

THE SURVEYS: MAIN FINDINGS

The key question for any evaluation is, “Did anything change that lasts over time?” Maryo Gard Ewell went to Spring Green to do a student study 6 months after the 1968 summer of most intensive activity; and Maryo, with Dr. Peter T. Ewell, did a subsequent study in 1973 and attempted to replicate it in 2005. Over time, with so many community changes, “findings” become increasingly merely suggestive, but even so may be valuable:

1969

Maryo Gard Ewell did a comparison of attitudes to the arts in Spring Green and Mazomanie, a “control town.” The numbers were very small, but suggestive: “Classically, studies have shown that gender and education levels are predictors of people’s participation in the arts. But these numbers, small as the sample is, suggested that maybe, exposure to the arts project triggered a disinclination to participate, along education lines....”

Still: “In Spring Green, 16% of the respondents with a high school education said that the program had not been a good thing – but 58% of Spring Green’s respondents with a high school education said that they would like to see local drama. This could suggest that locally-produced arts was somehow important in achieving the democratic ideal of the project.”

1973

Peter Ewell and Maryo Gard Ewell studied attitudes towards the arts in the 5 experimental towns, compared to 4 control towns. This was a large study with statistically significant responses: “Leaving Spring Green aside for the moment, it seems as though this echoes the findings of my childish student project of five years before: where in ‘unexposed’ towns there was a modest friendliness to the arts that was unrelated to demographics, exposure to the arts project seemed to cause a split in attitudes to the arts along the lines of gender and education....”

“We hypothesized that it was the combination of outside and local that moved Spring Green towards this ‘democratic ideal’ (because Spring Green started its own local theater company after the project was over). We concluded that the community arts activist must recognize the importance of both, recognizing that each has an important, but probably different, function.

“We even wondered whether there had to first be a demographic rift in order for the ‘healing’ process to leave a community more generally friendly to the arts. We called for more ‘carefully-planned, multi-staged projects,’ conducted over the long run.”

2005

Peter Ewell and Maryo Gard Ewell replicated their 1973 study. “We believe the following may be true, based on this study:

- In places where there is a good deal of arts exposure already, people want even more
- People in “underserved” places still want the arts
- Regardless of people’s own belief in the importance of the arts in town, they have high aspirations for the arts in their children’s education
- Exposure to the arts in school increases a person’s receptivity to the arts as adults
- There is somewhat more demand for the arts across the board since 1973, possibly as a result of more arts in the general environment
- Where in 1973 towns that were not exposed to the arts at all were friendly to the arts, this changed. Perhaps the pervasive availability of the arts in the general environment has caused the “fragmentation effect” that we believed in 1973 to be the result of arts exposure from the outside.
- Being female still predicts more interest in the arts and more likelihood of participation in the arts, as does having a college education.
- However, men’s desire for more arts in schools is as strong as women’s.
- In the project towns, the difference between women’s and men’s perception of the importance of the arts is reduced as is their likelihood of participation – there is greater across-the-board participation. In the project towns, the behavioral differences between people of more and less education are also reduced.
- An intentional locally-based program of arts development could be effective in bringing about general friendliness to the arts; only presenting events from the outside will not achieve the same effect.

“Intentional, locally-oriented policy may, indeed, affect the culture of a place over the long run.”