

Flexible Framework:

Working Towards a Dialogical Process

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How do we measure impact in arts and culture? What type of impact is relevant for these organizations and for communities? What are current impact studies telling us and what are they leaving out? These questions were repeatedly raised at Mary Elizabeth Luka's roundtable (Collaborative and ethical research that incorporates arts-based or research-creation approaches), giving us insight on what concerns traditional impact research methods are not addressing. Impact assessments that are usually used in the arts and culture sector are not designed for evaluating the effect of specific artforms and cultural practices among people and are mostly focused on economical factors (measuring value in relation to the amount of money, time or effort invested). Although their data is useful, the focus is also an indicator of what is being left out.

During the roundtable the concepts that kept coming up were about how to build trust with communities, horizontal collaboration, what is valued by organizations and what is meaningful for people. Traditional impact studies can give us a one-sided view (or authoritative view), which, as said before, lacks one of the principal components of what cultural and artistic practices aim for - that is, enhancing communities and peoples lives in a meaningful way. So, as a sector that is mainly made for people, how can we assess the impact of arts and culture *in* people's lives? This was one of the principal concerns of this roundtable which made evident the need for a different approach to impact assessment that traditional frameworks, as a single layered method, does not have the capacity to reach.

Mary Elizabeth Luka presented her work on ethics and practices of care for and from people. We discussed practices that were not for arts and culture but for people in communities that make arts and culture possible. The collaborative approach of measuring impact was understood not as a monologue

from the organizations towards communities, but a dialogical process that actively involves communities, people in the communities and artistic and cultural practices to work together for the development of spaces where everyone can tell their stories. Research creation or arts-based approaches give people and communities agency, where they have the possibility to co-construct their collective and personal identity as an active participant in society.

Why is flexible framework necessary?

Mainly because in cultural and artistic practices we work with people, and what is significant for communities are experiences, knowledge, story sharing, and sense-making, specifically addressing the cultural and artistic needs of the communities that participate in these events. Traditional impact assessments can show us patterns and numbers that are useful, but not meaningful when it comes to measuring wellness, collaboration, and impact in people's lives. A flexible framework could potentially answer the questions raised at the beginning of this post, working towards a dialogical relationship between communities and the arts and culture sector where there is space for everyone's story.