

Deconstructing the Concept of ‘Creative Industries’¹

Susan Galloway

Centre for Cultural Policy Research, University of Glasgow
s.galloway@arts.gla.ac.uk

Stewart Dunlop

Fraser of Allander Institute, University of Strathclyde
s.dunlop@strath.ac.uk

Introduction

‘Creative industries’ and ‘cultural industries’ are terms that tend to be used interchangeably by UK policymakers. However their meanings and uses are in fact very different. In this paper we will be exploring the differences between the two and arguing that, despite how influential it has become, the creative industries definition adopted by the British government is ill conceived in relation to culture.

First, it confuses or conflates culture and creativity, two quite different concepts. This is partly because of terminological confusion about the word culture, which we will look at later in more detail. Second, we argue that the UK creative industries definition is wedded to notions of the knowledge economy, within which culture is valued primarily for its economic contribution. The result is a creative industries definition that fails to take account of the importance and distinctiveness of culture – in policy terms the creative arts have been subsumed within a concept which, as we shall show, has no cultural content at all.

¹ An extended version of this paper will appear in the *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 13.1 (2007).

While a lot of the arts world is very pleased to be included in the creative industries, there is also uneasiness about where the arts sit within these. This has been presented as the arts' distaste for the world of commerce – in other words a tension between the subsidised and the commercial (Hesmondhalgh and Pratt). We think this is oversimplistic. The economy of the arts is mixed: the publicly funded and commercial have a complex inter-relationship and UK cultural policymakers have engaged with this reality for years. It is a naïve idea that this is something the creative industries agenda has thrust upon them.

In our view the uneasiness is more because of the perception that the rationale for publicly funding culture, and more narrowly, the arts, is being undermined. We will present this argument and look at some of the implications for cultural policy of the creative industries concept. First, we will look at what the different notions cultural industries and creative industries represent in policy terms. We will then turn to the differences between the two definitions, in particular comparing the complexity of Throsby's definition of the cultural industries, with the official UK definition of the creative industries (Throsby, *Economics*).

Origins of the Two Terms

Adorno and Horkheimer originally coined the term cultural industry to make the distinction between the traditional artisan based creative arts and industrially produced cultural forms (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*). The arts were specifically not part of the cultural industries. The term 'cultural industries' which developed from this – referring to the 'classic' cultural industries of film, recorded music, broadcasting and publishing – was deployed to incorporate these forms of commercial entertainment, mass produced by industrial methods, as an object of government cultural policy. This was the sense in which the cultural industries became a subject of interest to the French government, and to UNESCO in the late 1970s and 1980s (Garnham; Towse, *Cultural Economics*; Flew).

By adopting the phrase ‘creative industries’ Britain’s New Labour government were doing the reverse: in other words bringing the creative arts into an economic policy agenda. New Labour purposefully adopted the term creative industries to replace ‘cultural industries’ because it was regarded as a ‘unifying’ and ‘democratising’ notion. As a rhetorical device, it bridges the divide between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture – between the mass market, popular cultural products of the cultural industries and the high art of the creative arts, now branded ‘elitist’. It also bridges the divide between ‘art’ and ‘industry’ – between the demarcations of what is ‘publicly supported’ and what is ‘commercial’. It thereby provides a holistic approach to cultural production in its entirety, overcoming, at least conceptually, the traditional division of responsibility for culture within UK government, split between the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department responsible for Culture – previously Education, then DNH and now the DCMS.

It has been described by Andy Pratt and others as representing the ‘re-branding’ of culture by the New Labour government (Flew; Caust; Pratt, *The Cultural Economy*). The question we raise is whether this *is* simply a change in language, a branding exercise, or whether it signals a more significant change in policy approach to culture.

Definitions

The terminological clutter that surrounds the term culture is to some extent responsible, in our view, for the failure to adequately consider the differences between cultural and creative activities. In particular, there is an assumption that there is nothing distinctive about creativity in the cultural sphere. Most definitions of the cultural industries are based around a combination of five main criteria – creativity, intellectual property, symbolic meaning, use value, and methods of production.

Creativity

Cultural and creative industries are often described as those that are based upon individual creativity, and creativity is the key ingredient in official UK documents (see below). However, this would seem, almost tautologically, to define the ‘creative industries’, since any activity that involves creativity would necessarily be ‘creative’ (Pratt, *Cultural Industries* 33). Defining ‘creative industries’ against such a measure is, if nothing else, far too wide to be useful for any purpose. Any innovation – including scientific and technical innovations – of any sort in any industry is creative, and, in such terms, any industry is, therefore, potentially a ‘creative industry’. Conflating cultural creativity with all other forms of creativity fails to take adequate account of important differences between cultural and creative industries, a point we address below.

Intellectual Property

Intellectual property allows people to own the products of their creativity and therefore to exercise both economic and moral rights over these products. Towse comments that in the UK, copyright is now viewed as the ‘organising principle’ for the creative industries and is the basis for defining the cultural industries (*The Cultural Industries* 170).

However, it is equally clear that defining creative industries by their ability to generate intellectual property runs up against the same problem as defining them by using ‘general’ creativity – many types of creative activity, including science, engineering, and academia, generate intellectual property. We also believe that defining the cultural sector by its ability to generate intellectual property is again too wide-ranging, since it again fails to identify adequately the distinctive aspects of the cultural sector.

We should recognise that advocates of the ‘knowledge economy’ model, such as Howkins (*Speech to the Inception Session*), do argue that the term ‘creative industry’ *should* apply to any industry where ‘brain power is preponderant and where the

outcome is intellectual property' (Howkins 2). They argue, on this basis, that the boundaries of official DCMS definitions (the UK government Department for Culture, Media and Sport, DCMS) should be extended to include both business and scientific creativity.

This 'everything is creative' argument also underlies the UK government's approach to creative industries, which it defines as

those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.²

There is a sharp conflict between this view, which sees cultural production as just one type of creativity, and the alternative view that culture and cultural products are something distinctive. For adherents of the latter view, however, definitions based on concepts of creativity and/or intellectual property alone do not adequately explain what is 'cultural' about the 'cultural' or 'creative' industries. These writers place value on a third concept, 'symbolic meaning'.

Symbolic 'Goods' or 'Symbolic Meaning'

The 'everything is creative' approach is opposed by writers who place value on the concept of 'symbolic meaning'. For these commentators, the generation, or communication, of symbolic meaning is the defining concept of culture and the economic value of goods is derived from, or reflects, their cultural value. In his 2001 study, *Economics and Culture*, Throsby examined the etymology of the term 'culture'. Drawing on the work of Raymond Williams (*Keywords; Culture*), he showed that, while it was originally defined in terms of cultivating the soil, the meaning of culture was later refined to encompass individual intellectual and artistic cultivation: it is for

² *Creative Industries Mapping Document* prepared for the DCMS Creative Industries Task Force, October 1998.

this reason that we continue to refer to a person who is conversant in the arts as ‘cultivated’ (Throsby 3). In its original sense, therefore, culture was used to describe activities that contributed to the intellectual and artistic development of individuals.

However, during the nineteenth century the use of the term ‘culture’ was expanded, and it began to be applied in a wider sense, to describe the set of beliefs held in common by different societies. In the context of nineteenth-century nation building in particular, the term began to refer particularly to the development of individual nations. It thus evolved from describing the intellectual development of the individual, and began to be applied to describing features such as the belief system, customs, expressions, and so on, of a people or society. Subsequent development of this latter usage simply extends this definition further, and it has come to be used at a more micro level to describe a set of attitudes, expressions and customs common to or shared by groups within societies. For example, we now commonly talk about a ‘drug culture’, ‘youth culture’, and, at the very micro level, even of companies having a ‘corporate culture’.

However, it is also clear that, whatever group of people within society is under discussion, producing culture is essentially about generating and communicating some type of meaning. Thus O’Connor defines the cultural industries as ‘those activities which deal primarily in symbolic goods – goods whose primary economic value is derived from their cultural value’ (O’Connor 5). This definition, then, includes what O’Connor calls the ‘classical’ cultural industries – broadcast media, film, publishing, recorded music, design, architecture, new media – and the ‘traditional arts’ – visual art, crafts, theatre, music theatre, concerts and performance, literature, museums and galleries – all those activities which have been eligible for public funding as ‘art’ (O’Connor 5).

Use Value

Others, including Bilton and Leary (*What can managers do*) and Martin (*Defining Culture*), while agreeing on the importance of symbolic meaning, differ from O'Connor by considering a fourth concept, that of 'use value' to be the defining characteristic. Symbolic goods and services have as 'first use' the communication of ideas, rather than a functional value. So while activities which produce books, films, plays, music are part of the cultural industries, those such as fashion design, advertising and architecture, where there is symbolic content, but where functionality comes first, are not considered to be part of the cultural industries.

Throsby (*Economics and Culture*) presents a definition that combines all three concepts looked at so far, and also incorporates the issue of 'use value', allowing consideration of both the economic and cultural sides of the cultural industries. He argues that:

1. the activities of the cultural industries involve some form of creativity in their production;
2. the cultural industries are concerned with the generation and communication of symbolic meaning; and,
3. their output embodies, at least potentially, some form of intellectual property.

Taking the first two conditions together would seem to define the cultural industries. The first condition means that the activity involves some type of creativity, while the second limits this to symbolic meaning, importantly excluding the generation of scientific or functional knowledge. In Throsby's view all three conditions are necessary to decide whether an industry is part of the cultural industries, and while they provide a clear set of criteria for doing so, in practice there are considerable difficulties involved in deciding whether, and to what extent, individual activities are 'cultural industries'.

Throsby extends his analysis to define a three-fold classification of cultural industries. At the centre of this industry model lie creative arts such as music, dance, theatre,

literature, visual arts, crafts, plus newer forms such as video art and multimedia. He argues that the principal purpose of these industries is to generate and/or communicate meaning about the intellectual, moral and/or spiritual behaviour of the individual and/or the beliefs, values, norms, and other expressions of groups in society. We may disagree about the extent to which individual productions achieve this end, but these industries should properly be defined within the cultural sector because generating and communicating meaning is the main output of each.

Throsby next extends his approach to include a wider set of activities centred on the creative arts, and it is at this point that difficulties begin to appear with regard to the proper definition of culture. He broadens his definition in two ways. The first involves extending the boundaries of the cultural industries to include industries that operate essentially outside the cultural sphere, but where some cultural input into final production may be required. Advertising, design and architecture, for example, in addition to producing culture as discussed above, may also in some instances use material drawn from the creative arts as inputs into final products. In doing so, it could thus be argued that they generate and communicate symbolic meaning.

This, however, suggests that culture is used as an input into the production process of other industries. If, for example, an advertising campaign uses a reference taken from a painting, then it uses the output of a cultural industry to produce its own output. Industries that use cultural output may thus help to propagate culture, but since they do not themselves *produce* culture, they are not a part of the cultural industries.

Throsby's second extension is to include industries that produce goods which involve some degree of cultural output, but where it is difficult to ascertain the proportion of cultural and non-cultural output – in economic terminology, these activities produce 'joint goods', and it is at this point that more substantial difficulties begin to appear with regard to the proper definition of culture.

Joint Goods

This includes industries that may produce some cultural goods in the sense used above, but where industry output also involves the production of non-cultural goods – that is, the proportion of ‘core’ cultural goods is lower than in the creative arts. Throsby here is addressing essentially the same point identified by both Bilton and Leary (*What can managers do*) and Martin (*Defining Culture*). However, while they argue that it is possible to define precisely whether a good is cultural or functional, Throsby’s argument recognises that for many goods it may be difficult to ascertain the proportions of cultural and functional value.

One example of this would be architecture, where the design of buildings may make cultural statements that extend beyond purely functional aspects. We would then have to decide what proportion of this output is ‘cultural’ as opposed to ‘functional’. Similarly, advertising and design may produce genuinely cultural statements, and the value created is both cultural and non-cultural. Clearly the balance is extremely difficult to identify.

Terminological Clutter

However, difficulty in identifying the balance between the cultural and functional output of any commodity is not the only problem here – a second arises from terminological clutter. We discussed earlier how the use of the term culture has broadened over time. This has now created the problem that it has become increasingly difficult to agree on where to draw the line.

For example, Flew (“Beyond ad hocery” 13) discusses the way in which the use of the term has been extended over time, and points to the definitional problems that this creates. If we define cultural industries as those involved in the production of symbolic goods and services, he asks whether it is now “possible to exclude any activity of industrial production that has a symbolic content? Is the design and production of a Coca-Cola can a part of the cultural industry” (Flew 13).

The problem arises from the way in which the term itself is now increasingly used in an anthropological sense to describe aspects of everyday life. Flew argues that this development has its roots in the notion that culture (in this sense) is becoming an increasingly important part of everyday life, particularly with regard to consumption of goods and services – consumers are argued to use increasingly commodities to construct a personal identity, a process which Lash and Urry (*Economies* 61) call “the semiotisation of everyday life”. So,

Culture is thus recast from a distinct sphere of social life to something that permeates everything, from the design of urban spaces, offices, means of transport and communication ... to the promotional strategies of corporations and increasingly governments (Flew 2).

Used in this sense, we might equally conclude that ‘everything is cultural’ and that the term is used in such a wide sense that it is impossible to assign it any actual meaning.

Production Methods

The importance of production methods to an understanding of the cultural industries was first identified by Adorno, who distinguished between those cultural industries that employ industrial technology and modes of organisation to produce and distribute cultural goods and services, *which are themselves* produced by largely traditional or pre-industrial means (such as books and records), and those where the *cultural form* is industrial (such as newspapers, films and television programmes) (see Garnham).

It is often a combination of symbolic meaning and industrial-scale production methods that is understood to characterise the cultural industries (Garnham; Hesmondhalgh). This definition produces a list of what are often regarded as the ‘classic’ cultural industries, namely film, broadcasting, publishing and recorded music. Towse (*Cultural Industries* 170) describes the cultural industries as those which ‘mass-produce goods and services with sufficient artistic content to be considered creatively and culturally significant. The essential features are industrial-scale production combined with

cultural content'. Reviewing the cultural economics literature of the 1990s, Towse notes that as the 'creative arts' do not employ industrial-scale production methods, they are typically excluded from definitions of the cultural industries deployed by cultural economists.

For Hesmondhalgh (*The Cultural Industries* 12) 'the core cultural industries deal with the industrial production and circulation of texts (the production of social meaning) and are centrally reliant on the work of symbol creators' (his term for artists). Hesmondhalgh's list of core cultural industries therefore excludes the creative arts, but includes: advertising and marketing, broadcasting, film industries, internet industry, music industries: recording, publishing and live performance, print and publishing including books, video and computer games. For Hesmondhalgh the creative arts – including drama and visual arts – are 'peripheral' cultural industries; while they are centrally concerned with the production of texts (symbolic meaning), they use semi-industrial or non-industrial methods of production.

This understanding, based on industrial production methods, was the one on which UNESCO based its enquiry into the cultural industries in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Significantly, UNESCO placed the issue of political and economic *control* of the technological and industrial production of culture central to the question of cultural development, particularly in developing countries. There is therefore a direct line between UNESCO's early analysis of cultural industries and current debates around the notion of 'cultural rights' and the protection of cultural diversity (UNESCO, *Cultural Industries; Convention on the protection*). This is based on an understanding of the distinctiveness of cultural goods and markets and the consequences of market failure.

In light of the above discussion it should be clear that we doubt whether the production method is itself a sufficient basis on which to define those activities that produce culture. It is evident that *either* industrial or artisan methods can produce culture. For example, a stage production of Don Giovanni and Losey's film of Don Giovanni are simply different ways of presenting the same Mozart opera – defining cultural

industries by production method simply loses sight of *what* is being produced. However, it is the mass character of production that allows cultural industries to dominate consumption, and the structure and organisation of these industries that raises issues of ‘gatekeeping’ and control (Grant and Wood; Caves). Production methods don’t define what culture is, but are crucial for explaining why these industries must be considered part of cultural and not just economic policy.

Culture and the Knowledge Economy

The increased use of the term culture in the anthropologic sense discussed above, and the absorption of the cultural industries within the wider creative industries agenda, are both related to increased interest in the so-called ‘knowledge economy’. Analysis of the knowledge economy suggests that competitive advantage is increasingly derived from investment in intangibles, particularly information. Such information may be functional or scientific, but certain of the trends discussed above (e.g. a more sophisticated consumer demand) have led to suggestions that knowledge-intensity is an increasingly important competitive device in a wide range of consumer markets. One information set that, it is argued, increasingly underlies competitive advantage in such markets is the anthropologic type of cultural information discussed earlier.

Much has been written on how the knowledge economy affects the cultural and creative sectors (Flew; Cunningham). But what is most relevant for present purposes is that increased interest in leveraging the economic potential of knowledge is clearly a further reason why the distinctive aspects of the cultural sector have been subsumed within the wider creative industries agenda – culture is now viewed as just one more ‘knowledge economy asset’.

The key problem, once again, is that discussed earlier – the failure to distinguish between cultural and other creative activities. This failure causes, in a policy sense, two problems. Firstly, it means that we lose the ability to measure the actual contribution that cultural (i.e. symbolic) goods make within the knowledge economy

context. For example, we do not know whether advertising or opera, both designated as ‘creative’ industries, has the more significant economic effect. More significantly, conflating culture with other creative activities again fails to recognise the distinctive aspect of symbolic culture. We now turn to address this issue.

Cultural Distinctiveness

Two factors define the distinctiveness of cultural products, one political/ideological, the other economic. These factors differentiate cultural goods from the wider set of creative industries and have important consequences for public policy towards the cultural industries.

Symbolic Ideas and Freedom of Expression

We have argued above that cultural products are distinctive from other creative activities because they are about the production and circulation of symbolic ideas. Cultural activities thus play a central role in the freedom of human expression, and this provides a direct link to questions of democracy. Enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is the principle that every citizen should have the ability, through cultural participation, to freely develop their personality, and take part in the exchange of ideas (UNESCO, *Cultural Rights* 9). For this reason, we find ourselves agreeing with Dworkin’s proposition that the state, through cultural policy, has a role in ensuring that the “complexity and depth of forms of life” are open to the population now and for the future (Dworkin 232). This notion of cultural expression as a fundamental aspect of human freedom also underpins the UN Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (UNESCO, *Convention on the Protection*).

Market Failure in the Market for Culture

The distinctiveness of cultural goods also has an important economic dimension, central to which are arguments that cultural markets suffer from various types of “market failure”. From the argument that arts and culture create both private and non-private values comes the notion that art and culture create benefits both for those who consume them directly (by attending a cultural event) and for those who do not attend. The notion that market failure affects cultural markets has a long lineage in the cultural economics literature (Throsby and Withers). The argument is essentially that, because of the existence of non-private benefits, the market mechanism working alone will fail to provide the amount of culture that society actually wishes to consume, and, importantly, is willing to pay for. This is the force of the recent statement by Baumol and Peacock, when they argue that “the arts confer benefits that people will experience whether they pay or not” (*A Manifesto* 2). O’Hagan expresses the same point as follows:

While the arts do provide a service that can be bought and sold in the market place... they also provide another benefit, a non-private benefit that cannot be sold in the market place. (O’Hagan 22).

Viewed from this perspective, market failure is a key justification for post-war state support for the arts – indeed, the establishment of Arts Council of Great Britain, can be considered as a form of ‘nationalisation’ of the cultural economy. While currently unfashionable in this post-socialist free market era, market failure arguments are none the less robust; at least robust enough for the UK government to support the UN Convention on Cultural Diversity in October 2005. It appears that a gritty acknowledgement of its shortcomings runs alongside an official acceptance of the free market principle.

These two aspects of cultural distinctiveness are crucially interlinked. Both the production and consumption of culture are severely restricted if left entirely to the market, and the ensuing limitation of the field of cultural participation and expression represents a significant democratic deficit both for individuals and society as a whole.

Recognising these distinctive characteristics of culture provides us with clear grounds on which to distinguish cultural industries from the wider notion of creative industries. Cultural activities, whose primary purpose is to communicate symbolic ideas and meanings, play a central role in our ability to communicate and thus in the freedom of human expression. The same cannot be said of industries such as fashion design, whose prime purpose is to persuade people to buy certain types of clothing, or advertising, whose prime purpose is to simply persuade people to buy more. The key outputs of the cultural industry are not found in other parts of the creative industries, however defined, and it is this distinctive contribution that is lost by policy stances which subsume cultural creation within the wider creative agenda.

Definitions in UK Policy

Government interest in the ‘creative industries’ appears to stem from a belief that the UK has a strong track record in areas where individual creativity is important (in industries such as film and music), that the ‘creative industries’ have enjoyed high economic growth rates, and that this ‘creativity’ can be applied to the rest of the economy.

As we have seen, the highly influential DCMS definition of creative industries is based on two of the concepts discussed above: creativity and intellectual property. Scottish Enterprise (SE) in its ‘Creative Industries Cluster Strategy’ also uses the DCMS definition. When defining ‘creative industries’, SE (*Creativity and Enterprise 4*) advances the notion that ‘creative industries are those in which creativity fundamentally is the enterprise’. This could include any industry, however, and the meaning of the ‘creative industries’ is, to say the least, difficult to pin down. It is clearly extremely difficult, on the basis of the definition supplied by SE, to know the extent to which these industries are ‘creative industries’ and thus to develop an appropriate set of policy responses. It may include those specified by SE but, if the criterion for entry is that ‘creativity fundamentally is the enterprise’, then, as discussed

above, we could equally well include a range of other industries (see also Bilton and Leary 50).

The problem is that, while the cultural industries can be defined as those that generate symbolic meaning (as we have seen above), official definitions of the ‘creative industries’ make no reference to symbolic meaning and could involve *any* type of creative activity. Individual creativity could equally well include developing scientific innovations, yet industries that develop these are not typically included in definitions of the creative sector. The difficulty in identifying specific types of ‘individual creativity’ makes it very difficult to decide which industries are ‘creative’. Most importantly, in defining creative industries on the basis of creativity and intellectual property, the UK approach also fails to consider the nature of cultural creativity and so, as argued above, also loses sight of the distinctive public good contribution of culture.

Significantly, the UK’s ‘knowledge economy’ approach contrasts strongly with the definitions of cultural goods and services and of cultural industries proposed by UNESCO (*Convention on the Protection*). These combine the concepts of creativity and intellectual property with a strong emphasis on the importance of symbolic meaning, which means that cultural goods ‘embody or convey cultural expressions, irrespective of the commercial value they may have.’ (UNESCO, *Convention on the Protection 5*)

Conclusions

In short, why does this matter? Well definitions matter because they have implications for theory, policy and its practical application. These issues raise questions for cultural policy in the UK and elsewhere. Critical examination of the British government definition of creative industries reveals a lack of theoretical clarity. If the creative industries, by definition, have no cultural content, then we have to ask, is this an error,

or have the distinctive attributes of culture been purposely overlooked by the UK government in favour of a knowledge economy approach?

It is hard to tell. But it was interesting to see the UK government supporting the UN Convention Protecting Cultural Diversity in October 2005. The Convention is founded on a definition of cultural goods and services developed with the advice of David Throsby, that has symbolic meaning at its heart. It is therefore in direct contradiction to the official UK creative industries definition. Was that a change of heart, or just a pragmatic vote for Britain's economic interests?

If the UK government does not recognise the distinctiveness of culture and cultural creativity, as the creative industries definition suggests, then does this also apply to government cultural policy? The creative industries agenda is one to which the UK Arts Councils and other cultural agencies are required to contribute. These agencies have intervened in the cultural economy for many years, but with cultural objectives. At a practical level, if not at a policy or rhetorical level, can these motivations be maintained or will they necessarily be over-ridden by economic concerns?

On the one hand government interest in the creative industries has clearly benefitted some aspects of the arts through the prioritisation of support for artistic production. But alongside an acknowledgement of these gains, is the view that in the longer run culture may be being repositioned and with it the established arguments for cultural funding.

If the essence of culture is the production and circulation of symbolic meaning or ideas – then there is a clear link to questions of democracy. The right to develop ourselves through cultural expression and participation are recognised as fundamental human rights. From this recognition flows a clear role for government cultural policy. But this is not acknowledged or addressed by the creative industries paradigm.

Similarly the generation and communication of ideas within society is arguably restricted if left entirely to the market. Market failure has been an important justification of government support for the arts in post war Britain. The cultural

industries concept took this on, arguing for a cultural policy for industry or, alternatively, an industrial policy informed by cultural objectives. However the creative industries agenda ignores this. In our view, without an acceptance of cultural distinctiveness the whole context in which government support is debated and assessed is altered and an understanding of the public benefits of culture, those that cannot be captured by markets, may be diminished.

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