


Cultural snapshot reveals diminishing investment

By **KATE FIELDING**

12:00AM SEPTEMBER 10, 2019 •  NO COMMENTS

Did you listen to music this morning? Perhaps you read a book or played a game to wind down last night. What about the weekend: are you going out to see a film or take the kids to a museum?

Whether you recognise it or not, you probably participate in cultural activities every week. They are a fundamental part of life for most Australians, providing significant social, community and personal benefits. There's also an enormous economic spin-off, with creative and cultural activity pumping \$111bn into the Australian economy each year and employing more than a half-million Australians.

But is Australia adapting to global disruption across its creative and cultural industries? A new independent think tank, A New Approach, is trying to find out. ANA champions effective investment and return in Australian arts and culture. It was established last year, backed by three Australian philanthropic organisations, and its ambition is to strengthen bipartisan, business and wider community support for arts and culture through a truly independent, measured approach. We aim to foster a more robust discussion about cultural policy, one based on data and contemporary evidence.

Significant transformations are happening in how we create, share and experience culture. That requires rethinking policy settings, incentives and other forms of public and private support to ensure we all have relevant opportunities to participate in and contribute to a rich cultural life.

Many other countries — from Britain to South Africa, Canada to Indonesia — have recognised that creativity and culture are an essential part of contemporary society and economy. They are exploring the critical role and value of culture and creativity, including in health, education, social cohesion, international relations and the future of work.

ANA is working to drive this recognition and exploration in Australia. We understand the challenges facing art and culture cannot be resolved solely through the lens of funding. Finding the right incentives and policy settings to seize the opportunities requires a more nuanced approach.

To this end, ANA is preparing a series of reports that looks at the benefits and impact of investment in arts and culture, drawing on case studies in Australia and examples of effective initiatives from around the world.

On Tuesday we release our first report, *The Big Picture: Public Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia*. It provides a comprehensive snapshot of funding from all tiers of government between 2007-08 and 2017-18. Its purpose is to establish baseline understanding of public expenditure and to identify some international comparisons.

The report finds there has been an increased funding commitment from local government that is clearly seeing the impact of arts and culture in their communities. Our local councils should be commended for stepping up their commitment. But the report also finds that our governments overall have reduced funding per head of population by 4.9 per cent in the past decade, despite a significant increase in 2017-18.

We hope this report and future releases can open up new conversations about the transformation required to ensure effective, relevant investment in culture and creativity. It will require commitment and courage from all parts of the system — from philanthropists, businesses, non-government organisations, individuals and creators — as well as from governments.

We see a great opportunity, under new ministerial stewardship at a federal level, for more strategic co-operation between our federal, state, territory and local governments. This is an important first step in getting better outcomes for the many Australians who create, enjoy and value arts and culture.

Kate Fielding is program director of A New Approach.