

Towards cultural democracy

Promoting cultural capabilities for everyone

Beyond the deficit model

In recent years, there has been increasing criticism of the prevailing approach to cultural policy in the UK, which places primary emphasis on promoting 'access' to the publicly funded arts. Critics of this approach call it 'the deficit model', as it implies that people who don't attend publicly funded arts are not doing what they 'should'. These criticisms open-up key questions concerning the value of culture and the operations of power that enable and constrain what is culturally possible. But no-one has yet come up with a viable alternative vision of the future: an overall approach to cultural policy and practice beyond the deficit model. Just such an alternative vision is what this report offers: Towards cultural democracy.

Recognising interconnections

Based on a 15-month research project with the Get Creative campaign, in this report we call for a radical but pragmatic new approach to understanding and enabling cultural opportunities in the UK. Whilst acknowledging the vital importance of the publicly supported arts, and the profit-making creative industries, our research casts a spotlight on their relationships with 'everyday creativity' – from singing in church, to breakdancing in a shopping mall - a plethora of cultural activity that is happening around the UK but which is often overlooked. We show how the arts, creative industries and everyday creativity are not separate but deeply interconnected, and enable each other to flourish. This, in turn, re-directs attention onto the range of cultural freedoms that are needed in order to make this creative and cultural activity possible.

Cultural capability for all

Towards cultural democracy sheds light on the explosion of cultural creativity that could be happening if the arts, creative industries and everyday creativity were better connected. This would radically increase everyone's substantive freedom to co-create versions of culture: what the report refers to as cultural capability. It is a new way to understand what cultural opportunity consists of, moving well beyond cultural policy's over-arching emphasis on enabling access to currently existing publicly funded arts. Cultural capability is the combined freedom to speak, to express, to be heard, to experience, to make, to build, to contest, to create. It is the key idea at the heart of this report, and central to the vision of cultural democracy we present - in which everyone has the substantive freedom to co-create versions of culture.

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The reason the idea of cultural capability is so important is the implications it has for reframing cultural decision-making, from national cultural policy makers, to theatre chief-executives, to knitting club organisers. Cultural capability not only offers a new analysis of what cultural opportunity consists of: it provides a distinctive and urgent account of what is at stake in cultural opportunity, showing why it is important to our individual and collective lives, and to our democracy. This research speaks to the politics of culture, and to the culture of our politics. Beyond establishing this distinctive normative framework, the findings in this report point towards a viable future in which everyone has cultural capability: substantial and sustained opportunities to draw freely on their own cultural powers and possibilities - a world in which everyone has real freedom to co-create versions of culture. This achievable vision of the world is what we call cultural democracy.

Building new partnerships – everyone's invited

This report provides examples of the ways in which cultural democracy is achievable, and points towards the possibilities of new partnerships being created to enable it to flourish. Whilst the arts and creative industries must lead the agenda, these findings and recommendations are addressed to anyone who wants to help to achieve a more democratic and equal future for the UK. Ultimately, this is a call to collaboration: to work together to promote sustained and varied cultural opportunities in every neighbourhood across the country. As the report shows, there is great potential for cultural democracy to flourish.



To download the report, please visit
www.kcl.ac.uk/towardsculturaldemocracy

To discuss further, or to be added to a mailing list for future events
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