

# **New Zealand Productivity Commission Inquiry into breaking the cycle of persistent disadvantage.**

## **Submission from Regional Arts Network of Aotearoa**

Thank you for this opportunity to make a submission on the early stages of this inquiry.

It is important to acknowledge the framing work that has been done in the consultation document, and the important indication of working from a structure that centres on the key concept of Wairua (spirit) as the foundation or source of wellbeing. This is a powerful place to start, and one that looks towards holistic wellbeing rather than siloed indicators of shift.

It is also good to see the commitment towards “identifying structural or institutional barriers, as well as gaps or deficiencies in current policy settings” with an awareness of the need to “draw on frameworks and expertise across a range of disciplines” to influence change.

It is from this perspective that the Regional Arts Network of Aotearoa (RANA) makes this submission.

## **BACKGROUND ON RANA**

RANA is the connected network of Regional Arts Organisations who work collaboratively towards shared goals. This is a growing network that currently doesn't cover the whole of Aotearoa.

The regional arts organisations within RANA operate as a community of practice that supports regionally-focussed capability building within the arts and cultural sectors. Network members operate as strategic partners for regional engagement looking to enact positive sector impact as well as to proactively benefit community wellbeing throughout the arts and cultural ecosystem. To champion arts, culture and creativity as a public good, and to find new ways to support New Zealanders through the arts.

The strategic focus of each RAO is tailored in response to the needs, aspirations and strategic priorities of each region's arts, culture and creative sectors and communities. RAOs provide arts sector support, development and leadership. We also provide strategic guidance acting as independent intermediaries between the regional arts communities and other relevant stakeholders including local and central

government. This relationship works towards creating an embedded understanding of the role arts, culture and creativity plays in community wellbeing.

Key activities delivered by the RAOs include:

- engagement and consultation with the arts sector and wider arts communities
- regional needs analysis
- development of regional arts strategies and advocacy
- sector capacity and capability development
- initiation and delivery of programmes of work that respond to regional arts priorities.

This background is offered as supporting material for both the nature of our understanding of these elements from a regional basis across Aotearoa, but also as an offer for further consultation around the role of arts, culture and creativity within the framework of this inquiry and the role that these things play in addressing the wairua of people and community.

## **FOCUS FOR THE SUBMISSION**

We know that there will be a clear awareness of many of the main aspects of disadvantage covered by other submissions, as well as within your framing document. We want to address the importance of fully considering social cohesion and cultural wellbeing in an authentic and meaningful way within this work. Where there is social exclusion - a lack of social/civic cohesion, there is disadvantage. Where individuals have the inability to express oneself - one's creativity, one's identity - there is a strong disparity for people in our society. Access to the arts, and the work of arts and culture organisations across Aotearoa, help ensure a more equitable society.

To have the freedom to be part of creative activity is a human right: access for everyone to take part in a cultural life. By proactively valuing, and supporting the arts, culture and creative sector - whether at the local or central government level - we can add value and enhance the well-being of New Zealanders. It is therefore important to acknowledge the importance of access to cultural, artistic and creative expression as a key component of addressing disadvantage, and the work you are doing to define issues and develop remedies with *A fair chance for all: Breaking the disadvantage cycle*.

Arts, culture and creativity are concerned with questions of what is (and what is not), humanity, identity, dignity, community. Arts experiences are about shared humanity: of communicating empathy, of the transformation of lives, of visions for the future and of the mission of mankind. These things are universally applicable. There is a great deal of shared space within the role that arts, culture and creativity play within the broader civic and societal ecosystems. Spaces where diverse communities can come together. Spaces for them to celebrate what contributes to their identity and to nourish and champion that. Through artistic,

cultural and creative activity we can ask and often answer “How do we make the future more attractive than what now exists?”.

We know that it is important to acknowledge the role that cultural, arts and creative organisations can play in this space. To both address the sustainable funding issues that can cause barriers for audiences when engaging for local cultural organisations, but to also acknowledge the real impact that these programmes, and different community groups have on the communities they are connected with. Humans are natural storytellers, and it is important for each of us to recognise our stories being told on local stages. To feel empowered to share their stories in a safe and accessible space to encourage others on the same journey. This is a small part of the value that having arts, culture and creativity within this understanding and inquiry can bring. Greater support for the arts, for shared stories, for the expression of our humanity, should an important tool in your response to inequality and persistent disadvantage.

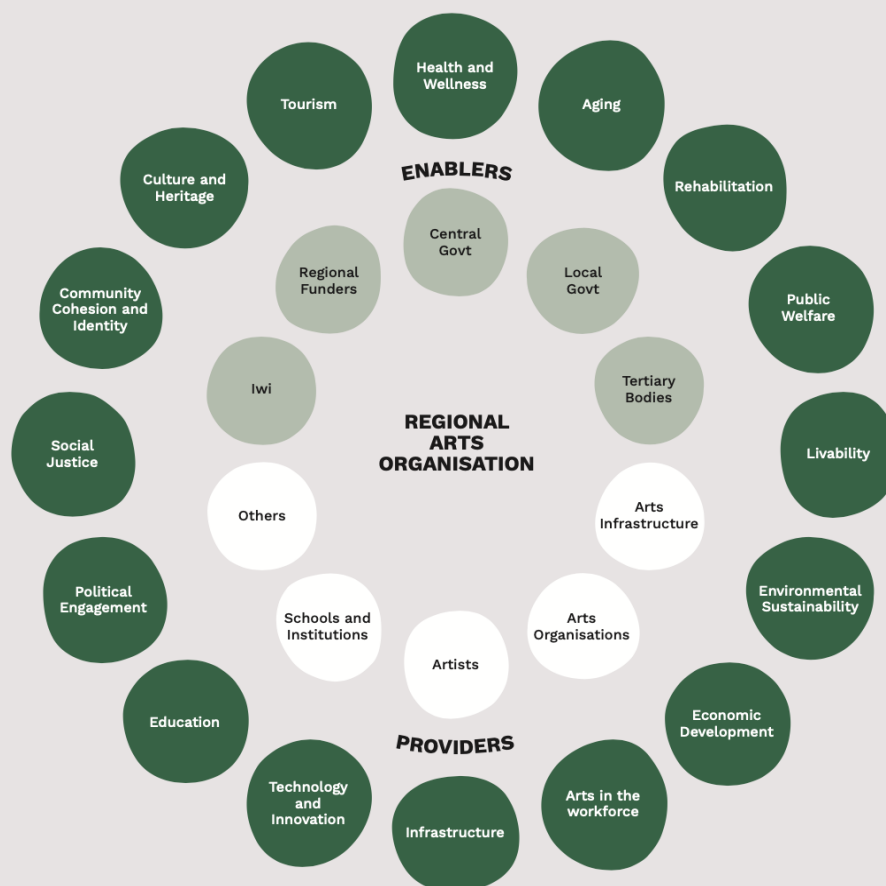
It is vital to explore and understand the true impact of the work discussed above as an upstream tool for addressing core issues, rather than being a problem solver once things have gone wrong. There are examples of this being delivered throughout the country and beyond, and strengthening this understanding not only supports those who go through the programmes, but also the programmes themselves. Articulating this impact in a compelling manner is often outside the capacity of those delivering the programmes. The limited funding often goes into doing the work, rather than measuring and celebrating the work.

It is also important in this inquiry to acknowledge the value of Toi Māori and the revitalisation of Māori culture within Aotearoa. It continues to have a meaningful impact that has already been used to alleviate disadvantage, and strengthening this will continue to increase Māori Productivity. This should address the use of te reo Māori nationally, supporting craftspeople and performers, and acknowledge Māori as economic drivers of their own productivity. As generations turn over and younger people are exposed to an education system that embraces Te Ao Māori there is likely to be more openness to initiatives that evolve culture and make this place Aotearoa.

We know that there is a growing body of research which can be explored (both nationally and internationally) around the role of meaningful access to creative expression as a tool for recovery, rehabilitation, addressing mental health, fostering creative thinking and innovation, encouraging social connection, building communities, and understanding the self. The arts are increasingly being used as a response to societal concerns, to bring about greater cohesion, equity, and sense of community.

As part of developing our own understanding of this complex and interconnected ecosystem of impact and understanding, we have created an ecosystem map that demonstrates the connections that arts, culture and creativity can (and should) have with wider societal needs.

**Arts and cultural ecosystem within the broader society and community**



<b>Health and Wellness</b> Wellbeing for individuals Better care for each other Increased quality of life	<b>Livability</b> Arts create vibrant cities Environmental impact Quality of Life	<b>Infrastructure</b> Advocacy, communication, design, breaking down barriers Agriculture, Food, Transport, Housing, Planning and Community Development	<b>Social Justice</b> Civic dialogue to discuss issues and policies Arts facilitate dialogue
<b>Aging</b> Physical and mental stimulation Entertainment Social interaction	<b>Environmental Sustainability</b> Education and Innovation Advocating and driving awareness Communication	<b>Technology and Innovation</b> Symbiotic relationship for creation and development Technology can be used to create and disseminate art	<b>Community Cohesion and Identity</b> Binds people together through shared experience Creates common vision for the future Arts bring people together
<b>Rehabilitation</b> Purpose Self-care Social interaction Capability Development	<b>Economic Development</b> Economic Wellbeing Support services and impact Sustainable Funding Workforce Development	<b>Education</b> Arts are part of a well-rounded education Curiosity and exploration Important at all levels of education	<b>Culture and Heritage</b> Art activity Diversity/Access/ Identity History and Tradition
<b>Public Welfare</b> Community Pride Mutual trust Safer and healthier communities	<b>Arts in the workforce</b> Well-rounded workers who drive innovation Creative thinkers Solid communicators	<b>Political Engagement</b> Can encourage political engagement, voting, and activation	<b>Tourism</b> Economic impact Empathy between communities Arts for travel

Diagram credit - Creative Waikato

We share this because we believe that all people should have access to arts, culture and creativity in their lives. These things bring people together, they are vital for re-shaping the structures in our society, and for empowering people to understand who they are and their connections to their culture, their community and to their future. In this work we should be able to address the value of creative process as a human right, as well as understanding how that process can be celebrated and utilised as a separate entity from "being an artist". Of course, the 'artist' will have a robust creative process, but the strength here is that all people have access to their own creative process and this, in turn, will be of benefit to our communities and people.

It would be excellent to see this inquiry working to engage with various programmes and networks (including specialists in arts, culture and creativity) who are creating positive impact in these spaces and look to understand that scope and explore those case studies to see what is replicable, what is community specific, and how different approaches when implemented earlier in the system can have long-term transformative change.

There is scope for the RANA network to be a support structure for this process - to identify positive examples within regional Aotearoa to understand this value in different communities, to support community-led projects, and to contribute to high-level strategic development alongside regional delivery. This is certainly not the only consideration within the scope of the work of this inquiry, but it is important to acknowledge the role that arts, culture and creativity will play in the holistic picture of wellbeing that seems to be at the core of this important work.

Submitted by Members of the Regional Arts Network of Aotearoa

Creative Waikato – Dr. Jeremy Mayall

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