

# Findings and recommendations report

## Project

To deliver a series of stakeholder conversations about widening creative and cultural engagement with the semi-rural community of Penderyn and its surrounding area.

## Re:cognition authors

Jon Luxton

Lu Thomas

**Report produced for the:**  
Arts Council of Wales, and  
National Museum Wales

August 2021



## Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Project aims, objectives and principles	3
3. Methodology	4
4. Summary of responses	5
5. Recommendations	12
Annex 1 - Findings	14

## 1. Introduction

Re:cognition was pleased to have been selected by the Arts Council Wales and the National Museum of Wales to deliver engagement with people from semi-rural disadvantaged communities as part of the 'widening of creative and cultural engagement with communities across Wales' project. Our work centred around the South Wales valley communities of Penderyn, Aberdare and Hirwaun.

The overall project aim, was to help uncover and understand the root causes of the commonly assumed negative perceptions and explore the possible dislocation of certain demographics from what is commonly called 'the arts'. To be truly relevant to all people in Wales, this dislocation must be first identified and then addressed. As a foundation of developing our understanding of the perceptions and possible barriers for under-represented communities, we needed the authentic voices of the people who live in the identified areas, and crucially not ordinarily engaged with the 'art and culture' scene.

We were very pleased that our organisation was chosen to partner on this project, as we have had a long-standing relationship with the arts, and understand the transformative effects art and culture can have when assisting in long and lasting positive societal change.

## 2. Project aims, objectives and principles

Both ACW and NMW acknowledge that they, along with their commissioning partner organisations, have not successfully reached as deeply into disadvantaged communities as they would have wished. This lack of reach is hindering their ability to deliver programmes and activities that could contribute to tackling the recognised social inequalities in the art and culture sectors of Wales. To dismantle the long-held inequalities associated with audience participation, it is vital that the rich and diverse histories and talents of all the communities of Wales are reflected in not only what is offered to audiences to view, but also for individuals and communities to be reflected in the production and participation of 'art and culture' within their communities.

The clients' wished to build an engagement/intervention approach or approaches which actively engaged people from disadvantaged communities in the process of discovering the barriers to involvement and participation within the arts and cultural landscape of Wales. To assist this, we created a semi structured perception-based interview structure which sought to explore the following question themes:

- Existing knowledge of Arts Council Wales and National Museums Wales.
- What counts as art and culture in these communities.
- where it happens,
- how often,
- who makes it,
- who experiences it, and
- cultural democracy.

We understand that any developed approaches cannot be homogeneous, they need to be contextual to the people/communities involved, so therefore must be derived from those same people.

### **The project aimed to reveal:**

- What relevance do the principles and practices associated with the notion of Cultural Democracy have to those being interviewed and their wider community?
- What are the best methods to use when engaging with this semi-rural disadvantaged community?
- Initial insights into this community's art and culture aspirations both from the point of view of being a creator and a consumer of art and culture.
- Identify what these communities would want from a programme designed to fund and/or support creative activity within their locality.

The results of this research will assist ACW create a pan-organisation Strategic Collaborative Programme, and help shape and inform the National Museum Wales' ten-year strategy. This Strategic Collaborative Programme, aims to promote broad and inclusive engagement with the communities that currently face the greatest disadvantages, which are often excluded from what is considered by the arts establishment to be 'arts and culture'.

Both clients recognised that this work must take place to ensure that the perspectives, wants, desires and aspirations of semi-rural disadvantaged communities are understood, the barriers to participation and practice identified and possible means for their mitigation offered.

Using this methodology, we aimed to:

- Identify key potential elements of a strategic programme to widen cultural and arts engagement across semi-rural economically disadvantaged areas of Wales.
- Develop insights allowing us to suggest types of support and ways of working, that might help to improve or increase opportunities.

These are important aims and may eventually lead to a more equal and inclusive arts and cultural scene that reflects the creativity and rich cultural diversity of all our communities of Wales; allowing us to confidently reflect and comment on society, sharing our values and challenging perceptions and ideas to better understand our own lives and histories and those of others, whilst discovering new ways of expressing our intersectional needs and desires within our shared spaces and communities - creating a true and equal cultural democracy.

This study is quite unique, but the aims of ACW/NMW will not be fully realised by this report alone. However, this research could form the basis of further studies.

### 3. Methodology

All our work on this project was routed in the theory and practice of Grounded Theory.

#### **Approach to engaging project stakeholders**

One principle of this type of community engagement work, is that where possible, directly engage with people in their own spaces. For instance, when engaging with a community group, we endeavour to meet with them at their regular meeting space and at the time/date they would have normally met. However, Covid intervened. In the first week of September 2020, we originally intended to use the following engagement methods:

1. Street interviews working with Kitsch n Sync.
2. Door knocking
3. Telephone interviews
4. If possible, tapping into existing community online Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams groups
5. Targeted individual interviews

However, the Covid situation and associated restrictions meant we had to quickly revise the engagement methodology to the following:

1. Telephone interviews  
Random numbers for the subject areas.
2. Street interviews  
Working with Kitsch n Sync

Unfortunately, following the commencement of the national lockdown on October 23 2020, our street interviews had to be cancelled.

## 4. Summary of responses

Annex 1 - Findings of this report contains a full breakdown of findings alongside indicative quotes from respondents. The sample size was 72 people from a population of 44,940.

### Question 1

#### **When you hear the words Arts Council Wales and National Museums Wales, what comes to mind?**

A low number of respondents demonstrated a firm understanding of the role of ACW (23%) and NMW (13%).

While this low recognition may not be crucial in itself, the lack of knowledge regarding the roles the organisations undertake may well impact on people's knowledge and ability to seek funding and opportunities, creating an opportunity gap between cities and the rural poor communities.

Responses to this question also indicate a blurring of the lines between NMW and museums in general.

### Question 2

#### **When you hear the word Museum, what immediately comes to mind?**

86% of respondents evidenced a full or partial engagement response to this question. This was higher than Q1 figure where 65% (only 13% reported a firm understanding while 52% said they had a partial understanding). This is understandable for two reasons:

- 1) They had had time to think since Q1
- 2) In Q1, they were asked about the National Museums Wales and not simply museums

In general, there was a high level of knowledge demonstrated, however, when considering venues their responses were entirely centred on the greater Cardiff conurbation with no other Welsh venues being namechecked. This could indicate a very local approach to museum attendance which was born out through responses to later questions.

### Question 3

#### **When you hear the words art and culture, what immediately comes to mind?**

The answers to this question were positive and quite varied. The positive response rate was high with only 7 people stating that art and culture had no meaning to them personally.

Welsh culture had the highest response of 41%. This was followed by 29% for different types of art; 26% of respondents singled out visual arts, and Heritage was mentioned by 20% of respondent.

The responses to the question also generated 12 singular responses.

The good wide-ranging set of responses, demonstrate a high level of knowledge of different art and cultural forms.

#### **Question 4**

##### **Do you know anyone who has been supported by ACW or NMW?**

The numbers here were low, with only 21% reporting yes, highlighting a lack of direct human connection between ACW/NMW and this community. It would be interesting to ask this question to people in other more networked parts of Wales, to see if this is a national, local or class issue.

This lack of this personal connection may have impacts if people wanted to progress in their artistic and cultural endeavours as accessible local role models can be what makes the difference.

#### **Question 5**

##### **What do you think of the idea of Cultural Democracy?**

Much discussion was generated by this question, indeed, more than any other question asked.

Initial responses indicated a very low recognition of the term, however, once explained and discussed, there was very high levels of support. The concept was seen as relevant and was supported by 74% of respondents, the highest support for any proposition in the study.

Many people quickly identified how practically it could be used to the benefit of their community. Indeed, one respondent citing an example where the principles of Cultural Democracy have already been put into practice in their own area.

33% of the respondents gravitated in their discussions towards a linkage of the term 'Cultural Democracy' and accessibility in its widest definition.

These positive discussions alongside their support for 'Cultural Democracy', was also reflected in the respondent's answers to later questions in this study.

#### **Question 6**

##### **Tell me about the last time you attended museums / art venues?**

This question revealed high responses for Cardiff based venues who took the top three places.

This question also revealed that those who cited the Coliseum were very passionate about their support for the venue.

Exhibitions, Music, Musicals and art were the most often cited when describing their visit.

The responses also revealed that 70% of the visits took place within the last two years indicating regular attendance.

## Question 7

### What would encourage you to visit museums / art venues?

This question offered participants the opportunity to express their preferences as participants within art and culture in Wales, and indicates a transactional relationship of desiring entertainment over more traditional ‘educational’ experiences.

Basically, the responses indicated that it's all about the content, price and accessibility, both of the content and location.

The most popular genres were musicals, plays both traditional and modern, big touring shows and exhibitions, bands, concerts, and History and social history.

The responses gravitated towards genres that could be described by some as entertainment.

## Question 8

### Have you ever attended an exhibition within the named local museums / arts venues?

15% of respondents, said they were not Interested in local museums or arts venues, which when compared to other questions is a strong negative score.

In regards to visits to local museums and arts venues, the Coliseum and the Aberdare (Cynon Valley) Museum, were by far the most well attended.

Colstars, comedians, films and bands were all cited as reasons to attend the Coliseum. In regard to the Aberdare (Cynon Valley) Museum, attendance appears to be helped because it is next door to a supermarket facilitating the ability of people to ‘pop in there for a cup of tea’.

While liked and appearing to be well attended, the Coliseum was not without criticism. These Included a lack of diverse content, seat size, and not enough modern or contemporary work.

A number of other close by well-known venues were not namechecked at all, including; Theatr Soar, Trecynon Community Hall, Redhouse Cymru, Pontypridd Museum, Steam Museum, and Cefn Coed Colliery Museum.

When we compare these reported local activities partaken by the respondents to their answers from question 7 where we asked ‘what would encourage you to visit museums / art venues?’, the locally provided art and culture activities do not line up with reported local aspiration, meaning local venues are not or can’t respond to local needs.

Activities provided locally	Attended	Activities wants from Q7
Musicals	5%	30%
Plays and theatre both traditional and modern	5%	30%
Big touring shows and exhibitions	5%	22%
Bands and concerts	13%	20%

This disconnect between local aspiration and what is provided locally is stark and may need to be addressed.

### **Question 9**

**Do you believe that the 7 named National Museum Wales projects and venues are connected/linked with your local community?**

Only 25% of respondent considered NMW connected/linked to their community. This number is very low and may partially reflect the location of NMW museums although there is little disconnection of NMW from other museums.

There was a very high number of people who did not respond to this question, the largest number for any question. There are several possibilities why this question garnered such a low response - It may have been the way the question was formulated, or their knowledge of National Museum Wales was so low that confidence in answering was impaired, for instance.

### **Question 10**

**Do you know many people who have exhibited / performed at the named local museums / arts venues?**

52% of respondents stated no/don't know to this question with 3% who did not provide an answer.

45% of respondent reported knowing people who have exhibited / performed at local museums / arts venues, with 76% of the them reported being connected through Colstars. Most of these connections were through familial bonds such as children performing in music, dance and drama.

The Colstars appear to have developed a high level of reach into this community. They appear to work very well with young people offering them good participative opportunities. This may not be said for local museums or the NMW, as no evidence was presented in regard to young people taking part in any of their educational projects indicating a lack reach into this community.

### **Question 11**

**What type of exhibitions / cultural events / performances would persuade you to visit the 7 National Museum Wales / arts venues?**

This question was responded to with great enthusiasm with strong engagement to its content and the art/cultural forms placed forward as preference.



For ACW related responses, the desire for music in all its forms dominated the narrative, while for NMW related responses, the answers were more widely spread with exhibitions, big touring exhibitions, local history and social, and Welsh heritage/history being the most popular.

The responses and the tone of the engagement for this question offers much to build on.

## **Question 12**

**Thinking back before lockdown, were you aware of what exhibitions and arts events were taking place locally and nationally in Wales?**

When answering this question, 80% of respondents were either not aware or only partially aware of what exhibitions and arts events were taking place locally and nationally in Wales. Only 20% of respondents considered themselves fully aware.

It may be the case here that on at least a local level, they are underestimating their knowledge as 58% of respondents had attended local events in the last year.

## **Question 13 & 14**

**Q13 - How would you like to be informed about new events/exhibitions?**

**Q14 - What do you think is the best way the Venue can inform local people about upcoming events/exhibitions?**

When it comes to being personally informed, electronic dissemination is preferred by many people, however, over half of the respondents, namechecked posters leaflets flyers as a means through which they would also like to be informed.

Q14 sought views regarding how people think their community should be best informed. It is of some interest that there is a difference between Individual preference for email as outlined in Q13, with what respondent recommended for other local people. 37% identify email as their personal preference, but only 11% would recommend it for others in their communities.

What is clear is that no one method of informing or engaging suits all people.

## **Question 15**

**What do you consider to be art and culture?**

When describing art, most respondents identified different art forms to illustrate their point.

When addressing culture, respondents offered a more varied responses when compared to their responses for art. The highest performing themes were; The way we live, Heritage and History.

A small (16%) enthusiastic cohort offered the interesting idea that everything that is part of our lives are connected and inseparable from art and culture.

To note: only one respondent namechecked the Eisteddfod indicating poor reach into this community of mainly English speakers. this lack of Welsh Language art and culture was also demonstrated in the responses to all other relevant questions.

## **Question 16**

### **How connected do you feel to art and culture in your community?**

Despite of regally attending art and culture event, 88% of respondents felt disconnected or partially disconnected to art and culture in their community.

With such conflicting data regarding attendance and connection, there may be a need to examine the quality of those local art/cultural experience attended by local people.

As we have seen from questions 7 and 8, there is a disconnect between local aspirations and the locally provided art and cultural genres. This may well have fed into this very high disconnection rate of 88%.

## **Question 17**

### **What would you and/or your community want from a programme designed and funded to support creative activity in your locality?**

The contributions to this question could be described as very enthusiastic. Some responses centred on general development with them knowing that things need to change but not being sure what to suggest, while other respondents came up with 123 concrete suggestions. Only two respondents were disengaged by the question.

- The want for more art and craft classes was very clear with over 50% of respondents in support. They identified 14 different art and craft activities that would benefit from focused classes.
- The previous discussion on democratising art and culture resulted in nearly a third wanting cultural democracy to be enacted. This was especially true regarding local people controlling what is funded.
- Nearly a third of respondents wanted more support for CYP focused art and cultural.
- Just over a fifth of respondents were keen for local theatre groups and the Coliseum to be better financially supported.
- Throughout this study, the Colstars have always been very well supported. In response to this question, 8% of respondents said they wanted them to be better funded.
- The effects of Covid on communities was noted with 16% of respondents wanting funded art/culture activities that respond to community cohesion issues exacerbated by Covid.
- Improve disability access and transport was cited by 10% of the respondents.
- More inter generation art and culture was supported by 5% of respondent. This included young people working on art and culture projects in nursing homes.

The number and the depth of the responses to this question illustrates a community that is extremely motivated and keen for more art and cultural opportunities in their local area, especially in the form of classes where people can develop their talent.

## **Question 18**

### **What would be your final message to ACW/MNW.**

This question was designed to give the respondents the ability to directly address ACW and MNW. The answers were rich and reflected much of the previous question lead discussions.

The responses were grouped by theme.

- The theme democratise art was supported by over a quarter of respondents. This response rate is similar to what was expressed and identified in Q17.
- Reflecting elements of cultural democracy, one third of respondents felt there was a need to focus on and invest in local communities.
- Again, similar to Q17 over a fifth wanted ACW/MNW to focus on Children and Young People.
- The poor and sporadic nature of information and promotional materials was noted with 8% wanting better ways of delivering this work.
- Throughout this study, lack of affordability has been a running theme including this question where 7% of respondents reported it as an issue to be addressed.
- Similar to Q17, the need for rebuilding communities with art and culture post Covid was cited by 8% of respondents.
- The need for a more rural focus was cited by a small number of respondents.

Similar to the responses to Q17, the responses to this question illustrates a community that is extremely motivated and keen for more art and cultural opportunities in their local area and want this to be put in place by ACW/MNW and other relevant players in this landscape.

## 5. Recommendations

Overall, we believe the case for change regarding Wales' approach to art and culture in rural disadvantaged communities is strongly evidenced in the findings of this study. We also believe that the findings strongly reflect a desire and a need for a change of approach to one rooted in the theory and practice of Cultural Democracy. Art and culture are by its very nature rich and diverse, however, the definition of what is art and culture is often limited to what is accepted and generated by the art and culture establishment and then reflected within the media and political processes. Working to the principles of Cultural Democracy will by necessity widen this definition resulting in a more inclusive approach to interventions in the art and culture landscape.

ACW and NMW should follow the lead of Welsh Government and work to the mantra of 'Build Back Fairer'. This includes an examination of how existing policies and practices work against the principles of Cultural Democracy.

There are many publications available that detail the theory and practice of cultural democracy, so for the sake of brevity, we won't reproduce them in this report.

### **1. Adopt Cultural Democracy in both theory and practice**

Cultural Democracy is not a new idea and is readily supported by many people in the art and culture sector, however, we don't believe it has been universally adopted in practice, particularly in regards to funding structure and decisions. We do not underestimate how difficult this could be to implement as organisational culture change is never easy, but is required.

### **2. Create structure through which Cultural Democracy can be delivered.**

If this model of working is to be adopted, structures do need to be created. It could be done through creating community led advisory boards or people's panels. These boards should be made up of people from the communities to ensure openness and transparency and to allow these same communities to be part of all decision-making processes, ensuring community needs and desires are fully reflected in all areas of work. These panels or boards will have the added bonus of acting as ambassadors of ACW and NMW bringing knowledge of them and their activities into the heart of communities.

### **3. Create a community of interest.**

There are already many art and culture groups within the study location, and here we also include educational settings. Bringing these groups together into a community of interest, will assist a cohesive and democratic approach to their development into whatever direction they wish. Good practice can be shared as well as creating the landscape for co-production and collaboration.

### **4. Improve the name recognition of ACW and NMW.**

While the low level of name recognition may not be crucial in itself, as we don't believe it impacts on the viewing pleasures of an audience, however it may impact on people's opportunities within the art and cultural industry. Low awareness of funding bodies, coupled with little personal connections to people working in these fields, may well impact on people's knowledge and ability to seek funding and opportunities, creating an opportunity gap between cities, the middle class and rural disadvantaged communities.

## **5. Encourage local art and culture providers to more closely align their activities with the wants and desires of their local community**

When comparing the reported art and culture activities partaken by respondents, to their stated desires of what they wanted put on locally, there was a large and stark disconnect. The locally provided art and culture activities, do not line up with reported local aspiration, meaning local venues are not or can't respond to local needs.

The data would indicate the very high disconnect between the stated desires of people, and their local art and culture offer, may be a driver for the very high reported disengagement between people and what is locally provided.

Taking a Cultural Democracy approach will by its nature address such issues.

## **6. Ensure there is a developed focus on Children and young people**

Throughout the consultation responses, and especially in the two closing questions, respondents wanted a clear focus on the art and cultural aspirations of children and young people. Most of the comments were angled towards art and culture while others were more in the realm of community cohesion. Colstars were consistently namechecked and supported by the respondents. Their community reach was very high with their name recognition being much higher than both ACW and NMW.

## **7. Rebuilding community cohesion in a post Covid world**

Many older people feel isolated and fear that their pre Covid bonds to their community may be permanently broken. It was suggested that art and culture could be a means to rebuild lost connections. Intergenerational work was also suggested, especially in nursing homes where people have been isolated for a year. Work could include projects that collect life stories from the large older population in the area. They are generally disconnected from arts and culture, so making a performance and or exhibition which puts their lives at the centre would have much value and could help create their inclusion into arts and culture in an accessible way.

## **8. Cultural democracy in a post Covid world.**

This is a perfect opportunity to use the principles and practices of cultural democracy, embracing the opportunities that creativity and culture play in securing local economies and talent.

Understanding the role of the arts and cultural scenes in helping build and sustain communities, improving health and wellbeing and supporting and promoting opportunities for our children and young people, should be the foundation of the work of ACW and NMW when navigating what inevitably will be a challenging post Covid 19 world.

## Annex 1 - Findings

The findings below are grouped by question and includes some of the interviewer guidance and prompts.

The sample size was 72 people from a population of 44,940.

### Question 1

**When you hear the words Arts Council Wales and National Museums Wales, what comes to mind?**

*(some prompting may be required)*

Regarding name recognition, there was a substantial difference in regards to the interviewees knowledge and understanding of ACW and NMW.

#### a) ACW

23% of respondents had a **firm understanding** of ACW's role

- *Arts council is a funding body for projects and individuals.*
- *funding body for theatres, musical groups, orchestras*
- *Arts Council Wales, I think of putting money in and talking about art.*
- *Supporting art. The usual painting, drama, theatre but then things like creative writing.*

One respondent reported direct experience of ACW.

30% of respondents had a **partial understanding** of ACW's role

- *Theatrical things*
- *Something that is in Cardiff probably. Arts Council pops up in the credits sometimes to say they've been given a bit of support.*

47% of respondents had **no understanding** or knowledge of ACW or its role.

- *I haven't heard of Arts Council Wales at all.*

#### b) NMW

13% of respondents had a **firm understanding** of NMW's role

- *Historic buildings, folk museum, museum in Cardiff, other exhibitions that are held throughout the country, it doesn't make me think of anything local.*
- *looking after our artists, sculptors, our national heritage, the museum is more than looking after our artefacts but our national heritage as well.*

52% of respondents had a **partial understanding /awareness** of NMW's role

- *Somewhere where they give funding for shows and things, the museum in Cardiff, St. Fagans.*

- *It's all in Cardiff, museums and that, there's nothing in the valleys, if you want to see anything you have to go to Cardiff*

35% of respondents had **no understanding** or knowledge of NMWs role

- *We have absolutely nothing here. Nothing. I will tell you one thing we need. A new Post Office.*
- *I think of painting, I haven't really heard of the museums you mentioned so nothing comes to mind.*

The data then shows a higher recognition of NMW than ACW:

NMW – Firm + partial understanding = 65%

ACW – Firm + partial understanding = 53%

In the discussion around museums the respondent identified museums in the following locations:

- Cardiff 44%
- St Fagans 16%
- Aberdare 7
- Aberystwyth 2

## Question 2

### When you hear the word Museum, what immediately comes to mind?

*Note for interviewer – 'don't expand on what they say'*

In regards to museums:

- history 55%
- art & artefacts 22%
- culture 10%
- international events 5%

In regards to venues, of those who name one:

- Cardiff 23%
- St Fagans 10%
- Aberdare museum 3%

### Question 3

#### When you hear the words art and culture, what immediately comes to mind?

*(again, don't expand)*

Welsh culture in particular had a high positive response rate of 41%.

The engagement rate was very high with only 7 people saying art meant nothing to them.

Welsh culture was the most popular having a response rate of 41%.

- *A celebration of our culture if you will, here in Wales, our language and our food and our music.*

This was followed by 29% for different types of art, music, singing, performance art etc.

- *Public Sculptures, art events, shows and concerts.*

A further 26% singled out visual arts.

- *works of art, painting and sculpture*

Heritage was mentioned by 20% of respondents

- *Heritage, more than anything, welsh heritage*

The responses to the question also generated single figure percentages for:

- Makes human beings different
- Art is highbrow and separates us.
- Entertainment
- Artistic expression
- Events and buildings
- Culture wars
- Crafts
- Live performance
- International art and culture
- History
- Venues
- Artefacts



## Question 4

### Do you know anyone who has been supported by ACW or NMW?

*(Prompt First explain the roles of ACW and NMW)*

*(name 7 NMW venues - National Museum Cardiff, St Fagans National Museum of History, National Waterfront Museum, Big Pit National Coal Museum, National Slate Museum, National Wool Museum, National Roman Legion Museum)*

*(further prompts may be required, and if yes, prompt for more details)*

*(name major organisations supported by ACW)*

The answers to this question highlighted a lack of direct human connection to ACW or NMW within this community.

- Yes: 21%
  - *No. I know people who have been to the museum but none that have got any money or anything like that.*
- No: 79%

Many of the positive responses indicated a lack of in-depth knowledge or simply general awareness:

- *I do know they supported the local theatre and the local Operatic society. Getting to and from is the difficulty.*

## Question 5

### What do you think of the idea of Cultural Democracy?

*(interviewer to explain the concept of Cultural Democracy if necessary)*

*(prompt for more details to discover whether the concept is valued or seen as irrelevant by the interviewee)*

Only three respondents were aware of the term and all were very much in support.

- *How long have you got? My area of work, big cultural democratisation in south wales, will have to be different all over the country and I'm afraid right now democratisation is for the haves, and not the nots.*

However, once discussion topic prompts were used there then developed rich discussions. The concept was seen as relevant and was supported by 74% of respondents, the highest support for any proposition in the study. 33% of the respondents gravitated in their discussions towards a linkage of the term 'Cultural Democracy' and accessibility in its widest definition

It really struck a chord with people - resulting in many rich discussions.

- *Interesting term, culture for all. We should give people the opportunity to get involved and in control.*
- *There's lots of people who are belonging to arts clubs who would endorse it, it's a good idea because there could be exhibitions made by local people.*
- *fabulous idea, people have a misconception that arts and culture are for the rich and elite and they are not they are for everybody and everybody should have access to them despite their background and it should be free like it used to be.*
- *I think we should be pursuing this as it's a great leveller*
- *Culture should be open to all*
- *brilliant idea.*
- *I think everybody should be involved even if they don't think they are interested*
- *It's a good idea but I think the people who make the decisions need to have a background in the actual art they are looking at, not just a salary to look into something they know nothing about which you see a lot.*
- *Yeah, great you should have your say, the whole community should be involved in decision making, not just one person or one organisation.*
- *In terms of opportunities that would be good, I live quite rurally and if I wanted to pursue something it would be harder for me than for someone who lives in the city who would have better access and connections.*
- *There was slavery in wales, give everyone a fair chance... of course I think it's a good idea*
- *The terminology should be democracy, cultural freedom and openness. It's a good idea, definitely, keep wales alive and in people's minds, culture and history....*
- *People should have more say in what's produced and how its produced*
- *multicultural? yes, it's a good idea*
- *Oh, absolutely a good idea. Man doesn't live by bread alone. Art and culture is essential especially these days because we are losing it and we sort of distance ourselves from it these days. It's really sad.*
- *I think it's interesting and a great idea that is already working here. Some small examples the bee friendly status well the community council approached local businesses for funding support they also employed a local-I don't know what you call it-street? A graffiti artist. The end result is our grotty public toilet has now got a fabulous butterfly mural painted on it. The design of the butterfly and flowers was actually produced by local children. We had a competition; the children sent their entries in and then all the winning ones were put together. Somebody came up with the overall design and then the graffiti artist translated that and out it onto the toilets.*

- *I like the sound of that because it doesn't exclude anyone. I think this could be very encouraging for people as everyone is a bit shut off these days and people don't seem to do as much. Life isn't just about watching the television is it.*
- *It's a good idea, rather than having a small number of people or a clique who decide what's done and is good and bad culture, I prefer to have people be free to choose. If you widen the decision making it would be better but I don't know how it would work how it would it be set up.*
- *It seems valuable, if you widen the decision making to more people then you're going to have a more democratic way of looking at things.*
- *Oh, it's very deep isn't it. It's a democratic thing? It seems a good idea.*

Even amongst its supporters there was concerns regarding feasibility:

- *Can you make people interested in it if they aren't already? I don't know*
- *its sounds like a good idea but how would they do that?*
- *what is democracy, a very few people make decisions for all our lives every day, how would it operate? it would be Marxism – it's an ideal to work towards but it never works does it?*

14% of respondents were opposed to the concept with a further 12% being unsure.

- *It sounds awful, a term invented to be politically correct*
- *Sounds like gobbledygook*

## Question 6

**Tell me about the last times you attended museums / art venues?**

***(prompts may be required)***

- If attended – prompt...
  - what type/s of event/s exhibition/s were they?
  - How did you find out about the event/exhibition?
  - Did you enjoy It?
  - Would you go again?
    - If not, why not?
    - If yes, why?
- If never or very rarely attended,
  - Seek the reasons.
  - Unpick any barriers affecting the interviewee.
  - Discuss perceptions of the interviewees regarding the perceived content of events and museums.

The venues Identified included:

Venues	Percentage
• Cardiff museum	38%
• St Fagans	17%
• WMC	15%
• Coliseum Aberdare	14%
• At David's Hall	9%
• Aberdare museum	9%
• New Theatre	5%
• Wool museum	2%
• Big Pit	2%
• Motorpoint	2%
• Sherman theatre	2%
• Welsh college of M&D	2%
• Parc and Dare Hall	2%
• Brecon theatre	2%
• Brecon museum	2%
• National library	2%
• Cyfarthfa Castle	2%
• Cynon Valley Museum	2%
• Roman Legion Museum	2%

Those who identified the Coliseum were quite passionate supporters of the venue with typical responses as follows:

- *We go quite regularly to Coliseum, they put on cinema experiences for the kids and pantos which we try to support.*
- *I have been to see local productions in the Coliseum from the col stars sometimes and comedians.*
- *I've been to the Coliseum quite a few times. I've been to a Motown show at the Coliseum, it was great, it was brilliant-more like that-and the crowd and the people in there the atmosphere was fantastic!*

There was a further 8 unnamed museums and 5 unnamed theatres

The Genres reported were:

Genres	Percentage
• Exhibitions	29%
• Music	20%
• Musicals	17%
• Art	17%
• Plays	8%
• Film	8%

- Comedy 6%
- Opera 6%
- Panto 3%
- Col stars 3%
- Eisteddfod 2%
- Talk 2%
- History 2%
- Children's 2%
- Choirs 2%

The respondents reported the last time they attended any venue:

Time scale	Percentage
• Within the last year	58%
• Within 18 months	5%
• Within 2 years	7%
• Within 3 years	2%
• Within 5 years	2%
• Years and years ago	23%
• 20 years ago	2%
• never	9%

## Question 7

### What would encourage you to visit museums / art venues?

*(prompts may be required - What sort of things would you like to see at venues / museums?)*

#### Genres in order of popularity:

Musicals	30%
Plays and theatre both traditional and modern	30%
Big touring shows and exhibitions	22%
Bands and concerts	20%
History and social history	17%
Focus on children	14%
music	11%
Art	11%
<i>Likes culture but not art</i>	8%
opera	8%
Natural history	6%
interactive	6%

comedy	6%
ballet	6%
pantomimes	6%
Community involvement	5%
Orchestral music	5%
dance	5%
film	5%
choirs	5%
education	5%
castles	5%
educational	5%
science, sculpture and lectures	3% each
New writing, ceramics, welsh language, Literature	2% each

Some indicative quotes include:

- *Something dynamic to grabs the attention of the children, something interactive, something that makes them feel like they are having a fun day out and they are learning something at the same time.*
- *I like anything natural history, anything dinosaur.*
- *large exhibitions, like the soldier's relics from china, big presentations, international ones*
- *No way would I pay £100 to see someone in concert*
- *Theatre plays, dramas, Agatha christie, thrillers, local new writers, but problem is now we have to travel 30 miles. The theatres near us which are very good quality only have the commercial productions and not really anything else.*
- *I like dancing and music and comedy, not ballet but modern dancing*
- *More modern, castle museum in merthyr hasn't changed. 50 years back, same art - there's no point in going again.*
- *I like to look at paintings and sculptures*
- *There is so much. I like social history. How people would like to live, everyday things. I mean there are things now in museums that I remember. Working elements of the past. Anything local and social.*
- *There is very little about women in museums and the contribution they've made is phenomenal. When I was doing history, we got taught male middle-class history. So, women's history, black history, especially in the valleys it's important.*
- *We've got lots of these local groups, amateur theatre group, we've got an art group in our local library the art society which I know some of the participants have found it a real support mechanism they've formed friendships and it's got them out of the house. I think if some one*

*could come down and look at what the area has to offer even down to we've got a knit and natter group what they produce is really something. A display of all their work that's art.*

- *Space, science, geology, geography, evolution, history of man, dinosaurs.*

**Barriers to participation were also offered even though barriers were not the focus of the question:**

cost	11%
disabled access	2%
no time	2%

Some indicative quotes include:

- *No way would I pay £100 to see someone in concert*
- *I have 10 grandchildren so it can be expensive seeing a live performance, 12 or 13 tickets, other expenses as well, it has to be quite an event!*
- *It was expensive and most of the stuff I had seen or could see online and it didn't feel too different.*

**13% of respondents said they had no interest in art or culture.**

- *Well I don't know I like everything.... your minutes up - Goodbye.*

## Question 8

**Have you ever attended an exhibition within the named local museums / arts venues?**

- If not...
  - Why not?
  - What would attract/encourage you to go?
    - If the answer is nothing, ask why.
    - What sort of things would you like to see at these museums?
- If yes...
  - Discuss the type of event.
  - How they found out about it.
  - What they thought of it.
  - Ask would they go again to the venue and unpick their answer.

All but 15% of respondents (who said they were not interested in local museums and arts venues), provided good and useful information. In regards to visits to local museums and arts venues, the following were name checked:

Coliseum	70%
Aberdare (Cynon Valley) museum	52%
Parc and Dare	8%
Big Pit	8%
Cyfarthfa Park & Castle	6%
Muni Arts Centre	2%

A number of other close venues were not noted, including Theatr Soar, Theatr Soar, Trecynon Community Hall, Redhouse Cymru, Pontypridd Museum, Steam Museum, and the Cefn Coed Colliery Museum.

The Aberdare (Cynon Valley) Museum was also well attended by the respondents. The consistent comments about the museum included:

- *Its lost funding,*
- *People attend after they have finished in Tesco so they can have a cup of tea and use the lo, and*
- *However, it's had the same exhibition for so long that people are bored of it.*

Localness in all its forms was very well supported, however, it was also seen as limiting:

- *They tend to be more limited to local, like panto and local performance art, its recurring, it's the same, it doesn't really open up to youngsters.*

**There was so also very strong support for the Coliseum:**

- *The kids do Shakespeare every year with a visiting company, they teach Shakespeare and they put the plays on, my daughters been in 2 now. It's good for teaching our young kids culture.*

**Being semi-rural, travel is an issue that can easily isolate; however, some elements of local innovation to combat the lack of accessibility is present within the communities one respondent for example highlighted a local initiative:**

- *We hire a mini bus for all our elderly neighbours and take them. I have a friend in the am dram club so I get info from him. Having the means to get there makes a difference.*

**When respondents described the activities experience at their local venues, the following was reported:**

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Local artists, performances and exhibitions	40%
Pantomimes	14%
Seeing the Colstars	14%
Bands and concerts	13%
Films	8%
Art and artefacts	8%
comedians	8%
Choirs	6%
General exhibitions	6%
Musicals	5%
Plays	5%
Opera	5%



Music	5%
Christmas shows	5%
Touring	5%
Dance	2%

**While children were not a strong theme in this question, change was called for:**

While children and young people's participation was not a strong theme in this question, change was called for:

- *It would be nice to have things on a national scale with all children from different areas mixing up different cultures, you tend to get the same names in things all the time on a local scale it's not really encouraging a lot of youngsters to get involved in performance arts.*

**Question 9**

**Do you believe that the 7 named National Museum Wales are connected/linked with your local community?**

*(discuss, expand and prompt if required)*

**The narrative around the answers included:**

- used by tourists
- they are there but you have to be interested to visit
- distance a problem
- good for kids and education
- big pit feels connected
- our responsibility to use them
- lack of advertising and knowing what's going on, and
- can be (Cardiff) a big day out.

**In broad terms this was the opinions of the respondents:**

Yes	25%
No	37%
Considered don't know / not sure	11%
No stated opinion	27%

**'No' was the largest response and in some ways the firmest and most unequivocal:**

- *I don't think they come out of Cardiff those organisations, keep it Cardiff and that's it.*
- *I don't know about connected but you can visit a museum whenever you want...., they don't make a difference to my community but they are there If you want to go you just have to make the effort if you want to.*

- *...not up in the valleys, I never see any advertisements .... a few adverts on the television would be handy... don't have newspapers mind... so if they advertised, I'd be more likely to go.*

**Amongst the yes's, to be inclusive of NMW venues, the definition of local was stretched:**

- *You have to travel to them and go and look what's on there but I think St Fagans, big pit and maybe Cardiff museum feel linked to us here, the others not really*
- *All part of wales, they feel connected to me.*

### **Question 10**

**Do you know many people who have exhibited / performed at the named local museums / arts venues?**

The responses were mainly related to performance art:

Yes Colstars	34%
General yes	6%
Yes, related to exhibited	5%
No.	25%
Not sure/don't know	27%
No answer	3%

## Question 11

**What type of exhibitions / cultural events / performances would persuade you to visit the 7 National Museum Wales / arts venues?**

This question was responded to with great enthusiasm with strong engagement to its content. We have split the responses into 3 areas:

### 1) Interest to ACW

Music dominated the responses:

Genres	Mentioned by respondents
General music, bands and Concerts	21%
Musicals	16%
Art	8%
Big touring shows	6%
Opera	5%
Comedy	5%
Theatre/plays	5%
Ballet	3%
Dance	3%
Big named performers	3%

### 2) Interest to NMW

There were more responses for NMW related activities. The respondents did not limit their responses to NMW establishments, but stated what they wanted from the sector:

Genres	Mentioned by respondents
Big touring exhibitions	20%
A wider range of exhibitions	15%
Local history and social	15%
Welsh heritage/history	10%
General history	8%
Natural history Science and nature	6%
International touring exhibitions	5%
interactive history	3%

### 3) Cross cutting

Interest to children and Families	15%
-----------------------------------	-----

**The following received just one response each.**

Sculpture, Shakespeare, book club, craft workshops, military history, contemporary history, pantomimes, good reviews, lectures and workshops, tribute bands, for work, and films.

## Question 12

**Thinking back before lockdown, were you aware of what exhibitions and arts events were taking place locally and national in Wales?**

The breakdown for this question is as follows:

<b>Response</b>	<b>%</b>
Fully aware	15%
Only locally aware	4%
Only nationally aware	1%
<b>Total with awareness</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Partially aware</b>	<b>31%</b>
Not aware	42%
Locally not aware	1%
Nationally not aware	6%
<b>Total nor aware</b>	<b>49%</b>

Thirty-four respondents also informed us of how they were Informed / partial Informed:

<b>Method</b>	<b>number</b>
Their own online research	16
Venue mailing/emailing	8
Social media	6
leaflets	4

## Question 13

**How would you like to be informed about new events/exhibitions?**

Below is the table that represent the preferred mediums respondents preferred to be information of new events/exhibitions.

Posters leaflets flyers	52%
Social media	37%
Email	37%
Internet	19%
Newspaper	15%
Radio	11%
Tv	5%
Word of mouth	5%
Billboard	2%
Parish magazine	2%

## Question 14

**What do you think is the best way the Venue can inform local people about upcoming events/exhibitions?**

Below is the table that represents the respondent's views of how their community can be best informed of new events/exhibitions.

Posters leaflets flyers	52%
social media	40%
internet	21%
newspapers	19%
emails	11%
TV	11%
radio	5%

Billboards, sign posts, parish magazine, and local circulars were each suggested by one person.

## Question 15

**What do you consider to be art and culture?**

*(Discuss)*

For the purpose of clarity, art and culture are presented below separately in their answers.

### 1) What is art?

Most people identified specific art forms when thinking about what art is.

- *Anything to do with theatre, shows, dance classes, anything that brings things for people to see*

The concept of art was not discussed to and meaningful degree. However, concepts did enter the discussions, be it fleetingly.

Different art forms	56%
Self-expression	8%
Creativity	5%

Moving, thought provoking and talent were each mentioned once by respondents.

### 2) What is culture?

One respondent stated:

- *Culture encompasses so many things, a nation, it's people and its heritage*

While a respondent had a different view:

- *I don't really know what I think of the word culture to be honest, the word has snobbery attached to it because when you say someone is cultured it means refined and that not really what the word means...*

There were many more varied answers when compared to art. They are thematically listed below:

The way we live	23%
Heritage	19%
History	13%
Language	6%
expression	6%
Community	6%
National	5%
Highbrow	3%

Traditions, location, celebration, Eisteddfod, local, social and education were each mentioned once by respondents.

### **3) Everything is connected and is part of art and culture.**

The Idea that everything, every part of our lives, were connected and inseparable from art and culture was stated by a number of respondents.

Everything is connected 16%

Comments included

- *They are interlinked, ways of expressing philosophy and ideas and expressing entertainment, you need both together to make it successful.*
- *If you speak to people in the valleys they'd say what is culture, its everything, a way of life, what you do, what your involved in.*
- *Everything to do with life really*
- *There's not a distinction between art and culture, they are all on the same spectrum... you've got comedians and opera singers and they are both telling stories... art and culture is a wide spectrum of education, entertainment, appreciating people's skills. Its people expressing themselves...*

Not interested – only 5%

- *I've never thought about it, I'm not interested.*

## Question 16

### How connected do you feel to art and culture in your community?

The table below represents how connected respondents felt to art and culture in your community:

Fully connected	12%
Partially connected	29%
Disconnected	59%

Comments included:

- *Not at all, I go abroad now, not to say it couldn't change if the right circumstances were encouraged.*
- *I'm not connected with it and I don't see a lot of connection in the community.*
- *There is nothing going on, it's like a ghost town. We need people with nice ideas, they should be on the council. It's awful at the moment. We used to have...we had two cinemas, courses you could go to and it was good you know. Now it's gone to nothing, even the shops, it's all takeaways.*

With such conflicting data, we need to examine the quality of experience of the high number of people who attend various local events.

Those who felt connected were often very enthusiastic:

- *I feel connected to performing arts by amateur dramatics and exhibitions at museum in Aberdare, I enjoy all sorts of things, take pleasure in whatever there is is my philosophy, you might not think much of it but you've had a look.*
- *I'm connected to the community, people think of culture like something posh like Shakespeare or something, that's not what it is all about it. We do get involved in everyday things, when we try to raise funds, we put something cultural on, the local choir or comedian, use culture to raise money for causes like food banks.*

## Question 17

**What would you and/or your community want from a programme designed and funded to support creative activity in your locality?**

*(because of the above discussions, the interviewees should be able to answer this key question to the best of their ability and interest. Lots to discuss here discuss and prompt)*

The response/theme breakdown is as follows:

### More classes were a very popular choice:

Craft classes: 39%

- Cookery lesson
- Cake decorating
- Felting
- Woodwork classes
- Knitting and embroidery classes
- Blacksmiths
- Furniture restoring
- Allotments and gardening club
- Flower Arranging

Art classes: 24%

- Painting
- Photography
- Jewellery
- Pottery
- Music

### Other response/themes were as follows:

- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| • More local funding with local control               | 29% |
| • Ensuring art and cultural needs of CYP are met      | 27% |
| • Financial support for theatre groups & the Coliseum | 21% |
| • Post Covid community cohesion response              | 16% |
| • Better funded Colstars                              | 8%  |
| • Improving disability access and transport           | 10% |
| • More support for music                              | 5%  |
| • More inter generation art and culture               | 5%  |

There was also support for:

- More and better information
- The mapping of local organisations to help enable people to know what's on their doorstep.
- Using art and culture to help regenerate their local community – offering job opportunities
- Book club
- Hold collaborative arts event
- Lectures on local history



## Question 18

What would be your final message to ACW/MNW.

A number of themes were identified and are highlighted:

**The theme democratise art was supported by 26% of respondents and included**

- *It annoys me that WNO get such a massive amount of funding and it's not an art form that's followed by the majority of people, the arts council should also look after the smaller groups, we get nothing but we give a lot back.*
- *make art and culture open to everyone*
- *Get organised! Get the best people in the local areas together to decide what the local area needs and what can be done.*
- *Be inclusive don't give into very strong groups. Have a look and build it at the ground levels.*
- *Use art to enlighten people.*
- *Make it more inclusive, include as many people as you can, people who like the physical arts alike drawing and sculpting to other people who prefer drama etc, make it as inclusive as possible so everyone feels connected to it*
- *...they strike me as being elitist*

**The theme of focusing on Children and Young People was supported by 21% of responses.**

Responses included:

- *It's all about the children for me*
- *To invest money in activities for children. It helps them build confidence, interact with children of different ages and different social backgrounds*
- *We took our daughter to exhibitions from when she was a little girl and she still loves it now, it shows if you start at a young age, they will keep up the interest up.*
- *Target some of the youngsters to keep our heritage and culture going, they learn a lot in school but there's nothing to draw them in.*
- *A classical education is necessary to appreciate many things in our modern world.*
- *I don't think drama should be taught in schools it should be English literature, teaching the plays themselves then putting on the play properly would help get people interested, not bits and pieces.*

### **33% of respondents felt there was a need to focus on and invest in local communities.**

Responses grouped around this theme included:

- *We've got so much history and a wealth of arts and crafts and culture it's a pity it isn't readily available to everyone.*
- *Don't put everything in Cardiff and Swansea we need investment in the valleys where people are really struggling with unemployment and being poor, it could help people's lives, see there's more to it.*
- *Make it simpler to get support.*
- *Diversify and put funds into the local communities, there's little that goes out in to the smaller grassroots communities, unless you start building that up its going to get worse and worse.*
- *Get more money, keep it simple, do more simple community activities.*
- *Put some money back into Aberdare.*
- *We used to be 'The Queen of the Valleys' so it would be right to invest and draw in people again. Make things interesting for the local people.*
- *Put some investment into these areas as we feel we've been forgotten. Cardiff always gets, every-time because it's assumed, they have a lot to offer.*

### **Better promotion**

8% of respondent cited the need to improve the promotion of art and culture:

- *Promote yourself better, tell us what you've got, don't hide your light under a bushel, sing your praises!*
- *Spend your money on getting the message out to people of what you've got going on and getting them involved by reaching them in the places they actually go to, to encourage them to get off their behinds and be proud of their community again.*

### **Affordability**

Throughout this study, affordability has been raised many times. Regarding this question, 7% reported it as an issue to be addressed.

- *I think people who would like to go to things maybe don't have the money, I know our museums are free at the moment, a lot of times they have to have cars to get there, there's no public transport to get back form Cardiff. Especially older people can't get to things.*
- *I would dip my toe into say swan lake if it wasn't 80 quid a ticket, I'd try things more f they weren't so expensive, I'd try culture that I'm not so familiar with.*

### **Post Covid community cohesion**

The need for rebuilding communities with art and culture post Covid was cited by 8% of respondents.

- *As we come out of Covid, try to think of Welsh local history and forgotten people.*
- *Bring back fun and good times.*
- *Focus on bringing people back together and giving them skills to keep traditions going and keep themselves in work.*

### **Rural focus**

Two people felt there should be more of a rural focus:

- *Being a new mum, things for parents or families...creative groups, a little forest school seeing as we live so rurally, joining our environment with creativity, using where we are, walks and creative activities in a group that can motivate you to keep going and joining in.*
- *look at more local projects, smaller local projects in rural community as well as big national ones.*

### **Miscellaneous**

Amongst the responses, the following items were all cited once.

- Put on transport for the community and trips to Cardiff and back.
- More disability Art
- More international exhibitions
- Balance between traditional and modern.
- Balance between local and national.
- We want pantomimes and musicals
- Multi arts events
- Keep fighting for art