DAMCA

State of the Arts

Connecting

Research and Practice

Arts and cultural management are charac-
terized by different fields of knowledge that
often coexist rather than interact. How can
they be connected?
Focus starting on page 5

The Power of Connection

As the realm of arts and cultural management becomes increasingly complex, it has evolved into a field of specialized expertise – both in research and practice. These two facets are integral parts of a unified whole, each capable of enriching the other. However, research and practice in arts and cultural management differ in their peculiarities, languages, and priorities, resulting in a gap that inhibits the two fields from working together in order to improve the quality and relevance of arts and culture. While research is a treasure trove of insights and data, it can be too entangled in the theoretical realm, disconnected from the practical realities of the sector and driven by the demands of academic advancement. Conversely, practitioners, armed with experience and adept at navigating the challenges of enabling arts and culture, may find themselves constrained by time or resources, unable to fully engage with research. Thus, the question that arises is: How can we weave these two strands together rather than let them drift further apart? This edition of Arts Management Quarterly attempts to find answers to this question. In this effort, the authors probe the roots of this divide and provide examples of how we can reconnect the best of both worlds. By fostering transfer, arts and cultural management can challenge and overcome long-held but outdated assumptions about itself, such as the objectivity of researchers or the openness of practitioners regarding differing ways of thinking about and doing arts and culture. In doing so, arts and cultural managers of both spheres can harness the power of connection. This appears even more critical considering the persistent disparity in the acknowledgment of arts and cultural management approaches from Western and Southern regions of the world. It's imperative to connect all of these modes to foster a vibrant, inclusive, and relevant arts ecosystem.

State of the Arts

Dirk Schütz
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Kaleidoscope

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TEACHING SUSTAINABILITY

Plant a Seeed

To anchor sustainability in cultural management, it must be an integral part of the University program. That's why prospective technical directors at the Berlin University of Applied Sciences are taught how mindfulness of resources and event management can be combined.

by Thomas Sakschewski

https://bit.ly/sustainable_teaching

CONFERENCE REPORT: CULTURES OF AI
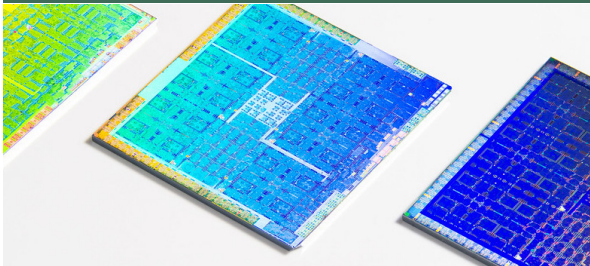
Fritzchens Fritz / Better Images of AI / GPU shot etched 2 / CC-BY 4.0

The end of museum work as we know it?

Opportunities and limits of artificial intelligence have been the subject of intense discussion both inside and outside the cultural sector. The conference "Cultures of Artificial Intelligence - New Perspectives for Museums" hit the zeitgeist and raised numerous questions that are worthy of discussion beyond the museum sector.

by Johannes Hemminger

https://bit.ly/Conf_CulturesAI22

DIGITAL MUSEUM FORMATS

Virtual culture

Museums faced a huge financial loss due to the pandemic, but now could recover by reaching more people than before - through digitization and audience engagement.

by Norbert Stockmann

https://bit.ly/digitalmuseums_pandemic

BOOK REVIEW

Music as Labour

The working conditions of musicians in Western national and genre contexts are often precarious and based on structural inequalities. With its compendium of historical and contemporary case studies, "Music as Labour", edited by Rosa Reitsamer and Dagmar Abfalter, presents comprehensive insights into the details, reasons and counter activities against this situation.

by Verena Teissl

https://bit.ly/rev_music_as_labour

ECO-BALANCE OF A MASTER'S PROGRAM

A Ton Lighter

Digitizing university teaching can improve sustainability, as the master's program in cultural management at the University of Basel (SKM), Switzerland, discovered during the pandemic. Own observations and an eco-balance gave impulses to carry out the teaching offer in a more attractive and ecologically sustainable way and to reassess the previous processes.

by Manuela Casagrande

https://bit.ly/Ecobalance_SKM

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN GAMING

Bigger than cinema

Games, especially video games, as a topic for arts and cultural management - that might sound surprising. But the production of digital games is a highly differentiated field with huge economic and personal significance for many people. So, it's time to examine the structures and methods of the games industry as a field of work for cultural managers.

by Johannes Hemminger

https://bit.ly/Games_Careers

Enhancing fair intercultural exchanges

The cultural sector and its decision-makers are talking about decolonization more frequently. But to what extent are we able to make this operational within the sector? The imbalance of power and, thus, the absence of true exchange among arts and cultural managers on an international level seems to persist. Some uncomfortable reflections may be needed.

by Federico Escribal

Beyond a growing reference to decolonisation as a political agenda, the field of cultural and arts management is based on dynamics developed from the often unconscious, anachronistic conviction that the only commendable culture is Western culture. The colonialist, racist idea of cultural distinction continues to be expressed in multiple aspects: academic events and publication formats that are not conducive to symmetrical dialogue between scholars from Western and Southern countries, training courses with monocultural conformist programmes, or prizes that support competitive logics based on Western canons. All of these elements insist on forms of legitimacy construction based primarily on interpersonal relations, rooted in Western traditions.

With the rise of decolonial approaches in the last years, it is worth debating to what extent the circulation and exchange of knowledge in arts and culture can be democratised using non-hegemonic formats and tools.

From different points of view across the Global South, we note that certain models of action have been exhausted and that the decolonial question, in its determinations in the field of cultural management, tends to be treated with a dangerous superficiality. The dissemination of "alternative" experiences continues to focus on those – albeit from the periphery – that fit the Western "success model", without looking carefully and judiciously at the

extent to which these are actually representative . All too often, it seems that boutique projects, designed to produce the admiration of the global power centres (and secure the flow of funding that in Africa is often called white money), are considered the best.

Something similar applies to speakers who are called upon to analyse their home contexts. Complex and heterogeneous cultural ecosystems tend to be interpreted by professionals who are not currently immersed in them – if they ever were –, or who can validly account for just a part of it (generally, urban manifestations in the capital cities). Typically trained and lecturing in the North Atlantic academic context, their selection tends to be guided by their ability to be assimilated into a formal and tidy academic context, rather than by their representativeness.

Literature deserves a separate mention: curiously, when looking at books and journals, they make it seem as if the only people trained to analyse culture and artistic production come from Europe and the US. I recently heard about a paper on the decolonisation of the curriculum that quoted exclusively European authors. The distortion between discourse and action runs deep.

A world in crisis calls for a crisis in academia

Humanity is increasingly aware of the multidimensionality of the global crisis it generated. These combine economic expressions of radical exclusion, incontrovertible evidence of the breakdown of the ecological balance that has allowed the reproduction of life as we have known it, and a cultural malaise that enforces the breakdown of social bonds.

"Certain academic institutions and discursivities, among them many from the field of arts and culture, seem to increasingly focus on the peripheries of the global order."

In this context, certain academic institutions and discursivities, among them many from the field of arts and culture, seem to increasingly focus on the peripheries of the global order. They appear to be seeking perspectives, knowledge, and collective experiences that may provide alternatives to

prevailing practices, which are based on the cultural patterns of the global power centres and appear to be inextricably associated with the reproduction of the current state of affairs.

By understanding and reflecting on the symbolic fabric that underpins political and social practices, cultural and arts management are particularly suitable fields of knowledge to address this issue. The development of interculturality as a critical approach has been playing a decisive role in this direction.

The idea of justice, from an intercultural perspective, implies the dismantling of asymmetrical power relations in the exchange of views, appreciations, values, and other relevant elements between different cultures. Its theoretical core is based on the equal appreciation of different cultures, together with the conviction of the need for dialogue between them as the driving force for addressing historical challenges. It stands out as an academic proposal with political implications, aimed at operationally guaranteeing real equality between different social groups. To this end, interculturality seeks to deconstruct the current hierarchical social order in and among societies that is based on the attribution of essential values to certain identities, forms of cultural consumption, and derived practices. To this end, interculturality scrutinises the assumption of the historical determination of contemporary oppressions, recognising the legacy of colonialism in their configuration. Hence, it recognises that inherited inequalities (racism, patriarchy, ageism, etc.) are articulated from the hierarchisation of a specific culture, to the detriment of others.

"Interculturality scrutinises the assumption of the historical determination of contemporary oppressions, recognising the legacy of colonialism in their configuration."

It is inadequate, contradictory and unacceptable to refer to decolonisation without accepting the challenges that interculturality proposes. From this approach, monocultural nationalisms as efficient political narratives enter a crisis, in favour of a reconfiguration that allows and promotes shared sovereignty among diverse collectives who are part of the same society and of a common destiny on this earth. Now, to which extent is cultural management really involved in this process?

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[1] *While "multicultural" refers to a state in which different cultures coexist, "intercultural" describes what happens when people from different cultural backgrounds interact and influence each other. In other words, interculturality describes societies in which there is a deep understanding and respect for all cultures, and where people exchange ideas and learn from each other. Multiculturality, on the other hand, refers to a society that contains several cultural or ethnic groups, but where they do not necessarily have engaging interactions with each other.*

Why is it taking so long?

Colonialism laid the foundations for its permanence beyond its military and political moment through the forced Westernisation of the world and its structures of feeling and thought. Consequently, operationalising interculturality implies allowing other (non-Western) world views to find where and how to express themselves, questioning and transforming institutions and everyday life.

This challenge is not an easy one to address. To date, intercultural theory has encountered limitations in its operationalisation. In part, the problem stems from the difficulty of developing and consolidating instruments of greater complexity than those inherited from the multicultural model.[1] In its quest to achieve tolerance between groups, but without an emphasis on the intrinsic value of each culture and identity, interculturality generated the quota policy (with the oxymoron of positive discrimination as its slogan). While the limits of tokenism in promoting and embracing real diversity may be obvious at this stage of the 21st century, no one is clear about what lies beyond it.

At the heart of this is the decision to address structures of inequality. From certain superficial perspectives, it seems that decolonisation simply demands the inclusion of racialised bodies as representatives of the global and social peripheries. Together with the presence of women – whose absence has today, happily, become conspicuous and unacceptable – and of any member of the sexual diversity collective, persons from former colonial contexts are sufficient elements – in the eyes of some – to apply "decolonisation" to the title of the activity, and to be able to move on to something else. This does not necessarily imply any structural transformation, in terms of the circulation and availability of epistemological and symbolic production from the traditions of the global South. We could be missing the real thing.

Decolonisation under colonial terms?

"Developed" countries – which came to colonially dominate one third of the global territories at the height of imperialism – still account for 95 percent of global exports of cultural goods and services. In this field, too, the presence of creators from racialised populations is becoming more and more frequent. A French singer of Senegalese origin or a Venezuelan orchestra

conductor triumphing in New York are examples of how a semblance of interculturality[2] is presented in the productions of the Western cultural industry. At the same time, the circuits of value production and economic accumulation remain intact. This also includes a growing presence of sexual diversity, overcoming the traditional reproduction of cis-heterosexual models that were imposed as the only possibility of sexual exercise, intending to create the false impression that all forms of oppression have finally been overcome in the field of hegemonic artistic representation. It would be inconsistent to stand up for democratic values while denying the importance of these steps forward. However, the question of the depth and systematicity of the transformations arises.

Given that the only universal condition "is to be fallen on earth" (i.e. the determination of the geographical, climatic and social context on culture and the construction of knowledge), can we sustain the universalisation of Western thought as the only formula for thinking-transforming the world for much longer?

Synthetically, just for starters, we may consider some policies for the academic field that would benefit a fairer knowledge exchange:

- **Translations:** More effort is needed in this area for the socialisation of knowledge from the Global South. Obviously, this is of particular concern to non-native English-speaking communities. Publishing conference proceedings in the other of the world's most widely used languages – beyond English – could be a good start. It might be desirable that part of the savings derived from digitisation be redirected to address this problem.
- **Decolonising the curriculum:** Closely linked to the above, international study and training programmes based exclusively on Western bibliography are intolerable at this stage of the 21st century. Similarly, national training programmes in peripheral countries based exclusively on North-Atlantic literature are not only anachronistic, but simply ridiculous.
- **All speakers are key:** The elaboration of new academic paradigms, based on the real challenges of our situation (both temporal and spatial) requires a community of peers that builds consensus beyond those that gave us security in the last century, and which today appear as a pantomime of themselves. Formats aimed at reproducing a logic of stardom in the academic field not only appear far from being able to provide solutions. They are an expression of the problem.

These are just a couple of humble proposals in order to continue advancing towards that decolonisation of which there is – healthily – increasing discussion in the field of cultural and arts management.

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Arts Management Education

Perceptions from outwith academia

By Caitlin McKinnon

This paper explores the perception of postgraduate arts management education and its implications for professionalisation. Arts management education has existed for almost four decades, and since its development it has continuously struggled with what many authors describe as a sense of distrust from practitioners towards formalised education compared to practical experience and towards the compatibility of arts and management. In the following I will detail the findings of a study drawing on focus group data, and on interviews with Scottish and Canadian individuals from a variety of educational and professional contexts and I will outline possible reasons for this apprehension.

The findings suggest that both participants who had attended postgraduate arts management programmes and those who did not generally agree that the programmes were beneficial in many ways. Still, further analysis revealed mixed perceptions of the impact of such programmes growing in popularity, seeing them as a way to formalise the sector as well as a potential gatekeeping mechanism. This fear was linked to a concern that arts management education is sometimes viewed as disconnected from the sector and contributes to an over dependence on credentials.

Overall, this paper contributes to the ongoing discussion on the relationship between academia and practice and aims to provide insights into how to build a stronger, more collaborative connection between the two.

The previous literature

Over the last 10 years, Ximena Varela's (2013) article has been regularly cited by many authors, as it provides a particularly succinct and clear timeline of arts management education. Though the focus of this timeline can be viewed as American-centric, it is regularly referenced within international-based

texts as well (Ortega Nuere et al., 2017; Mandel and Lambert, 2020). Varela (2013) asserts that while the notion of arts management is not a new one, the formal academic field concerned with its study and training of practitioners is still in its early stages of development, and along with many others points to the shared sense of hesitation or distrust towards arts management education from those working in the field (DiMaggio, 1987; Martin and Rich, 1998; Sikes, 2000; Burns and Pichilingi 2000; Şuteu, 2006; Brkić, 2009; Varela, 2013). The European Network for Cultural Management and Policy Education's (ENCATC) 25-year anniversary report adds insight into this. As suggested in it by Ortega Nuere et al. (2017), in the 1960s – and sometimes even today – there was a "strong belief that management and the arts were even incompatible because the rational mindset of managers would only lead to 'massification' and profit-making activities, which would stand in opposition to the notions of artistic integrity, and thus undermine the quality of cultural products" (Ortega Nuere et al., 2017, p.19).

"In the 1960s – and sometimes even today – there was a "strong belief that management and the arts were incompatible because the rational mindset of managers would only lead to 'massification' and profit-making activities"."

The study

Given the challenge of demonstrating the value of arts management education to practitioners and the frequent focus on the perspectives and reflections of academics currently working as educators of arts management, this study sought to explore how postgraduate arts management programmes are perceived within the sector, and what the perceived impacts of developing these programmes are. Using a combination of focus groups and one-to-one interviews, this study sought to involve groups that are commonly under-represented in research on arts management education, namely previous students of these programmes and those currently working in the sector. A sample group of twelve participants was assembled with roles at heritage, visual arts, theatre, music, film, and television organisations in both Scotland and Canada, based on my own networks in both countries and because their arts sectors function relatively similar. As an assortment of experiences was desired, this study included practicing arts workers at both

entry (Group 1) and managerial (Group 2) levels, with eight of the twelve participants having previously attended postgraduate arts management programmes.

The findings

The findings suggest a duality in the way practicing arts workers perceive arts management education. A useful illustration to start off with is found in the references to the 'language of the sector'. Many participants across Group 1 and 2 who had attended an arts management programme highlighted that their experience is what led them to learn a 'different language', which ultimately allowed them to have a better grasp of how to speak to people within the industry. This was considered by the participants in Group 1 to be a highly advantageous skill, however, some participants in Group 2 expressed concern over the development of a new sector language, with one participant who had not attended an arts management programme highlighting an experience of feeling 'left out of the discussion' because they couldn't 'speak the lingo', adding that they felt the terminology had changed quite quickly.

"Participants in both groups put a large amount of emphasis on the need to have 'sectoral knowledge' to work within the field."

In line with much of the previous literature, participants in both groups put a large amount of emphasis on the need to have 'sectoral knowledge' to work within the field. Though it was suggested that engagement with the field could come from a variety of ways, it was notable that arts management education was not included in this list and that instead, learning skills 'on the job' was favoured by both groups. That said, participants in Group 1 revealed that though they favoured the idea of gaining sector knowledge while 'on the job', they often felt that their superiors were not "really willing to help [them] learn anything 'cause [they] had to learn everything for [themselves]", and suggested that they didn't "know how you would learn those things without going to school for them".

While it was noted that there was general agreement that arts management education programmes are largely beneficial, particularly in reference to progression of the sector and graduate career advancement, there was still a focus

on the perceived detachment of academia from the sector, with participants highlighting 'learning based on a singular or biased perspective', a reliance on 'paper-based scenarios' that are not necessarily 'in tune with the sector' and existing 'in an education bubble'. One participant from Group 2 described their experience on the programme as quite "academic", commenting that they wished there had been more opportunity to bring personal experience and knowledge to the discussion in lectures and workgroups.

The notion that arts management education programmes might contribute to increasing the quality of practice within the field was affirmed by the assumption that these types of programmes create individuals who are ready to engage in a deeper thinking about the field in a space that is open to questioning the status quo. One participant emphasised this stating:

> *"I think, especially in terms of financial accountability and sustainability, that's something that needs to happen if the arts sector is going to continue to develop, and courses like this to some extent produce people who can help that to happen."*

While the participants seemed to acknowledge the fact that arts management education was seen as a formalising agent and a contributing factor to the progression of the sector, it was evident that there were mixed opinions on leaning into professionalisation. One participant highlighted,

> *"…there is some reluctance towards formalising things and to setting a way of doing things… professionalisation in general, and I can see that because people want the arts to be ad hoc and romantic and charismatic and everything, they don't necessarily want to have it formalised."*

It seems plausible that part of a reluctance to formalise is rooted in confusing the broader meaning of professionalisation with specific characteristics of what Cunliffe (2009) calls 'old managerialism'. Old managerialism is often associated with the rise of the managerial class and the managerialist ideology, one concerned with the way things are done and how workers act and are perceived within their organisations, and in which enhancing efficiency is ultimately the goal. Cunliffe (2009, p.8) adds that old managerialism is "ideological, authoritative, and viewed by some as being oppressive".

An underlying theme within this resistance centres around one of the main concerns of both groups, which highlighted that individuals might be 'cut

out', 'left behind' or 'face barriers' from within the field if they were unable to obtain certain credentials for a variety of reasons, including financial and social barriers. These findings align with previous studies, which reported fears that over-emphasising formalised credentials would lead to individuals being excluded from work in the field (Winkler and Denmead 2016).

The conclusions

The knowledge gained from this study adds to the growing body of research on arts management education and professionalisation and could be considered a validation of many previous studies. Beyond this, these findings provide a broader understanding of the complexity of this topic, highlighting the need to continue the discussion as perceptions change, and to clarify misinformation to alleviate tensions within the field. For these reasons, the following recommendations are offered:

To start, further research to validate and understand the root cause of the fears outlined above is certainly warranted, particularly if these barriers are expected to be addressed. Professionalisation within the specific contexts of the arts sector needs to be examined further to understand how it can contribute to the advancement of the sector without falling into the traps of managerialism and credentialism.

"The programmes were perceived as good in formalising some of the language and processes within the sector."

Additionally, while this study found that the programmes were perceived as good in formalising some of the language and processes within the sector, providing a community of support from within and building student confidence, it also revealed that real world opportunities and connections to the sector were perceived to be missing. Many participants who had attended programmes highlighted the difference in their expectations and assumptions of the programmes versus what they were taught, for example regarding the opportunity to learn and to practice more practical skills. As Varela (2013, p.77) notes, there has not been "a concurrent effort to educate practitioners about what arts administration degrees offer". This gap between expectations of a programme and their experiences introduces a need to identify and address where is there is misinformation and confusion.

An effort to inform and connect the industry with its academic counterpart needs to be made, but with that being said, it can be argued that such efforts should go both ways. While practitioners should be enlightened on course offerings, arts management education programmes need to deeply consider the issues identified by practicing arts workers in order to be accepted by the industry and to continue improving their curricula. Within that, it seems essential to suggest a critical reflection into the role these types of programmes are meant to play within the sector. As Durrer (2020, p.195) notes, this goes beyond asking what education can do for practice to evaluating "what is taught, why and how" and ultimately "giving firmer ground from which to explore the ethical and social roles of the discipline more deeply".

Finally, the concluding conversation of Group 2 embodies my own thoughts for the future, with one participant noting that academics, students, and practitioners are going to have to "work together and understand that there are many different ideas coming from many different viewpoints" in order "to help the industry move forward". I would argue this guidance to be of upmost importance and, as others have before me, present this moment of reflection as an opportunity to explore how arts management classrooms are organised currently and how we can allow for students and practitioners to bring their own experiences into the classroom and work in partnership with educators (Atkins 2020).

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Activating Knowledge in the U.S. Arts Sector

This article highlights the experience of Slover Linett Audience Research, a leading social research practice for the arts sector in the United States, in facilitating knowledge activation in arts organizations and cultural communities. The methods discussed in the article may be helpful to university-based researchers who seek avenues of knowledge exchange beyond traditional academic forums and publications.

by Anna Bernadska

In a knowledge society, data have become the driving force of learning, innovation, and social change. For arts organizations, data generated by nonprofit watchdog organizations, public agencies, and academic researchers offer opportunities to learn how to improve management practices and operations, better connect with audiences, and serve communities through equitable and inclusive programing. While arts organizations recognize the value of new knowledge in decision making, they struggle to achieve "productive engagement" with research data (Ostrower, 2020). With increased access to external data sources and the improved internal capacity for conducting market research, the leaders of arts organizations often find themselves overwhelmed with having lots of data, but not knowing what to do with it (Lee, 2015; Ostrower, 2020). As a result, organizational decisions continue to be based on intuition and experience rather than on data generated insights.

Multiple factors explain this research to practice gap. One factor is the chronic underfunding of arts organizations that undermines their capacity to invest in technology, structures, and expertise needed for supporting data driven practices (Lee, 2015; Nuccio & Bertacchini, 2021; Janardhan & Vakharia, 2014). In addition to funding and technology, the use of data is hindered by decision-making silos, the perception of data related activities as secondary to creative missions, and the reluctance to accept data that do not support current organizational practices and success stories (Janardhan & Vakharia, 2014; Lee, 2015; Sedgman, 2019).

[1] *In this article, knowledge activation is understood as the process of using the insights from data in decision-making.*

Across the arts sector, the sense of uniqueness of each organization even within one discipline prompts organizational leaders to question the usefulness of sector-wide data. According to Lee (2015), arts leaders often struggle to understand "how best to make data collected across multiple organizations relevant to their organization, and how to make data collected by their organization meaningful to the field" (p.7).

Given these multiple barriers, how can researchers facilitate the use of data in a way that activates knowledge[1] in individual arts organizations and across the sector? This question is explored through the prism of Slover Linett's experience of providing arts organizations with data and recommendations for audience development, planning and evaluation, community participation and engagement. The article is based on interviews with Slover Linett senior researchers Jen Benoit-Bryan, Tanya Treptow, and Matt Jenetopulos, and on a review of researchers' working notes that have been shared with the author. Information about Slover Linett and a narrative summary of findings are presented below.

Findings

The following themes illuminate how Slover Linett researchers facilitate knowledge activation: "Translating layers of data" describes the researchers' approach to working with individual organizations; "Turning the mic over" describes the experience of disseminating research findings in cultural communities; and "Thinking of it together" highlights the role of advisory councils in framing research questions and co-creating research.

ABOUT SLOVER LINETT AUDIENCE RESEARCH

Slover Linett Audience Research is a Chicago-based research company for the cultural sector, broadly defined to include museums of all types, the performing arts, science and nature engagement, public media, parks and public spaces, creative placemaking, and community funders and public agencies. The company's team of social scientists uses rigorous research and evaluation methods to illuminate needs, perceptions, values, behaviors, outcomes, and new possibilities, and to help the cultural sector become more inclusive, responsive, and equitable. Since its founding in 1999, Slover Linett has worked with some of the leading arts organizations in the country, including major museums, orchestras and opera companies, cultural funders, and other cultural and informal learning organizations and communities.

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Translating Layers of Data

When working with individual organizations, the researchers try to understand "what's most critical for the goals of the organization?" and determine what kinds of resources to use to facilitate comprehension of research findings by key decision-makers, organizational staff, and the board.

It is not uncommon for the researchers to present research findings to organizational leaders, staff, artistic/curatorial departments, and board members via an executive summary in the form of PowerPoint slides. When putting the slides together, the researchers focus on key stories within the data, while paying attention to the visual style of the presentation to make the information clear and direct.

The next step includes holding meetings with members of the executive team who are interested in getting deeper insights from the data. As Jen explained, "we pull out key insights from charts and graphs and highlight them so that we're not asking (the client) to do all of the work of making the meaning from data. We're kind of giving them a leg up, but then we also deliver full tables of splits across the data so that if they want to go deeper, they have the opportunity to do it."

"The researchers encourage organizational leaders to reflect on the value that their organization brings to the audiences, the visitors, and the community."

This process of translating layers of data and distilling down what is most critical for the achievement of organizational goals often leads to recommendations about opportunities that the organization can pursue, but also to having a conversation about activating research findings more broadly. For example, in addition to answering the questions about "how to convince people to buy more tickets, how to get ticket purchasers to become donors, and what percentage of the house we can expect to have filled," the researchers encourage organizational leaders to reflect on the value that their organization brings to the audiences, the visitors, and the community. These conversations, informed by research data and the researchers' own understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing arts and culture organizations, help organizational leaders better understand "how to connect individual organization purposes to a broader shared purpose (of the

cultural community),” and how to engage with the community in a sustainable way. These conversations often trigger new initiatives informed by the research as well as changes in the organization's understanding of the types of data they need to collect.

Turning the Mic Over

Slover Linett researchers often work on community-based research projects aimed at a broader range of stakeholders, including leaders of arts and culture organizations, foundations and funding organizations, policymakers, and the public. When working on these projects, the researchers strive to share back insights – and create shared meaning – with the communities they have been researching. One challenge they encounter is the need to show how community level data can be relevant and useful for individual organizations and practitioners.

"When working on these projects, the researchers strive to share back insights – and create shared meaning – with the communities they have been researching."

To overcome this challenge, the researchers often rely on the help of local arts leaders. Slover Linett's recent work on a project supported by the Massachusetts-based Barr Foundation illustrates this approach. The project's goal was to illuminate "what communities value and need from arts and culture organizations" to inform the work of arts organizations and foundations in Massachusetts. As part of the project, the researchers created a series of reports at the state level and for each region in the state, and then invited arts leaders to participate in presenting findings from these reports. In Jen's words, "after 20 minutes of research talk, we really turned the mic over to (arts leaders) to talk about how you do this and what's challenging about it and how research can help." Combining real life stories about arts organizations' successes and challenges with researchers' reflections on the priorities that they have learned mattered to the community appeared to be critical for enticing local arts organizations' interest in the research.

Another challenge that the researchers see while disseminating the results of community-based projects is convincing more than one person from an organization to take action based on the research. As Matt noted, "you might get somebody to attend your presentation who gets fired up about

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it, but then they have to take that insight back to their organization and convince others." To address this challenge, the researchers design "bite size" reports, consisting of a single page with the highlights of the research on front and back. These reports have proved to be a useful reference point for arts practitioners interested in discussing research findings in their organizations.

Thinking of It Together

While community leaders play an important role in disseminating research findings, advisory councils are essential for getting input on the priorities of the research and placing the research in the context of important issues facing the arts sector. According to the researchers, advisory boards are instrumental in discussing the research through the lens of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and making sure the research reflects the voices of marginalized communities.

"Advisory boards are instrumental in discussing the research through the lens of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and making sure the research reflects the voices of marginalized communities."

Some advisory councils are formed by research funders, while others are invited by Slover Linett from among arts practitioners who have firsthand knowledge of issues the researchers are trying to address. For example, in the research of classical music radio stations and new ways they can engage diverse audiences, Slover Linett worked with an advisory council consisting of individuals who were radio and multimedia presenters. These advisors got involved in the project from the beginning, but they also worked with the researchers at points throughout the process of data collection and analysis, providing feedback on initial findings, helping to identify gaps in the research, and discussing how to connect the research with practices happening in the field. These meetings helped the researchers reflect on the limitations of the research and the need to candidly discuss critical issues, such as racism within classical music and the arts in general. As Tanya remarked, "It's not only the findings that (the advisors) were commenting on, but the framing and the context of how this work relates to the equity building, the healing, and the acknowledgment of the racism that had happened in the past… They pushed us to really think about the history, but

also (about) efforts that are organically emerging in the field…The advisors were key to how we wrote the (project) report." In this example, the advisory council served as co-creators of the research by helping develop the lens through which the issues got explored.

Conclusions

To summarize, Slover Linett's approach to facilitating knowledge activation includes the use of multiple modalities to present research findings, from executive summaries and "bite size" reports to joint presentations with arts and culture practitioners, the reliance on "champions of the research" in arts organizations and cultural communities to promote the applicability of research findings, and the involvement of advisory councils who help critically assess the connection between the research and broader social and cultural issues. These methods have proven effective for knowledge activation within client organizations and among a broader community of stakeholders, including funders, policymakers, arts and cultural organizations and practitioners.

"These methods have proven effective for knowledge activation within client organizations and among a broader community of stakeholders, including funders, policymakers, arts and cultural organizations and practitioners."

In addition to contributing to the nascent literature on data use in the arts and cultural sector, the experience of Slover Linett should be of interest to other research organizations, universities, funders, and policymakers who strive to build knowledge centric arts organizations.

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Arts Incubators

Champions for Bridging Research and Practice

This article discusses how studies that bridge research and practice can support arts incubators as spaces for informal learning and development for artists and cultural institutions. By fostering introspection and offering starting points for enhancement, some results, which are presented in the following, have already proved beneficial for arts incubators in the US.

by Dr. Stan Renard

Research on arts incubators and the arts incubation process is in its infancy. Much of the research on the topic has been developed in the past decade (Essig, 2014 and 2018, Renard and Zanella, 2021 and 2022). However, it has garnered much interest from arts managers and the educational staff at many arts organizations. Indeed, cultural and arts organization interested in launching an element of arts incubation in their programming as well as the current 380+ arts incubator programs in the United States (Figure 1) pay close attention to the research being conducted. Most recently the 2021 Profile of Art Incubators technical report, created by the author and his team and available on the American for the Arts website, provides a comprehensive survey that benchmarks the budgets and programs of America's arts incubators that can inform arts organizations what resources are needed to launch an element of incubation in their community(ies). This report was recently paired with a webinar hosted by the National Archive of Data on Arts and Culture (NADAC).

Definition of an art incubator

Arts incubators and accelerator programs supporting the cultural sector assist and develop creators from a wide range of art forms including but not limited to music, film, fine arts, theatrical arts, dance, creative writing, and video game design. These programs often combine a cash allowance, a co-working space, as well as a mentorship support system, and are naturally very attractive for the participants involved. Importantly, they provide an option for artists and arts organization wishing to go through a rigorous program of varying length and scope and treat them as a startup by foster-

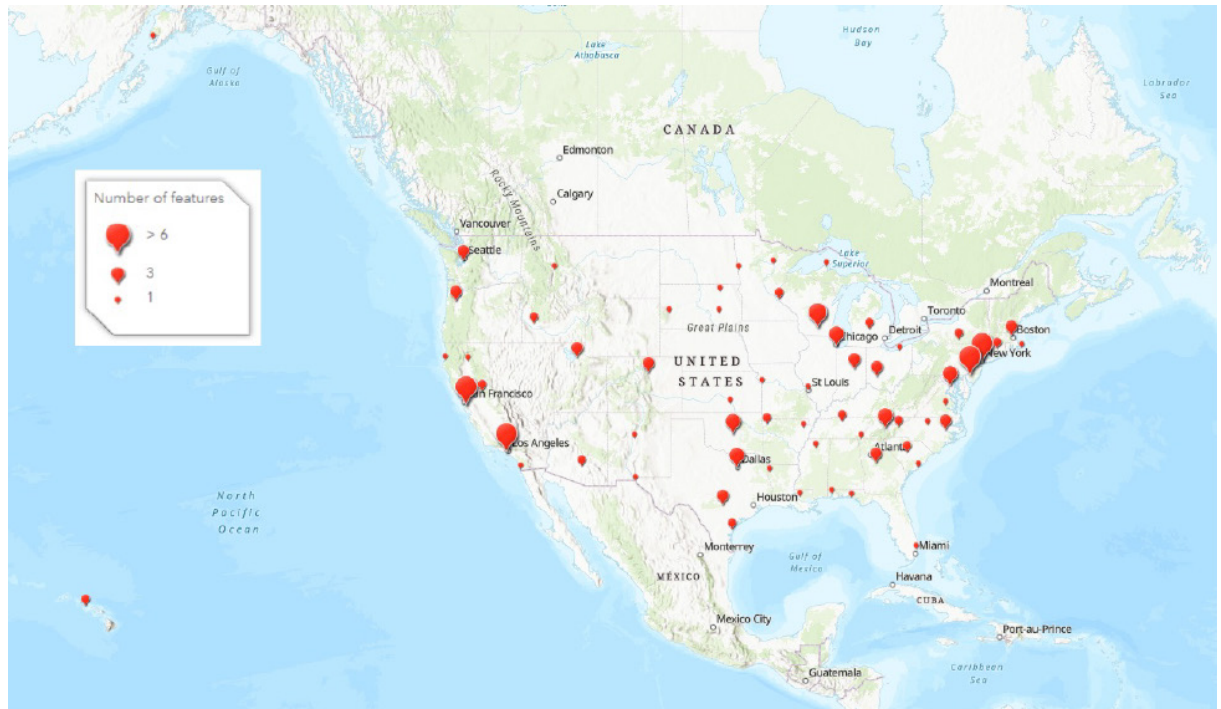ing their entrepreneurial mindset and know-how to increase their chances of success in the marketplace.

Figure 1. Universe of Arts Incubators in The United States

Arts Incubators nurture small and emerging arts organizations and/or individual artists by delivering training in business and entrepreneurial skills and mentorship to support artistic and creative innovation. While each is uniquely tailored to meet the needs of its community, all arts incubators provide developmental assistance to artists, arts organizations, and/or creative enterprises in the early stages of development. They can be entire organizations or facilities, or they can be programs/platforms that operate under the umbrella of a larger organization (including virtual incubators). They can be nonprofit, for-profit, or government entities, or have a hybrid legal status. Sometimes arts incubators are programs operated by local arts agencies. Many arts incubators don't have the term "incubator" in their name, but they typically recognize their status as an incubator, are referred to by others as an incubator, and/or view themselves as eligible to

seek funding meant for incubators. In addition to delivering training and mentorship, most arts incubators also provide one or more of the following offerings:

Networking – creating opportunities to interact with other arts organizations and/or artists to exchange information and develop professional or social contacts.

Facilities – providing access to low-cost or subsidized office space and/or artistic facilities and acting as an internet access point (i.e., space for creating, exhibiting, or performing arts).

Services – offering business services (e.g., cooperative marketing initiatives, bookkeeping, joint reception, shared office equipment).

Funding – providing funding opportunities via grants, loans, and/or equity investment. Fiscal Sponsorship – offer their tax-exempt status to groups engaged in activities related to their mission.

Arts incubators as catalysts for learning and development

Arts incubators provide services of incredible value to artists and arts organizations in their own communities including other arts incubators seeking to increase their organizational capacity or programming. This paragraph spotlights a sample of notable arts incubators operating in the United States:

"Arts incubators provide services of incredible value to artists and arts organizations in their own communities."

[Springboard for the Arts](#) located in Minnesota offers a plethora of tools on its website for both artists and art organizations seeking anything from fiscal sponsorships, worksheets to inform their own programming, to professional development coaching and several job boards. Many arts organizations use the work of Springboard for the Arts when developing their own arts incubation elements.

Intersection for the Arts based in San Francisco provides a wide range of services to arts organization, many operating as arts incubators themselves (i.e., Zoo Labs, Black Music Incubator, and many more). Intersection for the Arts offers workshops and training on topics such as arts finance, fundraising (i.e., donor development, crowdfunding, and grant writing), leadership skills, marketing, and strategic planning. It also provides a co-working space option for other arts organization to find a home as well as both sponsorships options to over 170 members organizations who may need accounting, human resources, and other administrative support, which helps those arts organizations reduce operational costs and concentrate on their mission, critical services and/or products such as programming, performances, and content creation.

For arts managers seeking additional training, National Arts Strategies operates an arts incubator with a high-quality executive program in arts and cultural strategy held in Philadelphia in partnership with the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy & Practice connecting arts leaders from across the United States. This executive program provides professionals working in the arts and culture sector valuable skills in strategy, fundraising, financial management, governance, and marketing.

Finally, the Center for Cultural Innovation is an example of an incubator that has produced many impactful studies and is a catalyst for knowledge exchange between the research it conducts and the practical training workshops it offers. The center uses its own publication Business of Art – now in its third edition – as the basis for its educational programming, which is a volume that is catered for artists and arts organizations and is full of actionable worksheets on topics such as business models, promotion, legal issues, fiscal management, fundraising, and strategic planning, all with an arts focus.

GIS as a mean to measure arts incubator success

Recent studies by the author and his team offer new insights that can be used to improve the offerings of arts incubators as well as help organizations interested in setting up an arts incubation programming element, especially when taking into regard geospatial metrics. All results were the culmination of meticulous data collection and thirteen hours of interviews with fourteen arts incubators across the United States.

Those studies provide insights into US-based arts incubators that offer entrepreneurial training to their associated 1,087 incubatees. The goal of those studies is to provide a metric that can assist arts incubators, program directors, arts administrators, and university programs in assessing program growth, funding, and marketing efforts (Renard and Zanella, 2021).

"The impact of incubators on various communities is deeply rooted in the mission statements of these organizations."

First all of all, the impact of incubators on various communities is deeply rooted in the mission statements of these organizations. Furthermore, most incubators operate with a small staff, typically consisting of 3 to 4 people on average. Due to limited human resources, funds, and physical spaces, if available, they must prioritize their efforts towards the target demographics they serve. For example, the Austin Music Foundation and Say Sí in San Antonio, Texas, focus their resources and make a concentrated impact on artists who are residents of their respective cities/communities. On the other hand, the First Peoples Fund in Rapid City, South Dakota, aims to assist Native artists in 62 communities across the United States, many of whom reside in rural areas.

Furthermore, some incubators provide dedicated arts incubation spaces, which may include artist studios (C4 Atlanta), co-working spaces (2112 Inc.), or even maker spaces (Art + Public). Others choose to solely offer programs and assistance to artists (Creative Capital, National Arts Strategies). The latter operational model allows for a broader reach, targeting as many communities as possible, while incubators with physical facilities are more

Figure 2. Co-working space at intersection for the Arts in San Francisco (left)

Figure 3. Maker Space at Art + Public Life in Chicago (right).

likely to focus their resources on neighboring or local communities. Each incubator maintains a unique approach and avoids duplicating other programs, instead providing specialized services based on the specific demands of participants from the communities they serve.

The development of network capacity varies depending on the cohort, and participants who have attended programs often establish strong connections within the respective cohort with lasting effects beyond the program's graduation.

Findings demonstrate that geospatial metrics (GIS) effectively measures the quantity and density of communities impacted by entrepreneurial education provided by incubators, and highlight three significant implications:

> **1. GIS serves** as a crucial tool for educators to assess the effectiveness of their educational activities and programs. By incorporating a geospatial impact measure alongside existing metrics, the educators working for incubators can gain insights into which non-local communities are most significantly influenced by their operations. This knowledge enables them to enhance and optimize their educational programs accordingly.

> **2. By leveraging GIS,** incubator leaders can extend their fundraising and marketing efforts to regions that are most affected by their activities. Understanding the geographical reach of their impact allows them to strategically target resources and engage with communities that can benefit the most from their initiatives.

> **3. University incubators** should strongly consider adopting GIS to evaluate their own programs, particularly as they deliver entrepreneurship education and expand their alumni network. Incorporating this metric into their evaluation processes will shape future research on the assessment of entrepreneurship training. It will also enable the quantifiable assessment of students' career progress, potentially accelerating their professional development.

Thus, using a geospatial metric will not only enhance the success rate of incubators but also contribute to the continuous improvement of educational programs. By accurately measuring the extent of their impact and strategically allocating resources, incubators can maximize their effectiveness in

supporting aspiring entrepreneurs and fostering community development (Renard and Zanella, 2021, 2022).

Incubators Benefiting from Research

Several of the arts incubators studied have contacted us to tell us that they have used our studies as references when applying for grants and other sources of funding and that those were important to the funding agencies. Others used our studies to validate their own assumptions, such as either moving away from a costly physical space into a virtual environment to downsizing their office space or even to support their growth strategy. Finally, the studies spotlighting specific arts incubators helped promote those organizations, making them more visible to other organizations and the public. Our lab also helps promote the activities of those organizations. For instance, if they have a call for participants and funding they are providing to artists, they contact us so that we may further disseminate their efforts.

Conclusion

Each arts incubator provides a unique alternative to formal education and acts as a professional development platform catering to the community(ies) of artists and arts organizations it serves. The knowledge exchange occurring between the universe of arts incubators and the academic community is still developing but many efforts have been made in recent years to synergize the activities of both communities. The article provides a glance into the complex ecosystem of arts incubators and showcases the scope of offerings featured by a few arts incubators with the hope that it will spur the reader to investigate further.

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Co-researching participation in cultural centres

The co-research project PARTICIPATE successfully bridged research and practice on participation to move from knowledge exchange to joint knowledge creation, resulting in research on and improvements in the participatory work of cultural centres in Denmark, a new funding programme for the sector and transnationally relevant methods.

by Louise Ejgod Hansen and Rachel Faulkner

PARTICIPATE is a research and development project in which two partners bridged research and practice related to the field of arts and culture. It is a partnership between the Association of Cultural Centres in Denmark (Kulturhusene i Danmark) and Aarhus University, funded by the foundation Nordea-fonden. Together with Karen Nordentoft, Birgit Eriksson and Louise Ejgod Hansen from the School of Communication and Culture at Aarhus University, 35 co-researchers created knowledge on participation and citizen engagement through participation. The co-researchers were leaders, employees and volunteers from small and large, urban and rural cultural institutions including multi-use cultural centres, libraries, museums, art galleries and citizen led spaces.

Aesthetic intensity	A feeling of togetherness	Social inclusion
Well-being	Creativity	Learning
Empowerment	Local development	Sustainability

The nine values of participation

At the start of the project, all co-researchers attended a two-day seminar. In addition to the methods, the group was introduced the different forms and values of participation as a framework to research participation in their own cultural centres.

Co-inhabitation
Aesthetic attention
Education
Co-creation
Physical exercise/play/games
Sharing material ressources
Publics
Co-decision

The eight forms of cultural participation.

The co-researchers gathered and analysed data on participants, on forms and values of participation, and on the way in which their own cultural centre enabled and hindered different forms of participation. They undertook and documented their research over a period of 15 months, getting together periodically for joint reviews – both as a large group, and in small, regional support networks that were led by the co-researchers. The methods applied included analysis of documents from the cultural centres, interviews with different types of participants, observation at different events, visual mapping of the spaces of the cultural centres and autoethnography on their own role as researchers. With this, the co-researchers provided initial analysis of their own data followed by a transverse analysis led by the academics that combined the complete data set with a nation-wide survey of cultural centres. In its core, PARTICIPATE was built on the idea that a collaborative approach to research was valuable both for practitioners and for academics.

The knowledge created during the project is valuable for arts managers to improve their understanding and documentation of the value of different forms of participation. It is also valuable for policy makers in search of insight into and evidence of the way in which cultural centres can function as arenas for democratic processes.

What were the benefits?

Networks and knowledge exchange

PARTICIPATE facilitated knowledge exchange between academics and practitioners and among the practitioners, building relationships and a network that enabled the practitioners to learn from each other. The knowledge exchange processes shed light on many different aspects including how to apply the research methods in practice, insight into the way in which other cultural centres engaged with and handled the same challenge, e.g., to include challenging groups of users. Both the dialogue between practitioners and with the academic researchers created a space for a more thorough reflection on one's own practice offering other perspectives on daily work routines.

"Both the dialogue between practitioners and with the academic researchers created a space for a more thorough reflection on one's own practice"

More and richer data

From a research perspective, the involvement of the co-researchers meant that more data was gathered than the academic team would have been able to collect on their own. More importantly, the data was enriched because it was collected by practitioners with expert knowledge about the cultural centres. This expert knowledge was also important in the analysis of data, given a deeper insight into the practices of participation.

Professional development and new insights

PARTICIPATE provided the practitioners with professional development in the form of new tools to use in their work which resulted in new insights to apply. Some of these changes were very hands-on and practical. For instance, the document analysis included an analysis of the door signage in one cultural centre, which made the co- researcher realise that their communication focused on things that were not allowed, resulting in them finding more welcoming ways to communicate. Another example was the process of visual mapping in which the co-researcher engaged her colleagues. This resulted in a debate on the status of different user groups, how resources were distributed and addressed questions of inclusion and exclusion that they had not previously been aware of.

What were the challenges?

Expectations and terms of participation

The co-researchers were a mix of full and part-time paid employees, volunteers and self-employed, meaning that some were paid to participate and some were not. The project demanded time and sustained focus and some of the co-researchers were not able to deliver all the data that was expected. With hindsight, the introduction to the methods was more complex than necessary and the intense kick-off seminar, introducing entirely new perspectives, built up expectations of a difficult and challenging task. The intention was to build a good and solid foundation for the co-researchers own data gathering process, but the seminar set the barrier too high and did not sufficiently address the concerns and questions of the co-researchers.

Quality and purpose of the data

From an academic perspective, the data that was generated was 'messy' and, in some cases, partisan. For example, the co-researchers wrote quite differently to each other, and some wanted to represent what was working well in their own cultural centres. Consequently, it was more difficult and time-consuming to work with the data in a systematic way and transform it into something that could both contribute to academic knowledge whilst acknowledging and respecting that the co-researchers might use the data to legitimize and document the importance of their work.

Confidence and knowledge hierarchies

When practitioners engage in a project with academics it is important to be aware of the different attitudes towards knowledge hierarchies and that some practitioners can experience a lack of confidence about their own knowledge and abilities due to societal values placed on academic versus practitioner

Cultural centre Trekanten, photo by co-researcher Michael Mansdotter (left)

Cultural centre Torup Ting, photo by co-researcher Catalina Odile Sommer (right).

knowledge. The idea that they are experts on their own practices is extremely important to communicate and the researchers need to explicitly acknowledge the role of the co-researchers in the research process.

What were the values?

In PARTICIPATE it was important to acknowledge and understand the different perspectives and purposes of being involved in the process and, in doing so, to create room for shared authority, different voices and outcomes that were of value to both the practitioners and the academics.

For the academics, the value of the rich data led to several academic findings not just on participation, but also on methods for citizen research. The project has – and is still in the process of creating – traditional academic outputs in the form of reports, conference papers and articles. The impact of PARTICIPATE has been much larger than traditional and even commissioned research, resulting in e.g., presentations at professional seminars and engagement on public debates on cultural centres. In addition, the project has been fun, and the relations built with practitioners has been rewarding not only professionally but also personally.

"The impact of PARTICIPATE has been much larger than traditional and even commissioned research resulting in e.g., presentations at professional seminars and engagement on public debates on cultural centres."

For the cultural practitioners, aside from the professional development and networking that the process provided, the value and outcomes for their practice were three-fold:

> **1. Enhanced relationships** with their audience/ participants, leading to stronger collaborations with civil society – volunteers and voluntary organisations;
> **2. New insights** about how their audience/ participants view, use and value participation, leading to improvements, and in some cases, transformations in their cultural offers, particularly around facilitation and engagement. As one co-researcher described, "it is not only a question of programming, but also of how we present it to the people,

how we communicate, how the interior and the buildings are designed. Looking at everything with open eyes again was a valuable part of the project";

3. A shared definition of the effect of participatory culture focusing on the meaning and value to the lives of the people that are participating, leading to increased advocacy for and recognition of the work.

For both researchers and practitioners, one of the biggest successes builds on the terminology and insight into forms and values of participation. Following the publication of the research reports Nordea-fonden as one of the largest public foundations in Denmark has created a new funding scheme specifically to support cultural centres and their participatory work.

The relevance of PARTICIPATE

After the process of data gathering, the co-researchers have continued to implement the findings and integrate the methods into their daily work. This process is vulnerable, and success requires the support of the management of the cultural centres as well as the inclusion of other colleagues than the co-researcher. In some cultural centres, PARTICIPATE has provided a shared language for understanding and improving their own practice, for some the results have been on a more practical level as described above.

"PARTICIPATE has provided a shared language for under–standing and improving their own practice."

The outcomes of PARTICIPATE are transnationally relevant for cultural managers, researchers and policy makers, who can apply the five methods and the forms and values of participation in their work. The methods can be used strategically to:

- Review the nature, value and impact of current participation to improve programmes;
- Involve users from the start in designing policy and programmes;
- Assess and implement diversity, equity and inclusion work e.g., to find out what barriers people have in accessing your work, or to understand who your users are and therefore who is missing.

PARTICIPATE showed that the outcome and value of participatory projects in research as well as in cultural institutions differ depending on the perspective, and that multiplicity is not a problem or a mistake, but a precondition that

Table 1

What questions each of the five methods can answer in relation to the forms and values of participation	Which of the 8 forms of participation can be found in the cultural centre?	How are the 8 forms of participation promoted or hindered by the culture centre's organisation?	What values do the 8 forms of participation have for the participants, the cultural centre and possibly the local area?
Graphic mapping	What activities are there?	Which forms of participation are promoted/hindered by physical access, decor and facilities?	What partners and users does the house have and have not?
Document analysis	Which forms of participation are communicated on SoMe, website, notice boards, in newsletters etc.?	Which forms of participation are promoted/hindered by administrative and economic conditions (rules, prices, etc.)?	Which forms of participation best match the values of the cultural institution and the needs of the local area?
Observation	What forms of participation take place, in which activities and with which participants?	Which forms of participation are promoted/hindered by the internal culture and the distribution of power and resources?	Are there visible/noticeable effects of the participation (e.g., joy, conversations, learning)?
Autoethnography	Which forms of participation do you feel most at home in?	Which forms of participation do you perceive as the easiest to work with in the house?	Which forms of participation do you perceive as particularly valuable?
Interviews	Which forms of participation are practiced by the users – and which are not?	What opportunities and barriers or limitations for participation do users experience?	What meaning and value do the forms of participation have for different users?

needs to be accepted and tackled in a dialogical and ideally non-hierarchical way. The collaborative approach has been demanding, but it has also embedded the research much more firmly in the practice at the cultural centres and has made the co-researchers insight into the findings much more profound.

The final English report and accompanying guide, to be published this summer, will provide examples of their use, including (illustrated in table 1) the type of questions each of the methods can answer.

Louise Ejgod Hansen, Associate Professor, School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University. In collaboration with Professor Birgit Eriksson and PhD Fellow Karen Nordentoft, she is engaged in PARTICIPATE. She is primarily doing research on the link between cultural policy, cultural institutions and cultural participation and has extensive experience in knowledge exchange and collaborations between research and practice.

Rachel Faulkner, Arts Consultant. Rachel was engaged in PARTICIPATE as a practitioner through her work with Culture Shift, a participatory arts organization. She has worked as a cultural manager in the UK, Australia and Denmark, where her practice has been developed and informed by both experience and evidence.

Community-Engaged Programming

Improving community-engaged collaborations from a cultural institutional perspective requires challenging some of the overt ways in which we operate, and a deeper reflection of how and why collaborative knowledge and practices take place. The Newcastle Writers Festival has adopted such a community-engaged practice in establishing Story Hunter, leading to a university-community partnership for designing evidence-based and writer-led children's literacy programs in regional schools in New South Wales, Australia.

by Bethany Falzon

As I peered out across a small bleak school quadrangle, searching a path to avoid the rain, I heard a hesitant voice speak up "Hey, don't I know you?". I turned, a sense of recognition washed over the young face looking up at me. "Miss, you tricked me into writing!" they beamed. I recognised the student from a Story Hunter pilot workshop we had held several months ago. During the workshop, they were struggling to write. I knelt at their desk, getting to know them, talking about everything except writing. They had some incredibly interesting ideas, I told them so, and eventually they began writing a story, several pages long, which culminated in a battle at an intergalactic fast-food car park. I laughed at the memory, before excitedly asking them: "Is there a second saga yet?!" Interactions like this provide anecdotal evidence that when we work closely with communities, we can have a powerful impact. However, anecdotal evidence based on individual accounts is rarely enough for organisations who design programs, artists who facilitate them, school principals who allocate precious resources to them, and of course students themselves who participate. Story Hunter centres anecdotal evidence to inform our programming decisions, whilst also embedding frameworks, research, quantitative and qualitative data.

Collaboration and Community

Collaboration – defined as two or more people working together to produce something that is new or different – is not always standard in the arts and cultural sector, let alone done well. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that when done badly, community-engaged projects can do more harm than good.[1] This could be in the form of burning an important relationship, overestimating or assuming community support, failure to produce an outcome, misstepping on a cultural issue, or having to return funding. For organisations seeking to embed collaborative practices and bring in new perspectives and ideas, community-engaged practice can be a strategic tool for working towards this. However, undertaking community-engaged collaborations from a cultural institutional perspective requires amending some of the ways in which we operate, and a deeper reflection of how and why we want to collaborate.

Community-engaged collaborations are generally guided by models such as community arts and cultural development, asset-based community development, and/or distributive justice theories. Yet, there continues to be little detailed evidence on the efficacy of these models particularly in an arts and education contexts. Theory on formats for community-engagement has no singular framework or artform but a deep way of working and bringing in new perspectives, and hence the transfer of knowledge in these spaces remains complicated. There is no singular approach to community-engaged practice: it changes from project to project, and is about doing things not for, but of, by and with the community, where space is provided for autonomy, agency and decision making.

"Theory on formats for community-engagement has no singular framework or artform (...), and hence the transfer of knowledge in these spaces remains complicated."

This challenge is further exacerbated within our education system, as schools face increasing pressure to standardise teaching and learning frameworks in their classrooms. There are positive outcomes from some standardisation efforts, but creative practices, particularly approaches to literacy, thrive on alternative ways of doing and being.

Both creative practitioners and educators often lack time and access to read research publications, in addition to time, resources and skills needed to actually establish communities of practice that increase access to social learning and thinking together, contributing to their own practice (Goodhue & Seriamlu 2021). Thus, it becomes integral for cultural leaders to identify, understand, and make frameworks explicit and intentional, in order to embed knowledge transfer by supporting formal and informal communities of practice.

"Our form of knowledge transfer is embedded into the structure of the program through frameworks that use creative and participatory activities as a foundation for engagement, communication, and facilitation."

Story Hunter focuses on creating pathways that incorporate interaction across our communities of writers (as practitioners), teachers (as facilitators) and students (as experts). Our form of knowledge transfer is embedded into the structure of the program through frameworks that use creative and participatory activities as a foundation for engagement, communication, and facilitation. It is integral for this program to focus on existing literature and frameworks, and immerse this knowledge into our everyday practice, embedding community voices and co-design elements into every aspect of our design, and not just delivery.

Newcastle Writers Festival

To understand the Newcastle Writers Festival (NWF), you need to understand Newcastle, the second-largest city in New South Wales (NSW), located two hours north of Sydney. It is the metropolitan centre of the Hunter region, which is one of Australia's oldest wine producing areas and the largest coal mining area in NSW. The region, with a population of almost 800,000 people, comprises 11 local government areas (LGAs), including Cessnock and Port Stephens, many of which are fast becoming a popular and affordable lifestyle destination for young families.

Founded in 2013, NWF runs a weekend festival featuring local and visiting writers, often in front of sell out crowds. In 2018, NWF took children's authors to Cessnock, one of the Hunter's most disadvantaged regions but

also fastest growing with young families forecast to make up 60 percent of future growth. In the five years since, we have watched that same community deal with the pandemic and its various social and financial impacts. And so – knowing the immense value of stories generally, and for children specifically (Logan et al. 2019) – the idea for Story Hunter was born.

Starting Small, Bias and Creative Control

With this in mind, we set out to design a program that embeds best practice community-engagement practices and responds to the needs of our regional communities. We consciously focused on creating pathways and interactions that allow space for writers, educators, and students to cross-collaborate.

Our project had several guiding principles: start small, recognise bias, and balance creative control. Rather than contact every school in the Hunter, we reached out to educators who had previously come to NWF events, or whom we had connections to. We identified and focused on Stage 3 students (aged 9-13) in three LGAs – Newcastle, Cessnock, and Port Stephens – based on access to key school decision-makers, connections with government, and networks of writers within those areas. By narrowing down who and why – starting small – we made our collaboration place-based, focused, and much more achievable. We wanted to drill down to the resources that already existed in these spaces to take an asset-based community approach. We encouraged our writers to position teachers and students for their expertise, as writers and as guides, and to value the passion, knowledge, and skills that already exist in these classrooms.

"By narrowing down who and why – starting small – we made our collaboration place-based, focused, and much more achievable."

However, regardless of how small you start, when you employ community-engaged processes, issues of power and safety immediately arise. Cultural leaders Cara Kirkwood and Robyn Higgins argue that all projects have to start with critical self-reflection on our own histories, biases, and privileges (Kirkwood & Higgins 2018). This involves vulnerability

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and transparency, which are risky, but offer opportunities for long-term and genuine exchange. Arts workers should ask themselves: Why are we undertaking this collaboration? Is there context to the collaboration or previous relationships to continue to build on? Who benefits from the exchange? Caroline Lenette argues that "the absence of "reflexivity" [in any community-engaged practice] has considerable potential to cause harm" (Lenette 2022). In the case of NWF, we are based in a regional city and many of our writers live in the city. How do we ensure our regional and rural communities are centred in the design and not just delivery of Story Hunter?[2]

Cultural leaders are often balancing competing demands, serving many stakeholders, and setting themselves many goals. However, community-engaged work requires us to let go of habitual ways of working. Our "labour" as community cultural workers is first and foremost to "create a space that nurtures being and purposeful engagement" (Abood & Ahmed, 2023). While goals focus our attention, they inadvertently persuade us that we are in control of every aspect; without space for community agency. Arts worker Claudia Chidiac argues that creative justice in community must embed mentorship and eldership into the process, ensuring enough creative control is present to deliver meaningful impact, yet enough distance is allowed to "make ourselves [facilitators, artists and cultural workers] redundant" (Chidiac & Fisher 2023).

"Rather than relying on goal-setting, we shape our processes around values such as integrity, innovation, collaboration and a passion for literature."

For Story Hunter, this means that rather than relying on goal-setting, we shape our processes around values such as integrity, innovation, collaboration and a passion for literature, allowing elements of creative control to be assumed by writers, educators and students. We focused on our writers as practitioners of this process through training, co-design, and one on one support, and we sought to embed community-engaged theories, practices, and values into how we collectively facilitate and run programs. For us, first and foremost, we want to position students as experts or knowledge bearers of their own stories and commit to platforming the next generation voices.

First Steps: Pilot It

Having identified and met with our communities, and designed a loose framework, we developed a partnership with Story Factory, a Sydney-based not-for-profit creative writing centre for young people in under-resourced communities, who shared similar values. Together we shared skills, networks, and resources, and invested in undertaking a small test pilot with 280 students across five schools. We tested two models. The first model was a multi-week model, one paid writer into a classroom for 1.5 hours each week for 5-6 weeks. The other model involved "intensive" workshops with the same group of 30 students across two days, with five paid writers present each day. Both pilot programs received similar results, and were overwhelmingly positive:

- 100% of teachers agreed that the program improved their students' literacy levels;
- 100% of writers felt confident delivering the program again;
- 97% of students had a positive experience;
- 74% of students felt the program made them more confident storytellers.

The multi-week model allowed students time and space to build relationships with a writer and complete their own short story prose, however, the intensive model seemed more effective in creating memorable experiences, and greater opportunities for one-on-one engagement.

Where to next?

Despite this success, we identified a large gap in our knowledge transfer. We had successfully identified strategies that embed knowledge transfer between writers and students, which sought to ensure participants felt confident and empowered to generate ideas, and we had converted these to programming outputs. But we failed to successfully recognise how to embed long term knowledge transfer between our educators. Teachers and educators are increasingly expected to demonstrate efficacy, but taking continuous steps to ensure that we are supporting, sharing, or disseminating knowledge and resources between and across writers, educators and students needs more strategic practices.

We approached the University of Newcastle School of Education and presented our data, initially for input onto our methodology. They sought to partner with us to support the next stage, a two-year feasibility study, supporting evaluation and impact report, alternative teacher-writer support mechanisms, and placements for their student teachers. This is an important outcome for cross-sector pollination, and ongoing reciprocal knowledge sharing. Universities have much greater access to academic literature and contemporary research and frameworks.

Conclusion

For cultural leaders, embedding and transferring community-engaged theory to practice is always going to be challenging. However, it's essential if we work with communities, that we have a clear intention of the frameworks, and of the core communities of practice that we are trying to establish. For us, it was that writers, educators, and students are continuously exposed to theoretical frameworks and approaches to the how and why of our processes. We found this allowed all of them to feel more confident, take greater creative risks with their literacy teaching and learning, and to be honest with us when things didn't work. We allow for mistake making, differing ideas and views, which are inevitable human interactions, and respond through critical thinking, communication, kindness, and self-reflection (although, more could be done to explicitly discuss failure in community-engaged practice). And as for the students in the quad, when we said farewell I called out "You're stuck with us in Term 3 for poetry workshops!", adding a playful wink for good measure. "I hate poetry, Miss", their trademark mischievous grin lingering.

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