

Arts crucial to sound rebound from coronavirus

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Social distancing has shown all of us how much we need and value connection — and how much productivity it drives.

Creativity connects us. And creativity will be vital to our recovery from this pandemic. It will help rebuild our communities, our social connections and our economy.

Throughout the lockdown, we have turned to creativity — binge-watching content, streaming podcasts, reading, artplay for our children — and have rediscovered how much it helps us to share with one another, interpret our experiences and stay mentally healthy.

Arts and culture have long been an integral part of our lives. Ninety-eight per cent of Australians connect regularly with Australian creativity through books, music, performance, screen, galleries and museums. Australians are soaking in it. And today's circumstances are making us value it more than ever.

Our arts and cultural industries serve all of us — as catalysts for connection and energy for engagement, essential to our consumption preferences, social participation and democracy itself. They build our understandings of ourselves and each other, improving social cohesion.

In addition to their extraordinary contribution to our social fabric and our wellbeing, the creative and cultural industries are also a major economic force. A 2018 Bureau of Communications and Arts Research study showed cultural and creative activity in Australia across the economy constituted 6.4 per cent of GDP, or \$111.7bn in 2016-17. And the flow-on impacts of creative activity and engagement are substantial, including:

- Tourism – where creative arts are a major driver of [domestic](#) and [international tourism](#);
- Hospitality – driving the [cultural and economic life of cities](#) and [rural communities](#);
- Education – where creative capabilities are largely recognised as the [skills of the future](#); and
- Health – where the arts have proven benefits to [wellbeing](#), including [mental health](#).

In all these areas, creative work and the engagement it engenders add extraordinary value. While vital, these benefits are vulnerable as they tend to be generated in the precarious conditions of the original “gig economy”.

The magic dust of connection and engagement that underpins so much of our social and economic success is generated by the collective endeavours of about 600,000 creative workers, many of whom have lost their livelihoods.

We are all aware how our creative and cultural industries have been disproportionately impacted by the shutdown. This has been swift and devastating. We are doing all we can to ensure it is not permanent.

This is an industry Australia can't afford to be without. It is not just creative workers and their audiences who stand to lose.

We will see significant impacts for all Australians across many industries unless we sustain our creative workforce through this crisis. Our national recovery depends on it.

An investment in the creative sector is a direct investment in economic recovery. As a natural source of innovation and collaboration, our creative sector will be essential in helping rebuild communities and navigate Australia's path out.

Arts and culture, already proven to be a major driver of tourism and hospitality, will be critical as we seek to bring life back into our cities and regions.

It will be cultural experiences that will have people hitting the road for domestic tourism, and the shared experiences of gigs and performances and public events that will draw us back into our urban and regional centres and their restaurants, bars and cafes.

While travel restrictions continue, our arts and culture can travel for us, maintaining connections and Australia's place in the world, and energising the nation's international brand.

The things we all need for a healthy recovery — engagement in active life, autonomy, social identity, meaning and hope, a positive sense of self — are all embedded in arts and culture participation. They are also the things that will drive our confidence and economic recovery.

We have experienced radical disruptions to so many of our routines, our revenues and our relationships. As we look to recovery, we have an opportunity to consider what kind of future we want. And, without question, it is a moment to think differently.

The experience of this pandemic has brought some important principles to the fore: the need to work together for our common good; and the value of resilience, self-discipline and local self-sufficiency.

Amid the trauma and loss, we have seen some unexpected benefits in pressing pause on many of our traditional forms of growth and productivity: less pollution, less waste, fewer road deaths, more time with our families. None of these are new concepts but they have been given widespread currency. If we find a way to maintain them, they offer long-term gains for humanity.

As we emerge from our enforced hiatus, we should consider what we value and which are the public goods and areas of opportunity that will sustain us.

In the second quarter of the 21st century, jobs that focus on our creative resources will fuel our future. We need to get creative, and to invest in creativity to boost our recovery.

The evidence clearly demonstrates the enormous contribution of arts and creativity to regeneration and growth, yet too often this is overlooked. Rapid recalibration that recognises the value of arts and creativity is required to ensure our creative workers, companies, venues and infrastructure are positioned and supported to do their important work of injecting the lifeblood back into our communities, cities, regions and culture.

We have turned to arts and culture through the dark hours of our lockdown, and we will need them more than ever as we emerge, blinking, into the light.

Our reconnections, and our recovery, will depend on it.