

*Towards an integrated  
approach for evaluating  
community-based arts*

Dr Marnie Badham, Research Fellow  
Centre for Cultural Partnerships, University of Melbourne

Australian Research Council-funded Linkage project with Dr Martin Mulligan (RMIT),  
Dr Lachlan MacDowall (CCP), and Frank Panucci (Australia Council for the Arts).

# *Community-based arts*

*citizen artist, artist activist, socially engaged art, social justice and arts activity, creative collaborations, creative partnerships, community based arts, community cultural development, cultural and social entrepreneurship, intervention, relational aesthetics, art of change, artist as ethnographer, artist as animateur, art of engagement, art of engagement, dialogic art, creative partnerships, interventionist art, communication for development*

# *Community-based arts*

- *Engages artists and communities collaborate to identify, effect, and celebrate issues of place and interest*
- *Provides opportunities for communities tell their stories, express identity, and participate directly in the development of their own cultures*

# *Community-based arts*

- *Roots in identity politics, art of resistance*
- *The “turn to community” in contemporary arts*
- *Government intervention: democratisation of arts*
  - Place-based – urban revitalization, regeneration
  - Partnerships – justice, education, health, housing
  - Issue-based – exploring ideas, self representation, often starts grassroots

*The problem of evaluating  
'community'*

# *“Why do you evaluate?”*

*“Ummm, we don’t evaluate... but we (artists and community) do know what success looks like!”*

- *Accountability to funders*
- *Critical reflection to improve practice\*\**
- *Provide feedback to participants*
- *Cost benefit analysis*
- *Understanding social impact*
- *Planning for future activity*
- *Data collection for advocacy*

## *Intrinsic*

- *Spiritual*
- *Aesthetic*
- *Communicative*
- *Pleasure*
- *Cognitive*

## *Instrumental*

- *Social inclusion*
- *Civic engagement*
- *Economic impact*
- *Urban revitalization*
- *Health*

# *Some implications*

- *a focus on instrumental benefits and outcomes, disconnected from actual creative activity;*
- *lack of specificity in the description of art activities, grouped by medium (“theatre”) or participants (“youth arts”);*
- *methodologies used from disciplines with no theoretical models for understanding art (“health promotion”);*
- *evaluation not effectively integrated into the arts process and/or the method not matching the principles under which it was delivered, thus not adequately capturing value;*
- *a lack of engagement with a range of theories that address the creative process, (aesthetics, creativity theory).*



## *Some implications*

*“The attempt to make the effects of culture transparent and manageable, in order to support it effectively, has somehow obscured the true nature of the activities and experiences themselves.”*

Holden, "Capturing Cultural Value: How culture has become a tool of government policy," 2004, p. 14.

# *Reviewing the literature*

- recent critiques of arts evaluation
- the development of arts-based research methods in social research, particularly in vulnerable communities to lessen impact
- new forms of aesthetic description
- the notion of research partnerships or “community-engaged research”

# *Preliminary review of practice*

- Adventures in creative evaluation
  - National electronic survey
  - 25 semi-structured interviews
- Exploring negative value, issues of harm
  - Anonymous electronic survey
  - 5 semi structured interviews
- Ehtnographic observation/ participation
  - Embedded evaluative methodologies
  - Evidence of control / satisfaction by community

## Reforming existing evaluation frameworks

- *Standard evaluation discrepancy approach*
- *Custom-designed multi-modal evaluation*

## New research methods

- *Dialogic approaches*
- *Democratised approaches*
- *Art as integrated evaluation*
- *Cultural economics and data mining*

## New forms of language in framing evaluation

- *New aesthetic descriptions*
- *Negative value*
- *Cultural complexity*

## *Next steps*

- Narrowed to 4 diverse case studies:
  - Political context, local issues
  - Partnerships and stakeholders
  - Art forms and creative approaches
  - Location/ geography
- Testing evaluation approaches
  - Peer assessment lab – critical dialogue
  - Organizational evaluation: capacity building
  - Project based: dialogic, democratized, creative

Dr. Marnie Badham, Research Fellow  
[m.badham@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:m.badham@unimelb.edu.au)

Centre for Cultural Partnerships  
Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts and Music  
The University of Melbourne, Australia

<http://www.vcam.unimelb.edu.au/ccp>

*"Towards an integrated evaluation framework for community-based arts" ARC linkage grant*