

The Economic and Social Impact of Arts in Surrey

Executive Summary

Aims

Recognising the central role of the arts in improving community welfare and economic benefits, this study aims to provide a unique overview of the social and economic impacts of the arts in Surrey. It brings together three leading arts organisations in Surrey as the research partners, namely: Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, The Lightbox, and Watts Gallery – Artists' Village, therefore enabling insights beyond any one organisation.

Outcomes

This research reveals that the three arts organisations share similar visitor spending patterns and economic impacts on the surrounding areas. Besides the economic benefits to the three organisations themselves, the operations of arts organisations contribute economically to the local and non-local areas, respectively. In general, **for every £10 of visitors' on-site spending within the art organisations, a further economic contribution of £3.91 to £13.28 are likely to be generated in the local and non-local areas**, and most of this economic benefit is maintained in the local economies.

In the local area, the **shopping and food and drink sectors are likely to benefit the most** from the three organisations through their visitors' further consumption in the local area during the same trip to the art venue. Although the economic impact diminishes in the areas farther from the organisations, food and beverage sectors are still likely to be benefited economically from the three art organisations. Meanwhile, according to the post-visit survey, **nearly 70% of the visitors would not have come to the area where the three art organisations are located if the art organisations were not in the area**, which indicates the importance of the existence of these art organisations and the contributions to their local economies and beyond.

The research process

The research was conducted between March and July 2020. It comprises two parts: the social impact of the arts in Surrey, and the economic impact of the arts in Surrey. A mixed-method approach is adopted in this research. The first part of the research uses mainly the qualitative method based on eight interviews with partner arts organisations and community partners to



Images: (Top) Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Paul Stead; (Middle) The Lightbox Gallery & Museum, © The Lightbox; (Bottom) Watts Gallery - Artists' Village, Andy Newbold Photography

examine the social impact of arts in Surrey. The research on the economic impact of arts was carried out through a post-visit online questionnaire survey with the three arts organisations' visitors. In total, 370 valid responses were received across the three organisations.

The research finds a range of ways through which arts organisations create supported spaces through collaboration and partnership to provide opportunities for engagement for community members both as individuals and groups. Such initiatives are embedded in, and align to, the key social impact drivers of community identity, health and wellbeing, education and skills development, social inclusion, social justice and spirituality. This research also finds that **arts organisations offer a wide range of engagement activities that directly increase community engagement with arts.** In particular, **communication and collaboration with key partners ensures that projects are designed to connect with the needs of vulnerable groups and those who might otherwise remain physically distanced from the arts sites. Arts organisations offer their specialist knowledge and expertise to support the social inclusion, health and wellbeing, education and creation of community identity within the region.**

It should be noted that given the lockdown, significant challenges were faced in obtaining access to partner organisations, associated community groups and visitors, which restricted the sample sizes of both the interviews and the online survey. A larger number and a broader range of interviewees and survey respondents would potentially offer richer, deeper and more accurate insights and wider perspectives of the social and economic impacts of arts organisations.

Covid response

During the COVID-19 lockdown, while arts organisations recognised the importance of physical delivery of programmes and initiatives, experiences during COVID-19 highlight the vital need to revise the offer of programmes and initiatives and consider the need for hybrid solutions to community engagement that extend across both physical and digital engagement platforms.

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