

# Building an Impact Evaluation Toolbox based on an Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem

By Ian Thomas



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## **Abstract**

The impact of soft power is notoriously difficult to measure due to the subtle ways in which cultural influence and attraction operate over time. This paper examines how the arts might contribute to soft power, with a focus on the British Council's Seasons and Festivals. The Evaluation Toolbox for the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem that is proposed in this paper explores methods for evaluating the impact of the arts on soft power. More specifically, the British Council Seasons portfolio is examined to demonstrate "how" soft power that is generated through arts can be measured through an integrated, long-term evaluation toolbox that is based on the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem and is targeted, authentic and contextually appropriate. Previous studies have stressed that the evidence on actual developments in soft power is patchy (Pamment, 2014, p. 50-59). They have emphasized the fundamental gap between the quality of data that is available to public diplomacy practitioners, and how practitioners are using this data to inform public diplomacy practice and policy (Buhmann & Sommerfeldt, 2020). Using the British Council Seasons and Festivals as an example, this paper shows how an evaluation approach based on an Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem could improve measurement efforts. The paper presents an overarching measurement framework for evaluation. Finally, the paper also proposes the creation of a Soft Power What Works Centre to further examine how soft power works in different contexts to join up evaluation approaches, datasets and evidence across the soft power agenda to support public diplomacy practitioners.

## Introduction

*"All the world a stage" William Shakespeare's As You Like It*

Soft power is a process rather than an outcome in itself (Nye, 2011), which can deliver a series of influence and attraction outcomes to improve a country's (or region [British Council, 2018h] or city's) image abroad. Soft power relies not on coercion but persuasion, the capacity of actors to convince others to pursue goals that match their own (EU National Institutes for Culture [EUNIC], 2018, p. 202). This power of persuasion is based on intangible resources such as the attractiveness of an international actor's culture and values. But it also depends on the values and culture of the target audience. The influence dynamics in international affairs are affected by growing and deepening mobility, connections and relationships. This creates an enabling environment for exploring shared values, improved perceptions and trust of a country. Soft power builds a country or region's attractiveness and influence through culture, public diplomacy and positive global contribution. Countries, regions and cities around the world are using soft power to improve international relations, bolster trade and boost tourism. Building on this definition and outcomes explored here such as improved relationships, increased shared values, improved perceptions and trust, the ecosystem approach allows us to explore suitable measurement tools for each of the outcomes within the ecosystem.

Assessing the impact of soft power is hindered by the intangibility of this kind of benefit, and the fact that past evaluations have often failed to agree in advance clear and measurable indicators. Due to the attributes of soft power resources and influence, the evaluation of soft power effects faces three challenges: (1) difficulty in measuring intangible resources and the long cultivation process; (2) variables

changing in the conversion process, and (3) the cultural compatibility between power ‘agents’ and ‘subjects’. Most attempts to evidence a causal link to soft power or systemic economic impacts within programme evaluations are to date relatively unconvincing. In2Impact argues that:

*“Often, the most convincing programme level evidence of soft power impacts is through qualitative feedback and examples of concrete outcomes in the form of MoUs or policy changes. But typically, this type of data is not analysed nor discussed in the language or framework of soft power”* (British Council, 2020d, p. 11).

Through this research, it has been identified that public diplomacy practitioners and cultural organizations are inhibited by an inability to conceptualize and measure the outcomes of diplomacy due to the lack of an overarching measurement framework which hinders soft power measurement.

This paper shows how an evaluation approach based on the development of an Arts and Soft power Ecosystem could improve measurement efforts for evaluating the impact of the arts through analysis of the ecosystem framework. The proposed measurement approaches can be used by public diplomacy practitioners and evaluators.

Evaluation practices are increasingly drawing on ‘systems thinking’ in order to attend carefully to complex circumstances and to judge the value of interventions. The defining feature of a system is that it is made up of many diverse, interacting components, and non-linear, non-proportional interactions between these components. Systems have characteristics that make their behaviour hard to predict and which present challenges to policy making



and evaluation. Context, history and delivery can cause the same intervention to have different outcomes in different settings. New tools are allowing evaluators to better describe and analyse the system boundaries, interrelationships and perspectives involved in complex situations.

This study draws on the British Council Arts Theory of Change together with an underlying theory drawing on commissioned British Council evaluations and research, the evaluation frameworks of the British Council's Seasons and the Arts Evaluation Toolbox. It adopts a mapping method by 3iE, which explores various different evaluation and data collection approaches (Snilstveit et al., 2017). The work also draws on interviews with the British Council global network, especially findings from the British Council Seasons and Festivals Learning Group. Finally, the analysis is also based on a review of other Cultural Relations organisations' evidence base around soft power.

## **The Ecosystem of Arts and Soft Power**

An 'ecosystem' refers to complex networks operating within and across a range of scales and time. Through an ecosystem there is also a growing network of organisations that are able to create international dialogue and exchanges of information through exchanges of culture. The combination of arts organisations of all sizes creates interconnections between varied 'cultural resources', an ecosystem of soft power within communities, cities, states and countries. As exhibitions, plays and musicals tour, they bring with them their influence and cultural diplomacy to an international scale. Therefore, soft power should be seen as flows, as a process to deliver outcomes such as deeper relationships, perception change, increased trust in a country and economic impacts which can occur in multiple directions, involving a complex network of partners, collaborators and co-creators. An

ecosystem consists not just a question of the 'items' within it, but of their interrelations and interdependencies, their levels of connectivity and their systemic conditions. The configuration of these different elements varies from one location to another, with notable similarities and differences. For example, in the British Council's (2020b) UK Georgia Season in 2019:

*"The additionality of the season came from a programme that was bespoke rather than 'tried-and-tested'. Recognition of the specificities of the Georgian context differentiated the season from regional British Council programmes and strengthened bilateral relations between the UK and Georgia" (p. 7).*

The British Council's Cultural Relations Evidence of Impact Report (2019d) found that there is significant evidence of the contribution which arts programmes make to increased connections and collaborations with and for the UK. An evaluation by Fleming of the British Council's (2018g) 'Connections through Culture' programme found the programme "encouraging openness, building trust and growing the appetite for more joint activities" (p. 21).

Through the British Council's Festivals and Seasons and arts programmes, we have started to see some emerging trends (British Council, 2019). Soft power is not a universal force that equally impacts audiences wherever they are. Audience reactions are shaped by things such as local demographics and cultural and economic factors. Solomon (2014) argues that the attraction of soft power stems fundamentally from audiences' affective investments in the images of identity that it produces. Further, soft power resources are usually intangible and include ideas, knowledge, values, and culture which have long-term impacts upon societies and are

difficult to measure. According to Nye, values of both the actor and target audience are central to soft power.

*"By definition, soft power means getting others to want the same outcomes you want, and that requires understanding how they are hearing your messages and fine-tuning it accordingly. It is crucial to understand the target audience"* (Blinken, 2003, p. 289).

Soft power is derived and exercised in a variety of ways such as increasing mutual understanding, collaboration, trust-building, and convening. The arts provide such opportunities. They provide a platform for engaging, sharing and understanding in a safe convening space where trust can be built even in the face of geopolitical conflict. Critically, art is an expression of a people's values. Matarasso argues that art allows us to enact our unspoken, even unconscious feelings. "It encourages and enables reflection" (EUNIC, 2018, p. 62). Crossick & Kaszynska (2016) highlighted:

*"the ability of arts and cultural engagement to help shape reflective individuals, facilitating greater understanding of themselves and their lives, increasing empathy with respect to others, and an appreciation of the diversity of human experience and cultures"* (p. 7).

Another key factor in the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem includes business relations. Economic ties and business relations are present at different levels of the system, from contextual factors to objectives. Fukuyama (1996) argues that prosperous countries tend to be those where business relations between people can be conducted informally and flexibly on the basis of trust. Zak and Knack (2001) concluded that growth rises nearly 1% point on average for each 15%

point increase in trust (p. 295-321). Research by Rose (2016) also indicates that soft power increases exports:

*"Holding other things constant, a country's exports are higher if it is perceived by the importer to be exerting more positive global influence. This effect is statistically and economically significant; a one percent net increase in perceived positive influence raises exports by around .8 percent. Succinctly, countries receive a commercial return on their soft power."* (Rose, 2016, p.217)

The paragraphs above establish why we need to look at soft power as a process through which to deliver a series of public diplomacy outcomes such as increased exports and business relations, while those outcomes act as inputs and contextual necessities for generating soft power. This is not a straightforward linear process, but an ecosystem with multiple feedback loops impacting each of the individual outcomes over time and vice versa. Furthermore, the magnitude and effects of a country's soft power is a relative measure as it is dependent on the target audience's values and the social and political culture. Impacts are unequally distributed among the target audience, influenced by things such as the levels of engagement (dosage), the different types of engagement, different local contexts and different starting points.

Therefore, as Jay and Sterman (2018) argue, in exploring ecosystem complexity, an evaluator needs to "be in a state of humility and inquiry, understanding that your view of the situation is never complete. Get additional perspectives and try to envision alternative futures. Constantly challenge your own mental models of any problem." Furthermore, identifying the contribution of a programme or series of interventions depends on observed results through an

increased understanding of why observed changes have occurred (or not occurred) and the roles played by the interventions and by other internal and external factors respectively.

Within the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem, outputs and outcomes do not exist in isolation. They both reflect and, in turn, impact upon, the context in which they are achieved, the resources which have been invested (the inputs) and the activities undertaken to achieve these outcomes. The inter-relationship of these factors is crucial. Soft power is a process mechanism which contributes and helps achieve certain outcomes over time, with other factors also playing a role such as previous levels of knowledge and previous levels of experience and engagement. To understand this type of ecosystem requires measurement of context and consideration of domains of change, inputs, outputs and outcomes (Figure 1). It indicates what evaluation approaches could be adopted for the elements and reveals the source of the underpinning evidence base for each outcome of the ecosystem.

**Figure 1: Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem**

	<i>Soft power as a process</i>						
	Inputs		Domains of change over time <i>inherent circularity of some of the Activities, Outputs and Outcomes</i>				
			<i>There are multiple feedback loops throughout the ecosystem</i>				
	Nation's soft power enabling environment, strategy, funding	Strength of the soft power assets such as cultural relations organisations arts and cultural organisations in relation to size of the country economy	Growing / deepening connections and relationships  Participants whose professional network has grown  + scale of this growth  + judgement of quality of those connections	Improved perceptions	Building empathy / trust  Improvement on scaled measure 'readiness to trust people from the other culture (compared to their own)'	Enhancing shared values, intercultural competence and confidence  Participants who feel part of a wider intercultural/ international network	Increasing trade and Foreign Direct Investment
<b>Possible evaluation tools</b>	Process tracing, Qualitative Case Studies	Soft Power Indices, Cultural Relations Dimond, Cultural Leaders omnibus tracking survey, Supply-chain analysis	Network Mapping & Analysis, Social Media Analysis and Mapping, Stakeholder interviews	Perception surveys, Digital Sentiment Analysis, Media Analysis, Qualitative Case Studies	OECD Measuring Trust, Discourse Analysis, Contribution Analysis, Ethnographic approach	Ethnographic tools, Cultural Relations Dimond, Qualitative Case Studies, Portfolio of Intercultural Competence tool	Gravity Model, Export and FDI data, Creative Economy Statistical Analysis
<b>Examples of underpinning evidence</b>		Portland Soft Power Index, Arts Council England National Portfolio International Activity Reports, British Council Value of Arts Showcasing Report, British Council Soft Power Superpower Report	British Council Art Connects Us Evaluation, British Council Connecting China Evaluation, Kings College London Art of Soft Power Report	British Council evaluation of Shakespeare Lives, British Academy Art of Attraction Report	British Council Trust Pays, British Council Value of Trust, British Council, Cultural Relations – Evidence of Impact, British Council, Soft Power Today Measuring the Influences and Effects	AHRC Cultural Value Report, British Council Cultural Value of Cultural Relations Report, British Council, Cultural Relations – Evidence of Impact	British Council Soft Power Today Measuring the Influences and Effects, Andrew Rose into Trade and Soft Power, British Council Trust Pays

The Ecosystem includes multiple interactions. Long, indirect causal chains linking inputs to impacts through System mapping and modelling can attempt to capture the key influences and interactions and guide construction of complexity-appropriate theories of change which provides a framework for exploring the strength and importance of relationships affecting outcomes and impacts in the Ecosystem. Qualitative, theory-based approaches can be used to explore whether the policy is contributing to change, in what way, and the underpinning mechanisms of change, to provide rich information and potentially useful lessons for similar policies and contexts.

The Ecosystem is an intricate web of connections and feedback loops, a dense network of interactions both internally with movement of ideas, people, products and money around the whole system and externally through ripple effects from the Ecosystem that may lead to other non-soft power related outcomes. The effectiveness and efficiency of the Ecosystem depends on the number and strength of the internal and external connections and the strength of the soft power assets such as arts organisations. Alongside the soft power related outcomes, cultural value is also created through a high degree of interaction and the quality of those relationships.

### **Towards the Soft Power What Works Centre: the evaluation toolbox for the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem**

Understanding the long-term impacts of arts participation will require ongoing commitments to research, international collaboration across scholarly fields and between practitioners and researchers, a high degree of intellectual honesty, and financial resources that are beyond the capacity of any single agency or funder. Accounting for human experiences of art and culture calls for multi-

criteria analyses and a range of approaches in order to span the depth and the breadth of research, as Walmsley (2018) warns:

*"Qualitative research in the arts has certainly succeeded in elucidating the audience experience, but it still struggles to address pernicious questions of reliability and to close the epistemological gap between perceived and actual cultural experiences."* (Walmsley, 2018, p.274)

Several approaches are needed to help evaluators overcome the conceptual and technical difficulties in measuring the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem. The vast majority of these involve, either explicitly or implicitly, developing a 'theory of change', a model of how the policy influencing activities are envisaged to result in the desired changes in policy or in people's lives (Whelan, 2008). There are two important considerations for developing a Theory of Change. First, start with a picture of what drives change in the 'target' and second, define the way(s) that the project aims to influence the target. A causal chain can then be linked into the model of what affects the target audience or outcome, to specify how the project or programme hopes to influence it. This flows from the project outputs, to a chain of intermediate outcomes, to the wider and longer-term outcomes. There is need to keep systematic track of the various actors, their interests, ideologies, capacities, their alignment with programme goals, and their relationships with other players, and how all these changes are central for measuring influence.

The measurement of long-term outcomes will likely need to be done in a series of steps linked to a Theory of Change. There would be benefit in collaboration between government and independent actors to give a more comprehensive



picture through pooling resources and methodology while sharing understanding to aid in the long-term measurement of soft power. The key to measuring the Ecosystem is to develop integrated long-term evaluation frameworks which are targeted, authentic and contextually appropriate together with a set of causal pathways. This section of the paper maps the outcomes from the Ecosystem to a set of evaluation tools to help measure the evidence of each of the outcomes, using a range of interdisciplinary mixed method tools to help evaluate the Ecosystem framework.

The Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem presented above includes the overarching evaluation paths for various elements of the Ecosystem such as inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. While acknowledging challenges, this section provides more nuanced frameworks for evaluating the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem. This proposes an Evaluation Toolbox which brings together a range of evaluation methods to capture the complexity of evaluating the Ecosystem and the public diplomacy outcomes within the Ecosystem. Methods used within the toolbox to evaluate soft power can be grouped into three types: theory-based, case-based, and participatory methods. Some evaluations use a combination of methods.

The outcomes of the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem Outcomes can be categorized as the following: (1) enhancing and strengthening soft power assets, (2) exploring opportunities for mutual collaboration through exploring mutual values, intercultural competence, and confidence, (3) building empathy and trust, (4) enhancing a soft power enabling environment, strategies and funding, (5) growing and deepening connections and relationships, (6) improving perceptions. Each of the outcomes of the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem are best design through unique tools that are introduced below. This categorization is based

on findings from British Council's evaluations and research, such as those used to evaluate the UK/Indonesia Season (figure 6) as well as the evaluation of the British Council's Year of Music in Russia in 2019 (Figure 7) which maps the evidence, outputs and outcomes of the Season to the core outcomes of the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem. Evaluation tools are introduced below to assess programs based on specific outcomes.

### **Evaluation tool: Cultural Relations Diamond**

This tool is best suitable for the evaluation of Outcomes 1 and 2: enhancing and strengthening soft power assets; exploring opportunities for mutual collaboration through exploring mutual values, intercultural competence and confidence.

"The Cultural Value Project: Cultural relations in societies in transition" was a joint research project commissioned by the British Council and the Goethe-Institut. It aimed to build a better understanding of the value of cultural relations in societies facing difficult challenges in Egypt and Ukraine. The Open University and the Hertie School of Governance brought together different methodological approaches and complementary foci of analysis into one shared analytical framework in order to examine the ways in which cultural relations work and the conditions and contexts under which cultural relations produce value and where they cannot. The relative strengths of different kinds of cultural relations activities and the value they create in diverse contexts are analyzed via a series of strategically selected case studies.

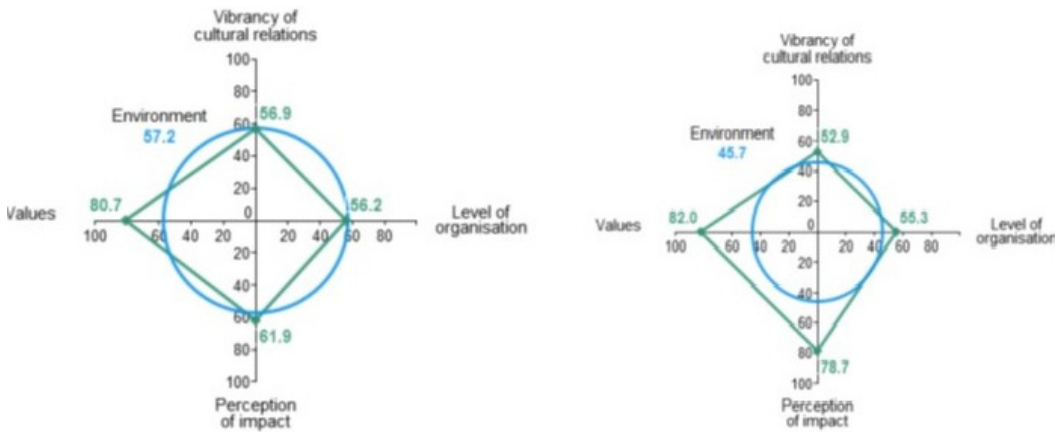
The Cultural Value Project builds on two methods: The Open University's Cultural Value Model and the Hertie School of Governance's Civil Society Diamond (British Council and Goethe Institut, 2018a, p. 10). The collaborative

synergies provide the Cultural Value Project with a joint analytical and methodological framework to deliver a rich and contextualized picture of the value of cultural relations in these contexts for different stakeholders. This joint methodological design brought into dialogue both approaches, their theoretical underpinnings, and their diverse data sets for the purpose of the analysis to provide an overview of processes, practices and outcomes that shed light on the value of cultural relations.

The Cultural Relations Diamond (Figure 2) is an indicator framework that gives insights into five dimensions of cultural relations: (1) the vibrancy of cultural relations, (2) the capacity of cultural actors to create value, (3) the perceived generation, practice and transformation of values, (4) the perceived impact cultural relations activities, and (5) the constraints faced by cultural actors and civil society, the actors mainly engaged. Given the Cultural Relations Diamond's standardised framework, the results across countries can be compared, introducing another level of analysis into the Cultural Value Project, which brings the possibility of extrapolating from the cases of Ukraine and Egypt towards more general findings about how value is created through cultural relations in the context of transition countries more generally.

## Figure 2: Cultural Relations Dimond's from Ukraine and Egypt

Source: Anheier et al. (2018)



The Cultural Relations Diamond draws from the Civil Society Diamond, developed by Helmut Anheier et al. (2018) and implemented in 70+ countries by Civicus. The Civil Society Diamond was a participatory needs assessment and planning tool for civil society in specific countries and regions, with the aim of creating a knowledge base and momentum for civil society strengthening initiatives within each country or region and for allowing comparison between countries.

The Civil Society Diamond used 55 indicators to analyse the state of civil society and 12 indicators measuring the external context. Each indicator assessed what is considered

an important, specific aspect of civil society. The indicators were grouped into 24 subdimensions which, in turn, grouped into four core dimensions: Civic Engagement, Level of Organisation, Practice of Values, and Perceived Impact. These dimensions were then circumscribed by the External Environment, which was in turn composed of three subdimensions. The Cultural Relations Diamond helps points towards aspects of cultural relations that might need extra attention for potential improvement across the Ecosystem.

### **Evaluation tool: Contribution Analysis**

This tool is best suitable for evaluating the third outcome of the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem: building empathy and trust.

Contribution analysis starts from a theory of change and builds up evidence to demonstrate the contribution made by the activity towards observed outcomes, such as increased trust and public diplomacy outcomes. It infers a contribution if a robust theory of change has been developed, the activities planned have been carried out, the chain of expected results has occurred, and other influences can either be shown to have been minimal or their influence is known and has been taken into account (White & Phillips, 2012, p. 42). Contribution analysis is not used for assessing outputs or outcomes; its value is in assessing the contribution that an intervention has made to an outcome.

Contribution analysis requires a robust theory of change and extensive evidence covering both the initiative under evaluation and other factors that might have influenced the outcomes and is best used where there is little or no scope for varying how the programme is implemented. It cannot offer definitive proof of attribution of impact, but it does provide reasonable confidence (Mayne, 2008).

Contribution analysis helps to confirm or revise a theory of change; it is not intended to be used to surface or uncover and display a hitherto implicit or inexplicit theory of change. Methodologically, contribution analysis also relies on iterative analysis whereby evidence is repeatedly collected and analysed as a narrative is developed.

Contribution analysis offers a step-by-step approach designed to help evaluators arrive at conclusions about the contribution the programme has made or is currently making to particular outcomes. In programme evaluations, this is done by assessing causal questions and inferring causality of interventions. Contribution analysis offers certainty of the impact of observed results, or the absence thereof, and the roles that external and internal factors may have played respectively. This is useful when thinking about triangulating the evidence and determining how many points of evidence exist.

Contribution analysis could help identify where there are needs to gather further evidence to strengthen the narrative in areas such as increases in trust or perception change where the evidence base might be weak or hard to measure as a potentially subjective outcome. Therefore, Contribution Analysis can help assemble a new evidence for more credible narrative development. In this regard, contribution analysis could be a suitable approach in determining a hypothesis or theory of change.

### **Evaluation tool: Process Tracing**

This tool is best suitable for evaluating the fourth outcome of the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem: enhancing a soft power enabling environment, strategies and funding.

Process Tracing is a data analysis method for identifying, validating, and testing causal mechanisms within case studies. It is a technique to test theories of causality in action by examining the intervening steps such as creating and enabling environment for soft power (Reilly, p. 734). The method requires a clear theory of change with a series of steps that are predicted to take place in the process. It is suited to studying decision-making processes and can capture emergent processes because it traces events over time such as a implementing a soft power strategy or public diplomacy outcomes, and it permits the study of complex causal relationships and provides a basis for inferring cause (Reilly, p. 735). It also helps answer questions about mechanisms and helps control researcher bias (Checkel, 2005, pp. 14-16).

Process Tracing takes a case-based approach to causal inference through a series of four causal tests. Process Tracing is a useful analytical approach for tracking consistency of results against a theory of change. These causal tests (or probability tests) allow for alternative explanations to be ruled out and are part of a wider effort to systematise qualitative methods.

The four causal tests within Process Tracing are:

- **‘Straw in the wind’ test:** the weakest of the four, this test is neither necessary nor sufficient to confirm a hypothesis, as it lends support for explanations without ruling them in or out.
- **‘Smoking gun’ test:** is not necessary for confirming a hypothesis, but it is sufficient. If a causal relationship can be conceived between an intervention and subsequent observation or finding, then this test stands.

- **‘Hoop’ test:** produces high certainty of causality and is necessary to confirm a hypothesis. Hoop tests are often used to exclude alternative hypotheses, which could exist in terms of assessing impact of the programme through the lens of the theory of change.
- **‘Doubly definitive’ test:** is both necessary and sufficient to confirm a hypothesis. It therefore requires additional evidence to the other tests as it has the highest rate of certainty.

The protocol of process tracing focuses on elaborating and testing a small number of outcomes within a larger project theory of change. This testing involves three elements:

- i. the shortlisting of one or more evidenced explanations for an outcome in question;
- ii. the ruling out of alternative competing explanations which are incompatible with the evidence, and;
- iii. the estimation of the level of influence each has on bringing about the change in question, if more than one explanation is supported by the evidence.

### **Evaluation tool: Single and Multiple Case Studies**

This tool helps measure the second and third outcomes of the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem Outcomes which are building empathy and trust, and exploring shared values, intercultural competence and confidence.

A case study is a detailed examination of a specific unit of analysis such as trust, intercultural competence in a



community, an organisation, an event, or an individual person (Bryman, 2008). Case study analysis is suited to situations where a programme is unique or highly innovative, when the project involves implementing an existing programme in a new setting, when investigating why outcomes in certain situations deviate from the norm, or when the environment is complex or turbulent such as an ecosystem (Balbach, 1999). It is also recommended when quantitative data are scarce or unavailable, and when the objective of the evaluation is learning why and how an intervention works, and not just assessing outcomes (EuropeAid, 2005).

Case studies provide rich details, are often easier for non-specialists to understand than other evaluation methods, and contribute to developing a deep understanding of situations, public diplomacy actors, and their motivations (EuropeAid, 2005). They are also flexible and can avoid the problem of being locked into preconceived ideas about the programme being evaluated (Balbach, 1999). However, Case study evaluations are also time-consuming and may not be generalisable to larger programmes or other contexts, although multiple case studies can be used to counter the latter concern (Balbach, 1999; EuropeAid, 2005). It can be difficult to select and define the cases to be examined, the approach can be expensive, and it relies on individual evaluators' subjective judgement (EuropeAid, 2005).

### **Evaluation tool: Network and Social Network Analysis**

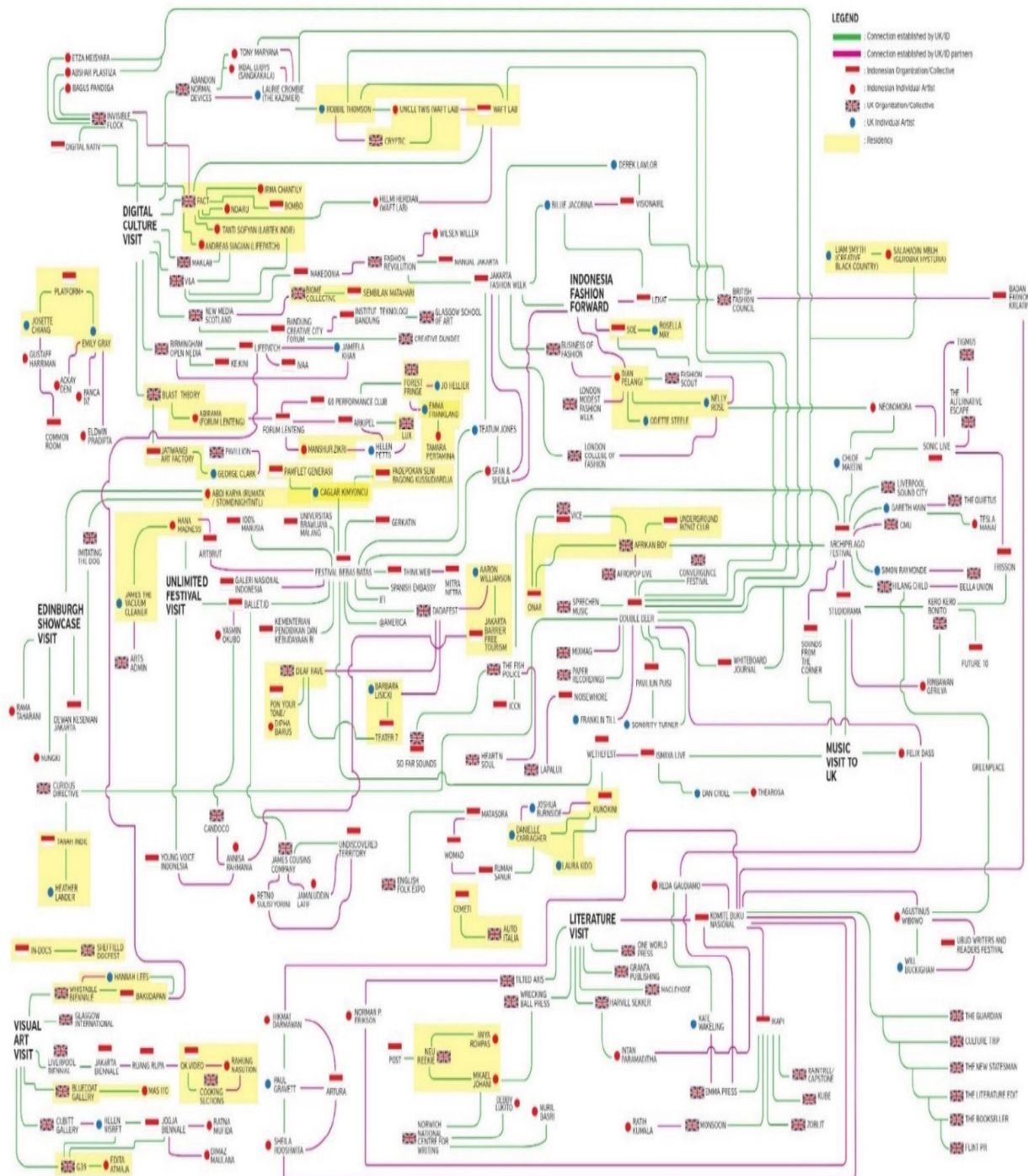
This tool helps measure the fifth outcome of the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem which is growing and deepening connections and relationships.

Through the Ecosystem there is a need to measure and capture the emerging networks and relationships within the Ecosystem together with measuring their perceived value,

to better visualize and map how networks grow and evolve. Network mapping and analysis provide a useful measure of judging the health of the ecosystem, as they explore the number and density of connections between the various parts of the Ecosystem and provide an understanding as to whether these connections are increasing or decreasing in number and quality.

The British Council's Value of Arts Showcasing report (2019a) networks and networking are regularly identified as the most valuable aspect of the British Council arts showcasing programmes. Extended from these networks are the benefits of knowledge exchange and collaboration, which were identified as significant benefits to the participants (British Council, 2019a, p. 12). Through this research 85% of survey respondents reported that they had made connections with individuals or organisations that have been valuable to their work. The research found around 17 new active global contacts being established on average per participant as a result of British Council showcasing activities (p. 2). The number of 'inward' contacts to the UK reported is also significant, an average of 9.1 per participant (p. 2). The location of the newly established contacts and the global network catalysed by the British Council showcasing activities were presented in a simple network map to show and demonstrate the effects of British Council showcasing activity for establishing and strengthening ties for the UK, as well as the significant catalysing effect for countries to establish new international connections. Figure 3 is a network map of the connections between artists and arts organisations from the UK and Indonesia Season.

**Figure 3: Connections between artists and arts organisations created throughout the British Council's UK/ID season**



The aim of the network map was not to create a static caption of each node in the network, but to highlight emerging patterns, commonalities and potential collaboration. Network analysis can allow you to break down by sectors such as audience, organisations, and policy makers to give a more segmented analysis of an organisation's reach and impact. Network mapping needs to be undertaken at regular intervals to show how relationships are changing, and it is important to examine the quality of relationships as well as their simple existence.

Social Network Analysis (SNA) gathers information on connections and maps the various nodes and linkages in a network or networks in a clear visual way, showing the length and strength of relationships and how they develop over time. A key benefit of SNA is that tools can be developed to gather data at different levels of inquiry. It allows distinctions between nodes that are people or organisations, which are more central or more dispersed, which are in a core group or in the periphery, and any subgroups and bridging actors or activities. It is possible to test statistically for the diversity of contacts and of the network itself, and to have metrics of network density, centralisation and centrality. These metrics will allow us to work to qualify the overall network and activities, and test hypotheses statistically.

SNA is a useful tool to understand, document and present details of the relationships occurring within programme networks. However, the main challenge is availability of relational data which is vital for social networking analysis particularly, as non-respondents can distort data.

While conventional metrics mainly collect data about individual network members (nodes), SNA also requires data about the relationships between nodes. SNA is a quantitative approach supplemented with qualitative methods to ensure

that a rounded and more nuanced analysis of the data is achieved. This could be achieved through bringing several other methodological considerations to bear, including Actor Network Theory. SNA is a body of methods developed for analysing social networks and particularly the structure of relationships between actors (Davies, 2009). It is a useful and versatile approach for modelling networks and value chains where the interactions among actors are the focus of interest. SNA may not be applicable to all types of advocacy and influencing initiatives, or all types of outputs or impacts, but is appropriate for evaluating initiatives where the objective is to build or strengthen networks (Giuliani and Pietrobelli, 2011, p. 17).

### **Evaluation tool: Actor Network Theory**

This tool also helps assess growth and strength of connections and relationships, which is captured as the fifth outcome.

Actor Network Theory (ANT) considers the non-human aspects that contribute to connections and networks. For example, a connection may not be able to be made, or opportunity taken if a person, or an organisation, does not have access to a phone, electricity, the internet/ computing equipment, a virtual or physical space to undertake activities, the time and resources to attend events, or the physical ability to travel. ANT involves understanding not just what networks are formed, but why they are able to be formed, and why some brokering activities may not result in longer lasting connections being made. This may be particularly useful when used in conjunction with a theory of change if the anticipated outcomes have not been achieved to enable an understanding of why this is the case.

## **Evaluation tool: Sentiment Analysis**

This tool is best suitable for assessing perceptions of a country, which is listed as the sixth outcome of the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem.

The Swedish Institute has worked with digital media tools that monitor social media and digital conversations about Sweden since 2016 (Swedish Institute, 2018). Social listening tools give the user an overview of current trends and discussions about specific events, capturing how much people and publishers post about a country. Most social listening tools provide some form of sentiment analysis, which is an AI-developed tool that analyzes the tonality of discussions. It can show, for instance, whether the posts are positive, negative or neutral in tone based on what words and sentences are used in the post.

Sentiment analysis can be automated and used to identify how sentiments and perceptions are expressed in texts and whether the expressions indicate positive or negative opinions towards the subject. It is a tool that can be used to assess opinions, which are usually subjective, and have an emotional component. Emotion is a neglected concept in thinking about soft power. Emotion and speed are related in that certain emotional circuits in the brain send faster (sub-cortical) signals than do the circuits that involve the cortex (Konstantinidis and Shanks, 2014, pp. 2111-2134). This has contributed to the conclusion that emotion can influence cognition and behaviour in powerful ways. Sentiment analysis lets us understand how we are perceived in relation to our actions through an analysis of tone and language expressed on social media.. This is important for trust (Pfister, 2015, pp. 225-231) and is one example of a tool to help capture the perception outcome of the Ecosystem. To help people respond effectively to shifting sentiments, complexity and

rapid information flows, we need to find ways to bring the insights of data science into our digital strategies.

### **Evaluation tool: Measuring Trust Guidelines**

This is another tool to help assess whether empathy and trust are built as a result of a soft power initiative, listed as the third outcome of the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem.

The OECD Measuring Trust Guidelines make a fundamental distinction between individuals' trust in other people (interpersonal trust) and trust in institutions (institutional trust). The British Council's evaluation of the UK India Season 2017 highlighted some of the complexity in measuring trust:

*"Our structured interviews asked whether the experience had increased participants' trust in the other country. Some respondents noted the difficulty in answering this question as they felt it was more nuanced than a yes-no response, with both "yes" and "no" having potentially positive and negative connotations. They also indicated that they generally had a positive level of trust before taking part in any project activities and recognise professional collaboration to be based on a certain level of established trust regardless of the nationality or location of the protagonists" (British Council, 2020e, p. 11).*

Trust measures should be considered within the broader survey context in which they are placed. As with the standardisation of wording and response formats, consistency of order within question modules across surveys and over time is essential to guarantee the quality and comparability of trust measures. Examples of trust measures



and survey questions can be found in the OECD's Measuring Trust guidance (OECD, 2017). One option is a quasi-/non-experimental approach which takes samples of those exposed to an intervention such as a festival (treatment group) and those who are not (control group) and establishes a baseline of trust in those from their neighborhood/ family/ friendship group/ audience members. Using survey questions for both groups based around trust in those from elsewhere in your city/region, trust in those elsewhere in your country, trust of those from your cultural background and trust of those from a different cultural background to you together with a questions centered on trust of those from the UK, in a list with other known, large cultural groups.

This allows an examination of the range of gradients as questions move outwards to trust in those from elsewhere in one's city, or one's country, or from the same cultural background or from a different cultural background. For example, depending on the placement of questions, trust of those from the UK could be measured in a list with other known, large cultural groups. This helps to estimate the effect of the exposure or dosage of the varying different levels of engagement if this is included in the 'control' questionnaire. Such evidence could then be combined either with existing third-party evidence of increasing trust related to increasing business engagement, such as the Value of Trust Report (British Council, 2019e) or to primary research that looks at business deals undertaken and potential business deals that were not undertaken and the relationship between trust and those deals.

A key challenge in building a better understanding of the drivers of trust and its impact on other outcomes is the limitations of the available current data. This limitation has also had an important impact on the ability to assess the validity and reliability of trust data rigorously. The OECD (2017) Trust



Database is an effort to map existing sources of data and compile them into a single repository of information. The OECD (2017) Trust Database provides repeated measures of trust for a number of countries at different points in time, from different surveys, and using different measurement instruments:

*"measuring generalised trust raises a number of issues about respondents' interpretation of the question in front of them and their subjective judgement, but these issues are not intractable. There is good evidence that, despite these issues, questions on generalized trust produce valid data, and there is extensive research that is providing new insights into the remaining measurement issues"* (OECD, 2017, p. 78).

### **Evaluation tool: Developmental Evaluation**

This is another tool that helps evaluate the second and fifth outcomes of the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem Outcomes. These outcomes are an assessment of programs that intend to explore mutual values, intercultural competence, and confidence, as well as those that aim for growing and deepening connections and relationships.

"Developmental evaluation refers to long-term, partnering relationships between evaluators and those engaged in innovative initiatives and development"; evaluators become part of the project team to help provide feedback, generate learning and support strategic decisions (Patton, 2006). The "focus is on adaptive learning rather than accountability" (Dozois et al., 2010, p. 14). The method is used to support innovation within a context of uncertainty and complexity, such as an ecosystem with interrelated links and feedback loops, and when working on early stage

social innovations. It is best suited for organisations in which innovation, exploration, and enquiry are core values; there is the possibility of iteratively generating, testing, and selecting options; risk-taking is permissible; there is a high degree of uncertainty about the path forward; and there are resources available for exploration (Gamble, 2008, 54-56). Rather than measuring success against predetermined goals, developmental evaluation provides feedback, generates learning, supports changes in direction, and develops measures and monitoring mechanisms as goals emerge and evolve.

Challenges for developmental evaluation include: managing the power dynamics that arise within innovative development processes; balancing rigour and accountability against the exploratory and emergent nature of innovation. Balancing the relationships between the evaluators and the subjects of the evaluation may raise questions about credibility; additional forms of evaluation may need to be planned and undertaken at other stages of a project; results and learning from the programme may be ambiguous and uncertain; the evaluation process itself can produce overwhelming amounts of information; the long-term nature of the process may be difficult to sustain; and there is a risk of putting too much attention on process and losing the focus on results (Gamble, 2008, 54-56).

### **In Practice Case Study: British Council's Seasons and Festivals**

The Ecosystem requires a combined mixed methods approach, drawing on the evaluation tools highlighted above. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods to triangulate and help capture the complexity of the ecosystem, psychological reactions to cultural activities,

the breadth and depth of engagement and networks from multiple viewpoints over time.

This research explores through a case study looking at the British Council's Seasons approach to an integrated evaluation approach. Quantitative and qualitative analyses are used to triangulate and help capture the complexity of the ecosystem, psychological reactions to cultural activities, the breadth and depth of engagement and networks from multiple viewpoints over time.

The Seasons work of the British Council are designed to create highly visible cultural platforms built around external opportunities and celebrations. British Council (2019a) showed, using case studies, surveys and network mapping, how participating in showcasing activity can have strong longer-term impacts in fostering lasting relationships between the UK and participating countries. Through the British Council's Learning Group for Seasons a common approach to evaluating Seasons together with common finding across different countries and contexts linked through to the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem and public diplomacy outcomes.

The outcomes from the UK-Georgia Season in 2019, were able to be compared with those reported from several other countries including Brazil, Nigeria, Mexico, Qatar and others. Through the UK India Season in 2017, follow up research in 2020 to capture some of the post season medium to long term outcomes linked to connections, trust and relationships. This research aimed to identify the legacy effects of the Season two years after its completion, with a focus on the key stakeholders involved using updated primary data collection from this group; including structured interviews and a focus group exploring their perceptions of

the Season's impacts highlighting the residue impact of the Season in 2017:

*"The overall findings are very positive. Although the sample does not include the whole population of key stakeholders, the 50% that we spoke to could identify clear benefits and positive impacts from their participation in the Season up to three years after the activities took place"* (British Council [2020e] p. 4).

The British Council's Learning Group for Seasons provides a common approach to evaluating Seasons together with common finding across different countries and contexts linked through to the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem outcomes. The target audience of the soft power related outcomes will also need to be clearly identified, segmented, baselined and tracked over time. For example, artists, audiences, and stakeholders could be monitored based on different levels of soft power engagement, soft power dosage and impacts. Management of evaluations of the Ecosystem needs to be flexible to respond to emergent changes to the intervention.

Arts programme level evaluations, such as a Season evaluation, have focused on measuring one aspect or one moment in time or a small aspect of the ecosystem. What is needed is measuring the ecosystem over a sustained period through a theory-based approach using a combined mixture of evaluation methods. Qualitative (descriptive, content, comparative) and quantitative techniques are used to triangulate different data sources and methods of data collection from a mixture of viewpoints.

The British Council is currently planning its future Seasons building the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem into

its approach for evaluation, which is targeted, authentic and contextually appropriate, and will be used to enhance the evidence base through the development of a What Works Centre for Soft Power.

### **Moving forward for public diplomacy practitioners**

Soft power is a nascent field of research for policy purposes, so there are opportunities to improve the evidence base on what works. Further research is needed to improve understanding of the precise routes to impact, the strength and nature of causality in different audiences and contexts and the durability of changes in perceptions and influences on behaviours. Key to this is obtaining both longitudinal and comparative data, applying analytical rigour and theoretical insight.

A What Works approach aims to increase both the supply of, and demand for, evidence in a policy area, which is tailored to the needs of decision-makers. It does this through collating existing evidence on the effectiveness of programmes and practices and then supporting practitioners, commissioners and policymakers to use these findings to inform their decisions. Taking a What Works approach would support better knowledge exchange, develop and share common evaluation methods, capacity building and mobility between government, industry and academia in the field. One example of this is through building a range of short-term placements and research fellowships which build a critical mass of knowledge, learning and the capacity to apply this to practice and in policy alongside establishing support research networks to share expertise, learning and insight into soft power.

Through this research, several strands have been raised to further develop the evidence base and learning for arts

and soft power impact which would further support the work of public diplomacy practitioners in the field. Most of the available current evidence is at a programme level held by a multitude of different organisations across the globe. Better comparable data at a system level would aid public diplomacy practitioners, researchers and policy makers alike by furthering progress on the measurement challenge. In that same vein, deep-dive studies on cause and effect of attempts to leverage specific soft power assets would benefit the field. Therefore, a systematic review of soft power research and evidence that pulls together the current evidence base around soft power and the measurement tools is a necessary step.

Systematic Review designs adopt an exhaustive systematic method to search for literature on a given topic. They screen the studies identified for relevance, appraise for quality based on the research design, methods and the rigour to review the strength of and mapping the evidence base. The evidence map presents a visual overview of existing and ongoing studies or reviews in a sector in terms of the types of programmes evaluated and the outcomes measured. This evidence is mapped onto this framework, graphically highlighting the gaps where few or no impact evaluations or systematic reviews exist and where there is a concentration of impact evaluations but no recent high-quality systematic review.

Evaluators have to be systems thinkers, viewing matters from multiple perspectives, respecting the ecological interdependence of things, and telling a story that connects what is being evaluated with the wider picture, analyzing and judging in context, together with respect for context. This approach allows to connect the “micro” with the “macro” within soft power and public diplomacy initiatives.



## **APPENDIX 1: Developing and Social and Cultural Capital Framework for Soft Power**

In the past decade in the UK, soft power has undergone an 'evaluative turn', evolving from academic discussion to policy implementation and benchmark setting such as through the development of Soft Power Indexes. Soft Power research so far has been based on two approaches: (1) indices measuring the assets rather than outcomes or benefits countries derive from them; (2) subjective reporting of perception as opposed to objective assessment of beliefs and how these affect actions.

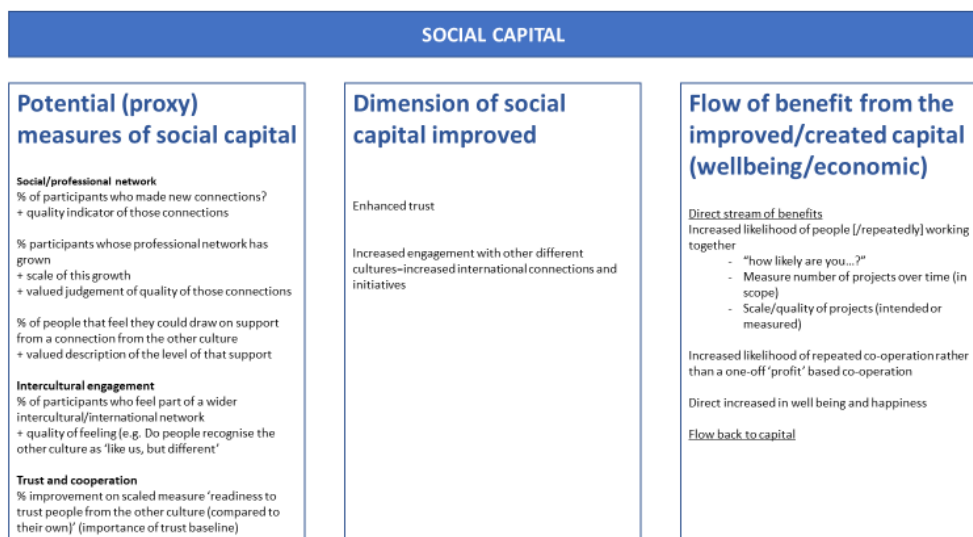
Within the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem there is the outcome around trust. Societies endowed with generalised trust gain a form of social capital that contributes to their success in modern economic competition (Fukuyama, 1996). Beugelsdijk (2004) highlights that trust is commonly employed as a proxy indicator for social capital. The term social capital is broadly related to ties and connections between people which forms part of the Ecosystem. Social capital contributes to the goal achievement of actors on the basis of relationships (Nooteboom, 2007, p.31). Gabbay & Leenders (1999) define social capital as "the set of resources, tangible or virtual, that accrue to an actor through the actor's social relationships, facilitating the attainment of goals" (p. 2).

Social capital makes use of relationships and often strengthens them (Nooteboom, 2007, p.34). It is often a by-product of other social activity and can be beneficial in furthering the achievement of goals (Gabbay and Leenders, 1999, p. 3) by connecting people in a productive and effective manner in achieving public diplomacy outcomes. They can be economic goals, such as trade. They can be intermediate goals, such as market access, reputation,



fostering innovation and public diplomacy outcomes. Figure 4 sets out a measurement framework, as part of the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem using a social capital approach to measure enhanced trust, intercultural fluency, building networks and the flow of benefits that stem from the increase in trust such as public diplomacy outcomes.

**Figure 4: Social and Cultural Capital Framework**



## CULTURAL CAPITAL

**Potential measures of cultural capital****Cultural knowledge/ exposure**

Number of people attending/participants  
[proxy for quality: net ticket sale revenue]  
% participants increasing understanding of [the] culture (+ depth of understanding)  
Relative % figures from different population groups (incl. disadvantaged/ harder to reach)  
%skills embed traditional/cultural aspects  
[proxy for quality: increased value of product/service arising]

**Increase in cultural use/embedded [mesh with Physical Capital or production]**

% buildings/physical objects reflecting [the] culture  
[proxy: increased value of non-cultural]  
% of products for sale embedding [the] culture  
[proxy: increased value of non-cultural]  
Measures of restoration/improvement of heritage aspects of physical objects/buildings

**Dimension of cultural capital improved**

Wider and stronger knowledge of and appreciation of the culture

Dynamism/renewal/relevance of the culture (not 'frozen')  
Productive mutual understanding/ string cultural identity/ learning and absorbing other culture to strengthen this culture

More visible use of the culture

More extensive physical embodiment of the culture

*Greater access and engagement to culture*

**Flow of benefit from the improved/created capital (wellbeing/economic)****Direct stream of benefits**

Increase of tourism  
Increased productivity (quality aspect)  
Enhance the UK's influence and attraction in the world

Innate enjoyment/appreciation of culture

**Flow back to capital**

More open-minded, culturally skilled people leads to increases in social capital in various forms

What has been done contributes to / extended the culture of country/region further enhancing Cultural Capital

Enhancing human capital with new cultural understanding alongside new skills

The Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem is complex, made up of fluid dense networks operating within and across a range of different contexts. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital explores sharing similar forms of cultural capital with others creates a sense of collective identity and group position. Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of relationships between social groups (Broady, 1991) and believes that there is a social dimension in both consumption and production (Bourdieu, 1986a & Broady, 1991). Bourdieu (1984) identified three sources of cultural capital. (1) Objective: cultural goods, books, works of art; (2) Embodied: language, mannerisms, preferences; (3) Institutionalised: qualifications, education credentials

A 'Capital' framework offers a 'systemic' view of what to do and why together with underpinning assumptions for long term benefits. Figure 5 proposes a set of cultural capital indicators measures leading to a flow of benefits

stemming from the cultural capital indicators measures which underpins the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem. This gives us a set of measurable indicators, together with the Social Capital indicators (figure 4), from which we can start to measure the Ecosystem. Following the measurable indicators, Figure 6 then sets out a 4-stage evidence process to help develop the evidence-base and to progress the ability to produce evidence that allows for comparability between programmes (and over time) as projects progress along the stages.

**Figure 5: Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem Outcomes and Measurement Indicators**

Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem Outcomes	Summary of the Capital Measurement Indicators
Growing / deepening connections and relationships	<p><b>Social/professional network</b></p> <p>% of participants who made new connections</p> <p>+ quality indicator of those connections</p> <p>% participants whose professional network has grown</p> <p>+ scale of this growth</p> <p>+ valued judgement of quality of those connections</p> <p>% of people that feel they could draw on support from a connection from other cultures</p> <p>+ valued description of the level of that support</p>

Exploring shared values, intercultural competence and confidence	<p><b>Cultural knowledge/ exposure</b></p> <p>Number of people attending/participants [proxy for quality: net ticket sale revenue]</p> <p>% participants increasing understanding of [the] culture (+depth/'maturity model')</p> <p>Relative % figures from different population groups (incl. disadvantaged/harder to reach)</p> <p>%skills embed traditional/cultural aspects</p> <p><b>Intercultural engagement</b></p> <p>% of participants who feel part of a wider intercultural/international network</p> <p>+ quality of feeling (e.g. Do people recognise other cultures as 'like us, but different')</p>
Building empathy/trust	<p><b>Trust and cooperation</b></p> <p>% improvement on scaled measure 'readiness to trust people from other cultures (compared to their own)' (importance of trust baseline)</p>

## APPENDIX 2: Evaluation Examples from two British Council Seasons and Festivals

The evaluation of the British Council's UK Indonesia Season used evaluation tools such as network mapping analysis, case studies and sentiment analysis, found that UK/ID strengthened participant understanding of UK/ID cultural sectors and ability to work across cultural/national boundaries.

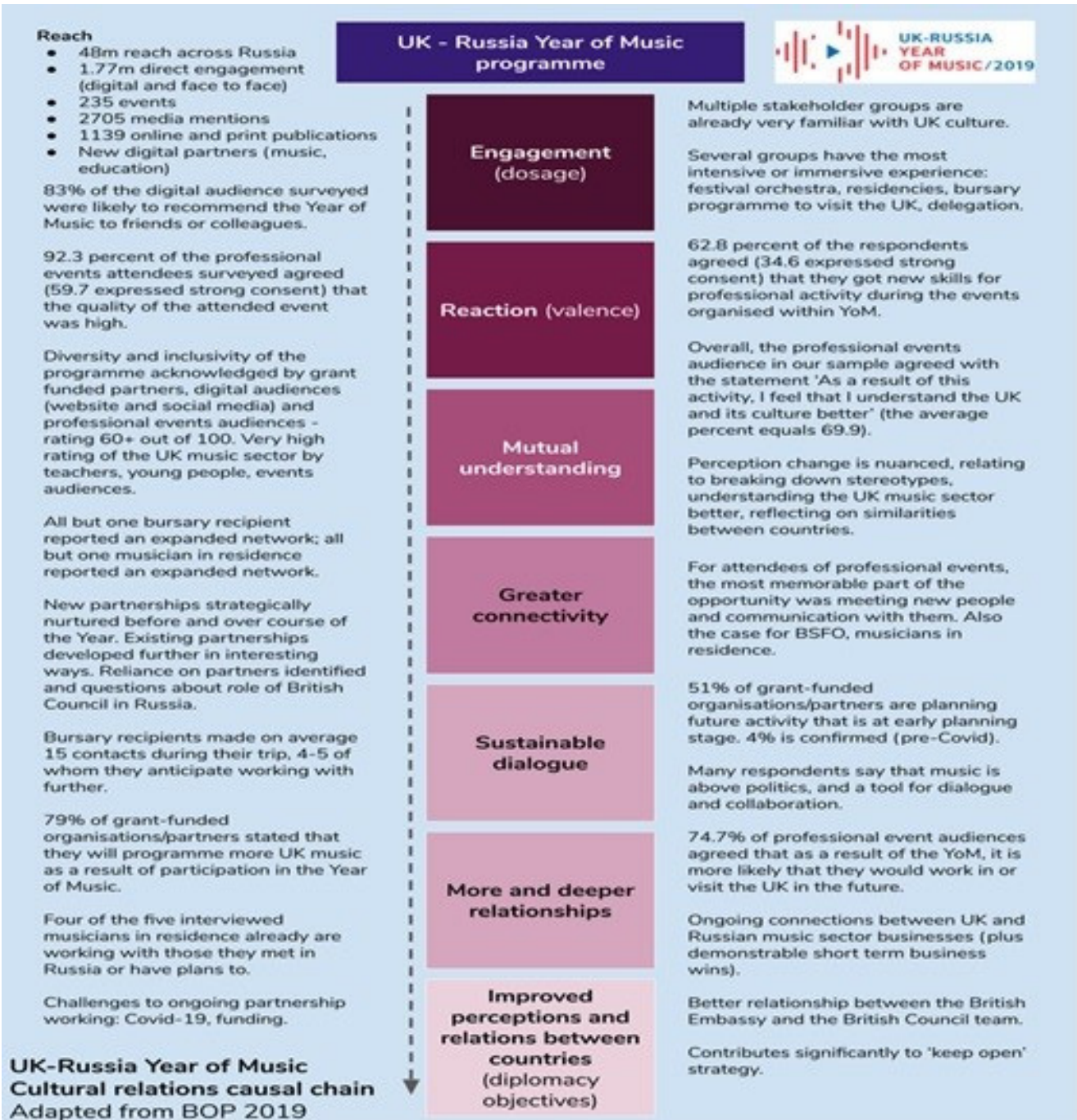
**Figure 6: UK/Indonesia Season Mapping to Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem**

<b>Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem Outcomes</b>	<b>UK Indonesia Season Evaluation Results</b>
Exploring shared values, intercultural competence and confidence. Participants who feel part of a wider intercultural/international network	The percentage of participants that they had a good or excellent understanding of UK/ID cultural sector increased from 23% before participation to 55% after participation.
Growing/deepening connections and relationships	For 76% of those participating, this was their first time working in partnership with an institution or individual from the other country.
Exploring shared values, intercultural competence and confidence. Participants who feel part of a wider intercultural/international network	Percentage of participants reporting that a good or excellent ability to work with people from UK/ID increased from 54% to 61%.
Growing/deepening connections and relationships	Increased the size of international networks of UK and ID institutions and individuals, there was an increase in the proportion of participants that had an international professional network of at least 4, from 31% to 62%.
Economic impacts	Created partnerships that sustain beyond British Council funding and engagement with 67% citing the UK as now being a key market for them and/or their organization.

The evaluation of the British Council's Year of Music in Russia in 2019 helped identify a set of key ingredients to the measuring soft power linked to the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem. These include the Theory of Change for the Season underpinned by Capital Theory; baseline pre delivery of the Season to allow for post comparison; common set of indicators, evaluation approach and tools used across all the Seasons linked to public diplomacy outcomes; continuing the evaluation after the Season has finished for 2-3 years to capture the medium to long term outcomes such as trust and economic benefits which takes time to appear using qualitative methodologies; overarching Learning Group to pull together the evidence from across different Seasons and a common approach to evaluation; exploring how the British Council's Seasons compare with other cultural relations organization's Seasons.

Figure 7 is taken from the evaluation of the British Council's Year of Music in Russia in 2019 which mapped the evidence, outputs and outcomes of the Season to the core outcomes of the Arts and Soft Power Ecosystem.

Figure 7: UK/Russia Year of Music 2019 Mapping to Soft Power Related Outcomes



## **Author's Biography**

**Ian Thomas** is the Head of Evidence, Arts at the British Council leading on the learning, evaluation and research across the British Council arts programmes such as the Cultural Protection Fund, the British Council's Inclusive Growth programmes and the British Council's Festivals and Seasons together with developing the British Council's Arts Evidence Strategy and Evidence Framework. Ian has chaired panel discussions and presented at several international conferences on arts and soft power and held the Gerry Farrell International Research Scholarship in 2018. Ian was an International Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California between 2018 and 2020 exploring evaluation approaches to soft power. Prior to his work at the British Council, he worked for Telford & Wrekin Council in the UK leading the development of several award-winning music education programmes. Previously, he worked for Arts Council England. He is a graduate of both the University of Liverpool and the University of Durham and a Fellow and Evidence Champion at the Royal Society for the Arts. Ian is Chair of the Merseyside Music Education Alliance and has sat on several arts organisations boards.



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