CultureCase

Measuring the social return on investment of an art gallery

This research was conducted by **Andrew Jackson** and **Richard McManus** at **Canterbury Christ Church University**

Summary

The paper describes a project to measure the social impact of Turner Contemporary art gallery in Margate, UK during the 2015/16 financial year. The total investment by Turner Contemporary in the Lifelong Learning programme for that period was £111,825. The study found that ‘in one year, for every £1 invested by Turner Contemporary, £4.09 of net social value is created for participants in lifelong learning activities’.

Through discussions with staff, a focus group and a survey the study established three outcomes for the lifelong learning programme

The outcomes were that participants became more open-minded and confident, strengthened their social networks, and enhanced their knowledge and skills. The researchers held a ‘valuation workshop’ with participants and used previous research to arrive at a value for ‘intensive participation in Lifelong Learning at Turner Contemporary’ which came out at ‘£3,000 per year per participant’. This amounted to ‘a total value for the outcomes of all lifelong learners who participated in the 2015/16 financial year of £1,185,570’.

However, any calculation of this type needs to recognise what happens in real life

This figure does not account for the fact that participants only experience some of the outcomes to a degree, that some would have felt the same way without participating in the Lifelong Learning sessions, and that the sessions prevented

some of them from doing other activities. Further analysis to account for these factors brought the value of the Lifelong Learning programme down to £569,074.

Social return on investment is about much more than just a number

The authors are keen to emphasise that it is ‘a story about change that includes case studies and qualitative information as well as quantitative and financial information’. The research gave management at the gallery the need to ‘look carefully at how they invest resources, the kinds of returns this gives, and where they can usefully focus their activities’.

Keywords

sroi **UK** **contemporary art** **gallery**

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