

Written evidence submitted by Professor Maria Delgado

Summary

The immediate effect on the sector can be mapped across different areas, closure of theatres, opera houses, cinemas, music venues – with short and longer term economic consequences in terms both of threats to an industry that has a worldwide reputation and to emotional and mental wellbeing. The effects of the arts on spiritual wellbeing, on motivation and self is profound. People speak of the value of culture in terms of providing an enhanced sense of wellbeing, a lifting of the soul – something unmeasurable but clearly tangible. The French director, Jean Vilar, wrote that theatre should be readily available to all: ‘A public service in exactly the same way as water or electricity’ (Le Theatre, service public, Paris: Gallimard, 1975, p. 173). Vilar, was the architect of the Avignon Festival – an initiative, like the Edinburgh Festival created in the aftermath of WW2 to heal the divisions caused by the devastation of a global conflict that had left 55 million dead. Propelled by the modernist belief in the inestimable value of cultural activity as a means of encouraging communities to reimagine themselves follow epochs of profound trauma, both Avignon and Edinburgh showed culture’s value as a key driver in bringing communities together to look at the ways in which they might envisage a different future. Culture operates as a way of rethinking our past, processing our present and imagining our future. It will be a record of how we responded to Covid-19, a way of understanding the temper of the times and mapping how we coped with the pandemic and its aftermath – both in material and emotional ways.

In the absence of live entertainment, the broadcasting and audiovisual industries have obviously played a growing role in satisfying the population’s appetite for culture. This is evidenced in the take up in subscriptions to broadcasting platforms like Netflix and Apple TV but also in the ways that theatrical and music fare recorded prior to the lockdown has been streamed through different fora. Much of this has been streamed for free – as with the National Theatre Home initiative – and it has shown how a national theatre can serve as a nationwide, rather than a capital-based, public service. Many who have never set foot into the National Theatre have engaged with its online streaming and the comments on the YouTube streaming platform make clear what it has represented for them in terms of enjoyment, delight, pleasure and emotional wellbeing. Over 200,000 people tuned in live to watch *One Man, Two Guvnors* when it streamed live at 7pm YouTube on 2 April, with figures of 1.6million by 3 April (<https://www.broadwayworld.com/article/National-Theatres-Livestreamed-ONE-MAN-TWO-GUVNORS-Reaches-Nearly-1-Million-Views-20200403>). The generous position taken by cultural organisations to stream work for free in the early weeks of lockdown has created a situation where the value of culture is acknowledged but the wider cost is not necessarily recognised. There has been a labour involved in rehearsing and producing work, a labour involved in recording it. Artistic labour needs to be paid for. This is not a hobby. Sharing productions through streaming for free has been a remarkable gesture of civic duty. Once the cultural offering has been released for free, however, it proves difficult to move to pay on demand or subscription models to help ensure the short- and mid-term sustainability of the UK’s cultural bodies.

The UK's model of cultural subsidy differs from that of other nations. In Germany, state subsidy of culture was 1.8 billion in 2018, analogous figures in the UK for 2019 – the year of a 4.1% increase to DCMS – seem to suggest a budget of less than half that (£300m for national museums and galleries and £500m for *both* Arts Council England Sport England). Pledges of £50b in Germany in late March (<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/bundesregierung/staatsministerin-fuer-kultur-und-medien/aktuelles/bundesregierung-beschliesst-soforthilfe-gruetters-rettungsschirm-fuer-den-kulturbereich--1733612>) have been seen as part of a federal arts project with parallels to the New Deal introduced in the USA by Roosevelt's government in the early 1930s – support for the self-employed was a key part of the package. Sponsorship – subject to a range of market forces – has had an increasingly important role in sustaining the cultural sector over the past decade as levels of state subsidy have declined in real terms.

A complex combination of factors thus leaves our cultural sector in a very vulnerable position as it becomes clear that government's guidelines on returning to work are unable to be taken up by a sector that has a particular set of challenges because of the nature of what is involved in production work, rehearsal, performance and filming. In Spain, the decision by the Minister of Culture and Sport to claim that culture was not important at a time of Covid (mis)quoting Orson Welles led to a 48-hour cultural blackout as artists pulled their work from the internet and a call from major Spanish artists for a change of policy which did come – formulated in discussion with major cultural industry bodies (<https://thetheatretimes.com/culture-matters-lluis-pasqual-pedro-almodovar-and-spains-cultural-sector-respond-to-the-seeming-indifference-of-the-countrys-minister-of-culture/>, <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/scapvc/theatre/research/current/culturesoftheleft/dispatches/dispatches/>).

There needs to be a recognition that it is not simply the larger buildings-based institutions that need support. The fluid nature of the UK's performing arts ecology means that small- and mid-scale touring companies and short films provide an important terrain for actors and designers, often cast or employed in their first jobs. To protect the large-scale at the expense of the small-scale will threaten a cultural landscape in which artists and actors work in a highly fluid manner across theatre, film and broadcasting sectors.

The culture sector is evolving – note the enhanced use of the digital as a performative space – and it will continue to evolve. The arts work around change, they always have done, they always will. They are resilient, to a point. But if we want to ensure that they can be enjoyed by all and that artistic voices come from as wide a sector of society and are as representative of that society as possible, there needs to be a government package that recognises their role in the wider civic structures and the fact that aid needs to be flexible and inclusive to ensure participation and drive positive change. This crisis point for the cultural sector comes at a time when structural issues about access and inclusion are, quite rightly, a key part of the discussion of what a post-Covid future for the arts might look like. They cannot be disaggregated. The arts have a role to play in forging a more equitable society.

Contributions that the cultural sector makes to the broader economy and possible roadmaps for future support are covered in the response made by the Creative Industries Federation to this call for evidence. I have also contributed to the GuildHE response and shared these

preliminary thoughts with Matthew Guest who authored the GuildHE response. This summary is about supporting the case for why culture matters – as part of supporting our wellbeing, promoting mental health and reminding us of what it means to be human. We don't yet know what the future will bring, but an inclusive cultural sector will help us forge and respond to it.

Professor Maria Delgado

Director of Research, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London