

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill



Adrian Paci. *Per Speculum*, 2006. Film on 16mm, duration 8min.
Courtesy of Galleria Francesca Kaufman, Milan.

Consultation by the National Assembly for Wales
Environment and Sustainability Committee

Written submission from the Arts Council of Wales

September 2014

“If the scientists are right, we’re living through the biggest thing that’s happened since human civilisation emerged. One species, ours, has by itself in the course of a couple of generations managed to powerfully raise the temperature of a whole planet, to knock its most basic systems out of kilter. But oddly, though we know about it, we don’t know about it. It hasn’t registered in our gut; it isn’t part of our culture. Where are the books? The poems? The plays? The goddamn operas?”

Bill McKibben *Open Democracy* (2005)

“This disparity between the rich and the poor has been noticed. It has been noticed, most acutely and not unnaturally, by the poor. Just because they have noticed it, it won't last for long. Whatever else in the world we know survives to the year 2000, that won't. Once the trick of getting rich is known, as it now is, the world can't survive half rich and half poor. It's just not on.”

C P Snow *The Two Cultures* (1959)

Consultation on the Well-Being and Future Generations (Wales) Bill:

Our response to the terms of reference

1. Legislating to put sustainability and sustainable development at the heart of government and the wider public sector

We endorse and support the Welsh Government's commitment to putting sustainability and sustainable development at the heart of government and the wider public sector. We particularly welcome the broadening of the Bill's designation to include the concept of well-being.

We recognise that climate change and environmental protection are amongst the most urgent issues of our time. There can be no doubting that they require urgent and focused action. However, we believe it to be a significant improvement that the Bill now acknowledges well-being as central to creating a strong, vibrant and ultimately sustainable society. Addressing issues of well-being helps to create resilient communities with individuals whose lives are happy, creative, positive and productive.

We want to help the arts sectors to understand and address these issues, ensuring that the arts sector demonstrates active leadership in helping to shape the cultural and creative industries for the future. However, we believe that a truly intelligent approach to sustainability will extend beyond environmental concerns, important though they are, to embrace the cultural, economic and social considerations that sustain our sense of resilience and well-being. The Bill, as currently titled, provides the philosophical framework within which this can happen.

The arts have a key role to play in supporting the principles of well-being and sustainability.

The arts illuminate and give life to the wide range of strategies that underpin public life. From arts and health to cultural tourism, public art to town centre re-generation, the arts bring meaning, enjoyment and well-being to our everyday lives.

The Welsh Government wants Wales to be fair, prosperous and confident, improving the quality of life of its people in all of the country's communities. The Arts support this. And if we allow it to happen, the Arts will be a guide, a commentator, a critic, a persuader, a leader in the campaign that must now unfold – because that's what culture can do.

2. The general principles of the Bill

The “common aim” and “sustainable development principle”

We support the framework of legislation for public bodies’ duties. As a Welsh Government Sponsored Body we would expect to set and publish our sustainability goals, measure our progress and report the results publicly.

We are broadly in favour of the definition of sustainable development that is being proposed. However, in its evolution from the definition first presented in “One Wales, One Planet”, some key features have been lost.

We would therefore advocate an amended definition along the following lines:

“Sustainable development means enhancing the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of people and communities, achieving a better quality of life for our own and future generations in ways which:

- promote social justice and equality of opportunity;
- enhance the natural and cultural environment and respect its limits using only our fair share of the earth’s resources
- sustain our environmental and cultural legacy in ways which do not compromise future generations’ ability to meet their own needs.”

Ultimately, however, it will be for the Welsh Government to articulate and describe a different future. And in doing so, it should not be obsessed with the “what?” to the exclusion of everything else – there must be equal importance paid to the “how?”

The approach to improving well-being – the well-being goals

A prosperous Wales

No comments offered.

A resilient Wales

We recognise that the proposed definition focuses on natural environment and bio diverse ecosystems. Clearly this is important. However, there are other facets to resilience – the human dimension – that involves the robustness, ingenuity and creativity of individuals and communities, and their ability to adapt and withstand unexpected shocks.

The arts are well able to develop and nurture this type of resilience. Engaging in creative activity increases individuals’ or communities’ confidence and feeling of self-worth; and provides a sense of empowerment. These are qualities that contribute positively to well-being and resilience. (See also “A Wales of cohesive communities” below.)

We would therefore advocate a slightly amended definition along the following lines:

“A biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that nurture the potential of human creativity and capability to support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change.”

A healthier Wales

No comments offered.

A more equal Wales

We strongly support this goal. A generous, fair-minded and tolerant society values and respects the creativity of all its citizens.

It's a society that embraces equality and celebrates difference, wherever it's found in race, gender, sexuality, age or disability. There's so much that can enrich and expand our culture and we would suggest that our vision should be of an approach to sustainability that more fully reflects diversity.

Change is rarely neutral or low impact, even when we aspire towards less bad outcomes. Nevertheless, social justice issues are nearly always a consequence of legislative change. It is government's job to protect the vulnerable against the implications of its own legislation.

We would therefore advocate a slightly amended definition along the following lines:

“A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background, culture or circumstances on a fair and equal basis.”

A Wales of cohesive communities

(See section above on “A resilient Wales”.)

A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language

Imagine Wales. And when you've done that – pictured it, heard it, enjoyed it, read about it, celebrated it – try to think of our country without song, the spoken word on stage and screen, without poetry and novels, and dance and sculptures and ceramics and paintings and images, and all of the living traditions – in both our languages – that make our contemporary culture so potentially dynamic.

Culture is about the things that we do, whether stretching the mind or the legs. It can be alone, mountain biking in the Brecon Beacons, walking the coastal path in Pembrokeshire, putting the branches on the family tree from parish and county archives. Or together, whether in a band rocking a Caernarfon pub, in the crowd at the Green Man Festival, or in concert with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

And for many people, 'doing' is as important as 'seeing' – sometimes more so.

There is a very strong tradition of amateur and community involvement in the arts. Whether singing in a choir, playing in a football team or participating in Eisteddfodau, amateurs and volunteers have been as much part of the cultural DNA of Wales as our award-winning athletes, artists and national companies. Large numbers of people take part in the arts as amateurs and volunteers.

Because culture is fun.

Singing with a choir, entering your first fun run with friends, writing a poem, enjoying the exuberance of dancing – these are all experiences that we cherish and remember throughout our lives. And taking part can lead to all kinds of benefits. We can get pleasure from learning to dance, sing, or to swim that length a little faster, to turn our thoughts and ideas into poems, stories and pictures. We can become more confident in the company of others, share dreams and imaginings, find out about ourselves and the communities that we live in.

And even if we don't actually want to do things ourselves, we're fascinated by watching others doing them, or enjoying what they've done. It's what fills seats at the Wales Millennium Centre, the Scala in Prestatyn or the Liberty Stadium in Swansea. It's what draws the crowds to our National Museums, Hay Festival, and Helf a Gelf. It can be the joyous tribal celebration which brings the tens of thousands to the National Eisteddfod or to watch Wales at the Millennium Stadium.

Culture can boost our personal, physical and mental well-being. But culture can also have a huge impact on the economic health and social well-being of communities.

We celebrate culture in Wales through the medium of English and Welsh.

We're a bi-lingual nation – legally, socially, culturally, and as individuals and communities. And nothing makes Wales more distinctive than the Welsh Language.

Our languages provide the means to understand and enjoy an extraordinarily rich literature and culture. We make sense of our identity through the languages that we speak. We take pride in belonging to a community that identifies itself through the words that convey its cultural beliefs and experiences.

Culture and the arts thrive on this exploration of the lived experience. We're many 'Wales', culturally, geographically, economically and linguistically. If Art can capture this, then the possession and extension of the Welsh language becomes one of the keys to unlock the connective strands within our common culture.

We would therefore advocate a slightly amended definition along the following lines:

“A society that values, promotes and protects the importance of culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to make, enjoy and take part in the arts, and sports and recreation.”

Measuring and reporting on progress

At the moment, auditing frameworks are fairly linear and metric where possible. The Bill encourages a multi-layered, multi-dimensional approach based on more collaboration and partnership. We endorse this approach. However, this can be very difficult to capture in current reporting mechanisms. We have worked closely with the Welsh Audit Office and the WLGA in trying to develop more sophisticated reporting mechanisms including a *‘triple bottom line’* approach.

Through the Chief Culture and Leisure Officers of Wales (CLOW) we have developed a joint RBA ‘scorecard’ with the overarching aim “The Wellbeing of citizens”. This brings all relevant partners (local authorities, CyMAL, Sports Wales, Arts Council of Wales) together under a shared vision showing where each partner contributes. Progress can be tracked against those high level targets. Although in embryonic stage, this approach will allow us to report on not only the financial impact but the social, economic and environmental impact of our work. For this to be truly meaningful it needs to include the whole of the public sector and would ultimately challenge current practices. We believe, however, that it would be worth the effort.

The establishment of a Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

We support the establishment of a Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, providing that they are furnished with the appropriate powers. The Commissioner is the guardian of the interests of future generations and must be equipped with the tools and the authority to fulfil this role. We believe that the democratic legitimacy of the post would be enhanced if the Commissioner was appointed by the National Assembly rather than the Welsh Government (as currently proposed).

Progress – in terms of the quality of outcomes – will not be achieved just through compliance with standards and measures. Much will depend on the ambition and quality of approach adopted. There might, therefore, be benefit in establishing clear lines of demarcation between the Auditor General for Wales/Wales Audit Office and the proposed Commissioner. The former could confirm that legal obligations are being met, whilst the latter could focus more on the quality of outcomes.

Public Service Boards – assessments and implementation of local well-being

No comments offered.

3. Addressing Welsh international obligations

Wales does not itself have international treaty or protocol obligations in relation to sustainable development. Such obligations are the responsibility of the UK Government.

Nevertheless, as a progressive nation we welcome Wales' ambition to be a responsible global citizen.

It will be important that Wales' ambitions reflect the changes taking place under the auspices of the United Nations as it moves from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals. The latter are more eclectically defined and offer a diversity of ways for nations to reflect the many challenges currently facing the world including inequality, climate change, poverty, deprivation and environmental degradation.

4. Potential barriers

We suspect that one of the most significant barriers is likely to be the general levels of knowledge and understanding of well-being and sustainability.

The Arts Council of Wales recognises that it has a key leadership role in encouraging the arts sector to respond positively to the requirements of the Bill. This means more than 'spinning' the media messages. It won't be enough just to use the arts as a communications finishing school for the tough or difficult stories: rather the arts must themselves develop the stories (and the ways of telling them) that encourage insight and understanding.

The concept of "well-being" within policy development will also require a different mind-set. Well-being shifts the debate away from the remedial to the preventative: prevention rather than cure. This is a more positive framework within which to develop new thinking and policy solutions.

5. Unintended consequences

No comments offered.

6. The financial implications of the Bill

The development, implementation and monitoring of data is likely to have an additional cost. The ability to assemble the right indicators and to assess them rigorously and expertly would challenge the current skills and expertise within our staff team. Nevertheless, we are investing in training and professional development and hope to build our capability to an appropriate level.

7. The appropriateness of powers for Welsh ministers

No comments offered.

Appendix: About the Arts Council of Wales

Who we are and what we do

We are an independent charity, established by Royal Charter in 1994. Our principal sponsor is the Welsh Government. We also distribute funding from the National Lottery and raise additional money where we can from a variety of public and private sector sources. We are the country's funding and development organisation for the arts.

Our vision is of a creative Wales where the arts are central to the life of the nation.

Our strategy is straightforward – it's summed up in just three words:

– **Make** –
– **Reach** –
– **Sustain** –

Making art, ensuring it connects and giving it a durable legacy are all part of the same picture. All three, when taken together, contribute to well-being and sustainability.

When we talk about **Make**, we mean artistic creation. We want to foster an environment for our artists and arts organisations in which they can create their best work. Because if we **Make** well, we inspire.

If we inspire, more people in Wales will enjoy and take part in the best that our nation has to offer. This is at the heart of our ability to **Reach**, and crucially to reach further than before.

And if in doing this, something of worth is created in what is made or who is embraced, then we should ask how we protect and **Sustain** these things in ways that work economically and that can endure.

Our services

- **we support and develop high quality arts activity** – we invest public funding, provided by the taxpayer, and allocated to us by the Welsh Assembly Government. We use these funds to help the arts to thrive in Wales
- **we distribute Lottery funds** – through applications to our Lottery funding programmes we are able to invest in projects that develop new arts activity, supporting individuals and organisations

- **provide advice about the arts** – through our staff and our advisers we have the largest concentration of specialist arts expertise and knowledge in Wales
- **we share information** – we are the national centre of a network of information and intelligence about the arts in Wales. We also have strong international links in the UK and beyond
- **we raise the profile of the arts in Wales** – we are the national voice for the arts in Wales, making sure that people are aware of the quality, value and importance of the country's arts
- **we generate more money for the arts economy** – initiatives such as *Collectorplan* (our scheme to encourage more people to buy art) and our success in securing European funding brings more money into the arts economy in Wales
- **we influence planners and decision-makers** – the arts take place in many different settings. They can have a dramatic impact on the quality of people's lives, and the places in which they live and work. The arts are also frequently at the heart of initiatives for economic and social regeneration. Our job is to ensure that the contribution that the arts can make is recognised, valued and celebrated
- **we develop international opportunities in the arts** – through our agency, Wales Arts International, we promote contemporary culture from Wales and encourage international exchange and collaboration between artists and arts organisations
- **we promote small-scale performances in local communities** – our Night Out scheme provides financial incentives to encourage the promotion of high quality arts activity in local community venues