

Policy Submission

**Submission to the NESF Project Team
on Cultural Inclusion**

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1. Introduction

Combat Poverty welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) in relation to Cultural Inclusion. Combat Poverty is the state advisory body responsible for developing and promoting evidence-based proposals and measures to combat poverty in Ireland. Acting as a catalyst for change Combat Poverty seeks to influence public policy and elicit public support for action on poverty issues.

In addition, Combat Poverty believes that artistic and cultural activities have a prominent role in preventing and reducing poverty and social exclusion in Ireland. Ensuring access to and participation in artistic and cultural activities can lead to a more inclusive society. Moreover, the Agency views access to and participation in the arts as a basic right – ‘citizenship rights encompass not only the core civil and political rights and obligations, but also social, economic and cultural rights’ (National Action Plan, against poverty and social exclusion 2003-2005) . Thus in making this submission Combat Poverty is primarily concerned about exclusion, poverty and inequality of access to and participation in artistic and cultural activities. Here Combat Poverty has drawn from its experience of community arts and other programmes and refers to research which Combat Poverty has previously been involved in the area of arts and culture.

2. Poverty & Social Exclusion

Almost one-fifth (19%) of Irelands’ population is living in relative income poverty (below 60% of median income) and a further 7% live in consistent poverty, which is the more extreme measure of poverty (i.e. in a household that is both income poor and deprived of basic necessities)¹. ‘People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, **cultural** and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and other resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society’ (NAPincl).

Therefore, tackling poverty is about much more than just ensuring that everyone has access to an adequate income. It is about addressing exclusion and inequality so that everyone has an opportunity to participate in ordinary living patterns, customs and activities of society. ‘Poverty is thus as much about social and cultural inequality and exclusion as about economic deprivation’ (Combat Poverty 1994). For people living in poverty services such as education, health, housing, transport and other services are often lacking or provided in an inferior way, which is also true for artistic and cultural activities. Thus, ‘understanding and

¹ CSO, *EU Survey on Income & Living Conditions*, 2004

tackling poverty requires a multidimensional approach especially in such a rapidly changing socio-economic context'. (ESRI 2006)

3. Poverty - The Role of Arts & Culture

Combat Poverty believes that arts and culture must be recognised not as a luxury but as a basic right and should be available to everyone in society. A consultation report for the next National Action Plan 2006-2008 reinforces this, as a number of submissions argued for the recognition of social, economic and cultural rights. Ensuring effective access to and participation in cultural activities is an essential dimension of promoting a more inclusive society as:

- 'improving **access** to facilities for arts, culture and recreation is an important means of increasing participation in voluntary activities and has a positive impact on socially disadvantaged individuals, groups and areas" (NAPincl). Policy should continue 'to improve access to arts, cultural and recreation facilities'.
- **participation** in cultural activities can be important in helping people and communities to overcome poverty and social exclusion. 'It is clear from all the evidence that cultural participation can have a directly beneficial effect on the individual and communities, and therefore an indirect one on the whole of society' (European Commission, 2004).
- it is the right of each citizen to have both a participative and experiential access to the arts because such access **enables individuals** to explore their own experience and reflect on that experience; it puts individuals in touch with an aspect of their own creative abilities which can help them to articulate clearly and at times solve problems and in addition, it provides an outlet for emotions and feelings.
- 'participation of young people in drama and theatre workshops can enhance their confidence and develop team-working and **interpersonal skills** and other generic transferable skills' (European Commission).
- participation of marginalised groups (i.e. **vulnerable groups** such as older people, people with disabilities, members of the Traveling community, ethnic minorities and non-nationals) in artistic and cultural activities can reduce their risk of poverty and social exclusion.
- literature suggests that **cultural capital** can be linked with the concept of **social capital**, as enriching the cultural capital of those on the margins has the potential to make education interventions more

successful, to act as a counterweight to anti-social behavior and to contribute toward crime reduction. In addition, access to arts and cultural resources provides a potential bridgehead to excluded communities (Corcoran 2006).

4. Community Arts

‘Community development is defined as a process whereby those who are marginalized and excluded are enabled to gain in self confidence, to join with others to participate in actions to change their situation and to tackle the problems that face their community’ (Combat Poverty 2000). The principles underlying community arts are complementary to community development and include participation and consultation. Community arts, when informed by community development principles and a community development approach, have a significant role to play in tackling poverty.

At a personal level, ‘community arts are concerned with confidence- building, education and the artist’s expression of individuals in a supportive group setting. Participants are encouraged to develop their imagination, creativity, understanding, ideas and arts skills within the group, using creative forms chosen in consultation with and appropriate to the needs of the participants’ (Combat Poverty, 1996). Furthermore, ‘art for community development and cultural action tends to focus on using creative methods, to undertake social and economic analysis and conscious raising and as a means of addressing issues and concerns particularly by using art forms to present points of view and experience’ (Combat Poverty, 1996).

Combat Poverty recognises the value of a community arts partnership approach and believes that there is scope for increasing opportunities for partnerships in developing access to the arts. Combat Poverty has supported community arts programmes in the past, such as the community arts pilot programme – Creating a Difference- implemented by CAFE (Creative Activity for Everyone) and Combat Poverty. These programmes have evidently demonstrated that community arts can provide a significant access route to the arts for those affected by poverty and disadvantage. Based on the experience of the community arts pilot programme, ‘development community arts practice includes the following aims and objectives:

Aims of community arts practice:

- to resource the self-development of individuals and groups experiencing poverty and social exclusion through collective and participation creative projects that draw on participants own experiences and resources;
- to recognize, validate and develop the art skills of groups experiencing social exclusion in order to express a point of view and to work for social inclusion and change.

Objectives of community arts practice:

- building creative and artistic skills;
- developing imagination and imaginative ways to tackling issues;
- using creative methods to come to an understanding and recognition of a shared experience and/or culture;
- enhancing community development and anti-poverty work' (Combat Poverty 1996).

5. Policy Issues

Combat Poverty recognises the immense potential that arts and cultural activities may have on reducing poverty and social exclusion and acknowledges the amount of work carried out in this area to date. This includes work carried out by local authorities, community arts groups, youth groups, voluntary groups, festival committees etc. However, we acknowledge that there are social and cultural policy gaps which need to be addressed. Here we outline some key policy issues which merit investigation in order to effectively utilise arts and culture to facilitate the reduction of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland.

A. National Policy Recognition

It is important to have cultural policy integrated effectively into social exclusion and anti-poverty policies. Culture needs to be recognised at national and local policy level as an important means of reducing poverty and social exclusion. 'National policies including National Action Plans for inclusion need to address the role that cultural policy and practices have in addressing the needs of people who are socially excluded' (European Commission, 2004). Furthermore, arts and culture evolves and so does our perceptions, therefore it is important that policy reflects this change in both society and what society requires in terms of cultural activities.

B. Statutory Bodies – Monitoring & Assessment

- The Arts Council should be encouraged to maintain a leading role in advocating arts policies in relation to poverty and disadvantage to other bodies who are part of the cultural framework e.g. local authorities and government departments who are concerned with the provision of cultural programmes.
- Arts and cultural policies implemented by statutory bodies should be assessed and monitored ensuring that those affected by poverty are taken into consideration. It is important that people in poverty or their representative organisations are involved in the design and implementation and monitoring of arts policies. For example local authority arts officers – need to consider basic questions as to how the outcomes of their activities will impact on those affected by poverty and disadvantaged (i.e. undertake poverty impact assessments and ongoing monitoring).
- Adequate indicators should be applied to measure the impact of the participation in cultural activities on poverty and social exclusion.

- Improved information sharing and awareness of services and activities on offer, needs to be encouraged for an integrated delivery approach.

C. Community Development & Community Arts

Following the benefits outlined in section 3 in relation to community arts, Combat Poverty believe that it would be beneficial to continue to build on and support current community arts as a mechanism to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

The following measures should take place:

- provision of adequate and sustained funding;
- development of an appropriate framework for delivery, including improved co-ordination across implementing organisations.
- ongoing monitoring and evaluation of outcomes, to ensure effective delivery.

D. Access & Participation

Issues of access and participation can be complex and need to be addressed. For example, the lack of adequate childcare provision, poor transport in rural areas, high admission costs, the location of arts and theatrical centers, lack of awareness and educational barriers all combine to play their part in excluding those affected by poverty and disadvantage from arts and cultural activities. Access can be addressed to some degree by improving arts education (in primary and secondary education), increasing awareness of artistic activities including outreach programmes (this can aid to reduce self-exclusion from accessing or participating in the arts), community arts practice and local activities, reducing artistic costs in disadvantage areas, providing more local events where artistic events are lacking and addressing transport issues in rural areas in particular. Often people can self-exclude themselves from accessing or participating in arts and cultural activities as they have a perception that the arts are not for them. However, awareness raising and encouragement to participate and access arts and cultural activities is warranted, particularly among young children.

E. Vulnerable Groups

At a time of major social and economic change in our society it is essential that opportunities are provided for those affected by poverty and disadvantage to access and participate in artistic activities and explore their distinct cultural identities. Various groups are perceived to be most at risk of cultural exclusion: first those who are economically disadvantaged and lack the financial or social means to access cultural activities (in particular the long-term unemployed, the disadvantage elderly and poor families) secondly culture distinct groups such as ethnic minorities, non-nationals and members of the Traveling community and thirdly people with disabilities. It is important that measures are secured in order to reduce the barriers which prevent these groups from accessing and participating in cultural and artist activities. In relation to ethnic minority groups, non-nationals and the members of the Traveling community, integration of these

groups can be promoted through the use of drama or dance in schools to celebrate different cultures or through language classes.

F. Regeneration Policy

Continue to support cultural projects as part of regeneration initiatives which are targeted at specific localities. Urban and rural regeneration programmes are often the vehicle for bringing local agencies together to tackle social exclusion and arts and cultural activities can facilitate this. In addition, artistic and cultural activities can assist the transformation of a neighbourhood during regeneration, particularly through the exploitation of visual art and performing arts e.g. Ballymun.

G. Education Policy

'Every person should have the right through the educational process to at least acquire a range of skills and experiences which enables them to contribute to society. Arts education can offer the individual an opportunity through, which to interpret experience intellectually, emotionally, socially and aesthetically' (Combat Poverty, 1997). Access to quality arts education is vital in life-long learning and it is important that a range of cultural services and activities are delivered successfully to all and to children and young people in particular throughout schools and youthreach programmes.

Furthermore, access to information is a key element in ensuring active citizenship and promoting social exclusion. A Combat Poverty study showed that marginalised groups have a negative perception of the library service and need to gain confidence and be encouraged to use this service². Support is needed for local authorities to understand the needs of these groups, establish links with relevant organisations, attend training, share information on successful initiatives and raise awareness of the services on offer. Extending access to the internet and using libraries to provide such access is also important, particularly for members of the Travelling community and young people.

H. Adequate Funding

While there are moves towards developing professional arts, community arts, youth arts, local arts centers, education, etc there appears to be very little co-ordination between those involved through lack of policy or funds. Limited funding and short-term initiatives can pose problems for long term results. Its important than arts and cultural activities are provided with sustained funding, so that those participating and organising activities have confidence that supports will be retained, which in turn facilitates long term planning.

I. Comprehensive Training

A Combat Poverty study³, found that for artists involvement with disadvantaged communities was a valued part of their work but they experienced financial

² Access to Public Libraries for Marginalised Groups, Combat Poverty Agency, 2004

³ Poverty Access and participation in the Arts, Combat Poverty, 1997

difficulties and found they had little organisational support. As well as providing artists with sufficient supports to carry out artistic activities in these areas, it is also beneficial to improve provision especially community arts provision in disadvantaged areas though providing adequate training.

6. Conclusion

Combat Poverty believes that access to and participation in arts and cultural activities has an important role to play in addressing poverty and social exclusion, but acknowledges that this potential is not entirely utilised to date. Combat Poverty has raised a number policy issues for consideration and hopes that these will contribute to the NESF project teams aim to prepare a set of policy recommendations on cultural inclusion and the role of the State. Combat Poverty welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this debate, through this submission and through our representation on the NESF project team, and hope that we can help facilitate progress on this matter.

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