Department for Culture, Media & Sport
Anthony Lilley, Magic Lantern Productions
Peter Linett, Slover Linett Audience Research
Carlos Manjarrez, Institute of Museum and Library Services
Bryce Merrill, WESTAF
Bob Morrison, Quadrant Arts Education Research
Ian David Moss, Fractured Atlas
Doug Noonan, Indiana University Public Policy Institute
Jennifer Novak-Leonard, University of Chicago
Ivonne Chand O’Neal, Kennedy Center
Kristen Purcell, Pew Research Center (*unable to attend, but provided content*)
Kevin Rafter, The James Irvine Foundation
Diane Ragsdale, Erasmus University Rotterdam
Josephine Ramirez, The James Irvine Foundation
Maria Rosario Jackson, The Kresge Foundation
Stephen Ross, Research Councils of the UK
Susan Seifert, University of Pennsylvania
Joanne Steller, TRGArts
Jill Robinson, TRGArts
Mark Stern, University of Pennsylvania
Ryan Stubbs, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies
E. Andrew Taylor, American University
Kristin Thomson, Future of Music Coalition
Ximena Varela, American University
Alaka Wali, The Field Museum
- NEA Staff**
Sunil Iyengar, Office of Research & Analysis
Joan Shigekawa, Senior Deputy Chairman
- AHRC Staff**
Geoffrey Crossick, Cultural Value Project, Arts & Humanities Research Council
Patrycja Kaszynska, Cultural Value Project, Arts & Humanities Research Council

Back cover photo: Blues and gospel band The Holmes Brothers, recipient of an NEA National Heritage Fellowship, perform at the 2014 NEA National Heritage Fellowships Concert. Photo by Michael G. Stewart



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