

Measuring Cultural Knowledge Exchange's Real Value: Five of my Favourite Assumptions

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- Assumption one. Real value is created by our Cultural Knowledge Exchange (KE) work.

Real value for individuals, organisations and communities and for wider society and the planet. Things are done that couldn't be done otherwise. People are inspired. Ways of doing things are transformed for the better. Some of these impacts are planned for, some of them not, but they happen anyway. The arts, culture and creative way! As a KE practitioner it's a privilege witnessing those moments when steps on the journey to creating this value are taken. Steps taken by Arts and Humanities researchers, by creative and community partners, by participants - the co producers of new knowledge and experience. As one member of Manor and Castle's Black Ladies Group said at a recent Roots and Futures' 'Cook Out and Culture Share' event, "*Talking with you has made my day*". Roots and Futures is a University of Sheffield, Archaeology, AHRC-funded place-based KE project enabling, empowering and embedding the voice and influence of racially marginalised communities within Sheffield's Heritage Strategy. Real value for an individual. Real value for a city.

But what is the nature of the evidence of this real value? How far on the journey of transformational impact have those involved actually travelled?

- Assumption two. Measuring/accounting for/describing this value with evidence and consistency supports the case for investment in cultural Knowledge Exchange work and also generates insights supportive of reflective learning and continuous improvement for our community of practice.

For many of us stories are the richest form for telling how change is coming about. We recognise the scenarios, we identify with those described and enjoy the performances of the actors. People respond to stories. Directors, CEOs, politicians, investors all utilise stories as tools for resourcing and growing their businesses and missions. For practitioners, the experience of the story can show how the subtleties of human dimensions of imperfect real-world knowledge exchange play out, what we have to be mindful of for bringing about the real value of our work.

But whose stories? Who's telling the stories? Whose words? What's in, what's left out? Who is it who is reading/listening to the stories? What gets lost in translation across the borders of discipline and sector? And how does the value of one story compare to the value of another? What are the real world underlying determinants of this value creation that is being storified... where/how is an inspirational narrative underpinned with actuals, the elements of the measurable? I imagine it will be better when, for those that need it, heart, head and purse are connected/interconnected, there on the same page or at least in the same book. Numbers (metrics) and words!

- Assumption three. We don't want to have inappropriate, unwieldy, ineffective measurement regimes imposed on us.

Apologies, but I'd more than likely rebel, or despair or just offer perfunctory less than valuable input and leave others to it. However, when it's appropriate, wieldy and effective, to be open to what measurement can reveal and make readable about the real value (or otherwise) that we create, my experience is that this is a good thing. Even if the story's good, measurement is one tool for seeing how we can make good better or do something differently if what we are doing is clearly not delivering as we anticipated.

- Assumption four. We already have the expertise, methodologies and frameworks to apply and adapt for this purpose.

So, this is such a live topic! Just in the last few months I've attended events with NCACE, Civic University Network, UKRI all pitching in. Right now numbers of us are delving into the discussion topics on the Praxis Auril members community where institutions are reporting how they are finding solutions. For example, Philippa Christoforou talks about the Oxford University Innovation approach: They measure Sustainable Development Goals - targets and indicators if possible; Set Key Performance Indicators that each project measures its impact by, with the understanding that each project is so distinct, that they cannot impose metrics; They underpin this by an impact management project framework: What; Who; How Much (scale, depth, duration of outcome)¹; Contribution; and Risk. These five dimensions of impact are not a million miles from the approaches and considerations of ascription of impact that widely-used Social Return on Investment (SROI)² takes account of.

In these conversations Logic Models, Theory of Change and principles all come up with frameworks designed not just to deliver data but also to drive good practice and therefore more beneficial outcome.

- Assumption five. Bringing onstream an appropriate and effective measurement methodology will require a carefully tailored and resourced adoption strategy. Culture shift will likely be involved for this to be successful. Hearts and minds need to be engaged.

We (artists, researchers, communities) love our stories, the observed, the anecdotal. We love our unexpected outcomes. We are so good at this stuff! Also we are rightfully wary of imposed instrumental, prescriptive agendas. And possibly because of this we may also struggle to have the means at hand to understand and show the long term real value for people and organisations, the return on investment for our contributions of insight, creativity and participation. 10 years on, what has changed (or otherwise) because of what we do together? My assumption is we need to be willing to advocate for measures that reflect the real value, affective and inclusive, of what this co produced knowledge exchange creates. Also that there's rigour in methods of understanding and description to be embraced. Now is a good time to be doing this because so many brilliant people are giving thought, voice and action to the project.

1. <https://impactfrontiers.org/norms/five-dimensions-of-impact/>
2. <https://socialvalueuk.org/resources/>