

DESIGNING POLICY FOR ARTS DEVELOPMENT THE 1973 SURVEY: SUMMARY

Maryo Gard Ewell
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In 1973 I was working for Emmett Sarig of UW-Madison Extension. By then I was married to Peter Ewell, a graduate student interested in evaluation. Emmett suggested that Peter pursue my student study, this time, doing a larger-sample survey and looking at all five of the original project towns. It was 1973; three years had passed since the NEA-sponsored project had ended. How did people think about the arts now?

We sent 150 questionnaires to addresses selected as randomly as we could, using phone books in these five towns. Then we identified “control towns” - selecting a town in roughly the same geographic area as an original project town, of roughly the same size, with roughly the same economic base. Because two of the original towns were somewhat similar, we selected only one comparison town for them. Thus we were looking at nine towns altogether – five of which had had a major arts program, four of which had no (or little) arts infrastructure. Our four new towns were Antigo, Highland, Wautoma, and Baraboo. (Baraboo, however, had a UW campus center with an active arts program, we later learned.)

This time, the questionnaire was very detailed. Our demographic questions now included participation/attendance at the arts while in school as well as occupation, education level and gender. We asked people how important the arts are in community life, and how important they should be. We asked people how important the arts are in the schools of the community, and how important they should be. We asked about their personal attendance at arts events – drama, “live concert,” arts-and-crafts – and about their interest in traveling to such events. We asked about their relative interest in seeing out-of-town-based professional arts events, compared to their interest in locally-based arts events.

We got a 40% response rate which appeared to be demographically reflective of the communities.

This study by Ewell and Ewell, “Planning for Grassroots Arts Development: A Research Study of Nine Communities in Transition,” was published in *Arts in Society* magazine in the summer of 1975. *Arts in Society* was not equipped to print tables and, sadly, almost all of our data was discarded, with the exception of one table showing men’s and women’s respective attitudes towards the arts; this table had simply been chosen for use as an example in the “technical appendix.” However, the text says that we were prepared to back up all assertions with statistically significant numbers, and Peter’s technical appendix described how he tested for levels of confidence. In the text he says that all conclusions are at the 90% confidence level or better. He also describes how he reviewed data for consistency as well as how he tested “hunches” - for example, if people in a community said “there is too little art here” then he tested the “hunch” that they should be more willing to travel to arts events. He is also clear that causality cannot be “proven” with this data – but it can be suggested. Finally, in the article, Peter describes the technique of regression analysis, which was used to assess the relative importance of variables such as gender, occupation, education, and whether the town was a project town or not.

With this in mind, looking at the data for all nine towns together, referencing all of the numbers that we included in the article, and creating simple tables based on the prose in our article, we found:

- age, marital status, and length of residence have little relationship to attitudes and

participation, although newcomers are slightly more likely to participate in what activities are available

- that women seem to think that art is more important than men, desire it more, and act on this desire more:

| | <u>Female</u> | <u>Male</u> |
|--|---------------|-------------|
| The amount of arts activities that are available to me/my children in town are (too much, just right) <u>TOO LITTLE</u> | 50% | 39% |
| Have you seen a live drama performance in the past year? (no) <u>YES</u> | 50% | 33% |

- BUT that if the art is locally-based, “more men are likely to get involved”
- that education and attitude are related:

| | <u>College</u> | <u>No college</u> |
|--|----------------|-------------------|
| The amount of arts activities that are available to me/my children in town are (too much, just right) <u>TOO LITTLE</u> | 62% | 37% |

- attendance rates of college-educated people at arts events ranges from 15-30% higher than non-college-educated people
- BUT that if the art is locally-based, the attendance patterns of college- and high school-educated people are about the same; only the grade-school-educated people show a lower pattern
- that occupation and attitude are related:

| | <u>Professionals</u> | <u>White collar</u> | <u>Blue collar</u> | <u>Farm</u> |
|--|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| The amount of arts activities that are available to me/my children in town are (too much, just right) <u>TOO LITTLE</u> | 60% | 52% | 37% | 31% |

- occupational status relates to participation rates
- BUT if the art is locally-based, “the results are even more striking than those for education. All occupational groups are willing to participate with about the same frequency. Farmers, for example, shift from 38% to 60% in willingness to participate when the framework is shifted from professional to local, while white collar and professional workers remain stable at about 70% and 80%, respectively”
- people who attended arts events in school “outnumber non-attenders 2-to-1 in both attitudes and participation; people who participated in the arts in school “outnumber non-participants 3-to-2 in pro-art attitudes and participation
- AND in terms of out-of-town professional vs. local, “the habit of participation seems to override the effects of any particular organizational arrangement”

These findings are themselves interesting in themselves. But, looking at the 9 towns we were able to arrange them in an interesting ranked order. We didn't print tables, but at least we reported that:

In Adams-Friendship, the project town with the most minimal activity, 87% reported “too little art.” These people had the lowest participation rate of people in any of the project towns, but were “by far the most willing to travel of all of the towns”

In Highland, not a project town, 70% said too little art. Their participation rate was “very low,” but reported “no undue willingness to travel”

In Antigo, not a project town, 63% said “too little art.” Their participate rate was “very low,” but people reported “no undue willingness to travel”

Portage, Rhinelander and Waupun, all project towns, looked about the same. “About 40%

reported too little art.” Their participation rate was “higher than nonproject towns except for Baraboo.”

Wautoma, not a project town, also had “about 40%” reporting too little art in town, but we did not say anything about people's willingness to travel.

In Baraboo, 28% said “too little art,” and people's participation rate in the arts was “high.”

In Spring Green, the town with the most intensive project, only 13% said “too little art,” and Spring Green had the highest rate of participation of all 9 towns.

Looking at project records, it appears that the project was least intensive in Adams-Friendship, most intensive in Spring Green, and of middling, and about equal, intensity in Portage, Rhinelander and Waupun. Peter speculated that the massive project in Spring Green satisfied an interest in the arts; the minimal project in Adams-Friendship provided a glimpse and whetted the appetite for the arts,” where the middling projects raised demand “slightly” and then “satisfied the raised demand, raising participation rates but providing only an “average” sense of satisfaction. (Our explanation for why Baraboo might look somewhat like Spring Green was the presence of the active arts program at the UW Center there.)

Finally, we looked at the combined effects of background demographics and project town status. Using regression analysis, which sorts out the interrelationship of variables (for instance, attendance at the arts in school and ultimate education level attained are related), we observed that gender and education are the most important predictors of attitudes towards, and participation in, the arts. This corroborates many, many studies which have said the same thing.

But here is the interesting pattern, comparing the project and nonproject towns:

- In Spring Green, gender and education “have absolutely no impact upon attitudes towards the arts in the community” (“Attitudes towards the arts” refers to the question asking whether there is too much, about right, or too little art in the community, and only 13% - as observed above – said “too little art.”)
- In the nonproject towns (except Baraboo) “background factors occasionally affect attitudes but not across the board. Sex seems to be the most consistent factor, with education and occupation following in that order.”
- In the other four project towns, and Baraboo, gender and education *do* relate to attitudes and we see women and college-educated people feeling that there is “too little” art significantly more than others. Adams-Friendship shows this effect less than the others.

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.

Gulp.

Ah, but now comes the interesting part. What happened in Spring Green, where in 1968 the admittedly small numbers showed a split in the town, along demographic lines? Why did the apparent split wash away...and so dramatically?

In Spring Green, a community theater was started in the late 1960's where, as far as we knew, nothing similar had begun in any of the other four towns by 1975. Remember that in 1968 the idea of local theater seemed to reduce the polarization in attitudes that seemed evident. And refer to the

observations in 1975 that local performances reduced the effects of gender, education and occupation.

How Peter concluded the article was this: A project could “succeed” in three ways:

- it can increase numbers of participants - in the current parlance of the RAND corporation, per Kevin McCarthy's important study “*A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts*,” the numbers can be “broadened”
- it can change the attitudes of people who were “disinclined” to be interested in the arts – again using the RAND vocabulary, it can “diversify” participation
- or numbers and types of people can be affected...the arts become truly “more democratic.”

“The policy implications of these conclusions are complex. While it seems that centrally-administered, non-indigenous programs...have the desirable effect of increasing the demand for arts activities, they have the less desirable side effect of mobilizing only the highly educated...” Remember that in 1969 I hypothesized the sequence to be 1) probably, like Mazomanie, an across-the-board modest friendliness to the arts 2) a massive project which split the town along demographic lines 3) the creation of the River Valley Theater, an inclusive local company 4) a patterns of friendliness towards the arts across-the-board, and much stronger than in the other project towns where no local arts organizations had been created.

We hypothesized that it was the combination of outside and local that moved Spring Green towards this “democratic ideal.” 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, and we concluded that if we moved towards this approach to arts development, “democracy in the arts in America is not despairingly far away, but could be much closer than anyone suspects.”