

Interchanges no. 9

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In this issue:

[Reassessing Evaluation](#)

[Focus on Evaluation: Some Recent Examples of Best Innovative Practice](#)

[Books and Publications Reviews Online](#)

Reassessing Evaluation

Seattle used to be a place mainly associated with rain, then it was sleeplessness and that was not linked to its next global affiliation: coffee. Then it was the site of one of the, now regular, World Trade Organisation meetings and accompanying protests. A few weeks ago Seattle was also the site of the annual US Grantmakers in the Arts conference, On the Edge.

There was certainly rain, a record breaking one day storm that dumped 18 centimetres of water causing no end of chaos including the stranding of some of the conference delegates on route to the Makah Indian reservation near the edge of the Pacific. For many there were also sleepless nights owing to both coffee and jetlag. Importantly, the theme of the conference prompted everyone to reassess what new challenges there are in an age described at one of the sessions as one of 'distributed culture'.

We discussed the new edges of creative space, the ecosystems that are forming around shared issues and disciplines and how the relationship between funders and the complex field of arts and culture is inevitably changing as new systems become our realities.

These new realities include working with agendas closely allied to community-building, education, social cohesion as well as the development of art itself. Perhaps predictably, since the membership of Grantmakers in the Arts comprises mostly people who distribute money, in almost every session the discussion turned to strategies for capturing, analysing and communicating the impact of the work being funded, in short evaluation.

Dr Maria-Rosario Jackson from the Urban Institute in Washington DC presented her fascinating Arts and Cultural Indicators in the Community Building Project. She argued that assessing the impact of arts and cultural activity within a local setting can be problematic

because of the baggage that comes with terms, especially the term 'arts'.

Asked about arts and culture stimulated people to talk about arts institutions, and it was often a somewhat negative picture that emerged of not enough or the wrong kind of facility in a particular community. Instead, she and her colleagues used ethnographic techniques and explored what kind of creative expression was present. For instance they asked, 'what do you find moving or beautiful in your community?' Then the conversation got very rich and people talked about artistic expression ranging from very formal to very informal kinds of practice. Choral groups, personal practices like altar making, cooking and gardening, came in the same list as teaching, learning, making arts and crafts.

As the links between the arts and cultural world and the worlds of education, social and community development and business become more explicit, as they do every time Grantmakers in the Arts holds its conference, the necessity of reassessing what defines priorities and, therefore, what should/can be measured, assessed and documented and why becomes clearer.

An interesting case in point comes from the launch of the London Development Agency's London Assets 4 Business website: www.LA4B.com. Professor Clive Butler, the HSBC Chair of

Innovation at Brunel University, London explained that his post was invented to assist business in judging the viability of technologically innovative projects looking for venture capital since traditionally the banks had a problem in knowing how to evaluate the ideas presented to them.

In studying the ideas for innovation Professor Butler discovered that they had a number of characteristics in common: their assets (usually ideas and invention) were hard to put a value on; the business model needed to develop them was unusual at best; development costs were often high and the products to be produced quickly became obsolete.

The evaluation checklist Professor Butler came up with included: Does the technology work? How innovative is it? What are the market prospects? How timely is the project? Ahead of its time, right on or behind others? How long will it last once it is produced? What is the record of achievement of the company or group with the idea? There are some valuable evaluation clues here for projects and initiatives in all fields including arts and education projects

At the GIA conference Mat Schwartzman, Program Director of the National Performance Network based in New Orleans, led an excellent session on evaluation. Among other things, he circulated a Documentation and Evaluation resource list and some of its references can be found in the Online section of this newsletter. We hope you find this issue of Interchanges of interest and give us your feedback.
Thank you

Focus on Evaluation: Some Recent Examples of Best Innovative Practice

In this section, we refer to some of the activities and reports that have come to our attention with regard to evolving concepts of evaluation in an interdependent world. This is complemented by the other sections in this month's Interchanges, which include online resources for evaluators and a list of forthcoming events as well as our regular Publications section.

Creative Regeneration; lessons from ten community projects, UK

This report by Tin Dwelly, published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation argues the case of creativity as an effective means to help in the regeneration of demoralised, fragmented communities. Creative community projects can foster pride in the area, increase self-confidence and promote neighbourhood solidarity. However, and given the intangible nature of these benefits, they are notoriously difficult to measure systematically.

This represents a problem in an era when 'best value' is the buzzword. Therefore this report is an attempt to harden evidence on the impact that investment in creative activities can have on communities. All projects chosen as case studies are based in Wales and follow the Foundation's 'Culture makes Communities' conference held in Swansea in 1999. As well as a description of the case studies, the report includes helpful lists of do's and don'ts, which arose >from the evaluation of each individual project.

www.jrf.org.uk

Creative Community Index; measuring progress towards a vibrant Silicon Valley (California, USA)

Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley is a non-profit organisation whose goal is to advance the vitality of Silicon Valley, California, through broad cultural participation, quality arts education in schools and the development of an informed and committed leadership in the community.

This report was developed to provide an objective source of information about the artistic, creative and cultural life of Silicon Valley in order to monitor effectively the progress of the initiative. However, before the aims of the exercise could be met it was necessary to define a framework, which would provide the indicators needed to measure the impact of creativity in the community.

The framework was based on a casual theory of the impact of the cultural sector on a community. The theory is that various 'levers' are available for influencing the dynamics of the arts and culture in Silicon Valley. These 'levers' (e.g. local authority passes a bill supporting the acquisition of public works of art), generate 'assets' (the art produced or acquired), which in turn encourage participation.

The accumulated results of this participation are measurable outcomes, such as a heightened sense of community identification and of connectedness to neighbours. The resulting report provides a summary of the research findings and offers a snapshot of the state of cultural life in Silicon Valley, which will inform future steps towards the strengthening of Silicon Valley's cultural and community sectors. www.ci.sv.org

Creative Connections; business and the arts working together to create a more inclusive society, UK

This report, written by Phyllida Shaw for Arts & Business with support >from Marks & Spencer and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), emphasises the benefits that can be reaped from the collaboration between business and the arts working together in a community.

Focusing on ten UK-based projects specifically developed to tackle social exclusion, the report covers each project in detail: offering a contextual description, evaluating its aims and the obstacles encountered as well as providing accounts by the participants and organisers. All in all this is an inspiring work, which successfully makes the case for a greater involvement of the business world in community level arts projects. www.AandB.org.uk

Powerful Voices; developing high-impact programmes for teens, USA

The Surdna Foundation based in New York, USA, is committed to increasing the quality of resources and circumstances in which artists and teenagers come together.

To this effect, in 2000, the Foundation undertook to evaluate the design and impact of its Arts Programme. Overall, the evaluators found that the best work "takes a holistic approach to the creative development of young people, combining a search for significant artistic advancement with purposeful development of individual life skills." In addition to providing the findings of the evaluation, the Surdna Foundation wants to share its methodology and, therefore, the report includes a toolkit for tackling issues of programme planning and assessment.

The foundation is eager to learn of anyone applying the evaluation framework or the self-assessment toolkit described in the report and would appreciate any comments and suggestions for the refinement of its methodology. The report is available from the Foundation's website www.surdna.org Please email any comments or suggestions to powerfulvoices@surdna.org

Books and Publications Reviews

Arvac bulletin, *25th anniversary edition, no.90 October 2003, UK*
ARVAC, the Association for research in the Voluntary sector provides information and training in research for and about the community sector. The ARVAC bulletin is produced four times a year and distributed to members. This edition marks ARVAC's 25th anniversary and it looks among other topics at new research providing a unique insight into the potential key role the voluntary sector can play in tackling young people's involvement in gang activity. For membership details please contact arvac@arvac.freemove.co.uk

Developing Competencies in Cultural Education, *Germany*
This is the report of the international conference organised by the German Federation of Associations for Cultural Youth Education (BKJ) in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Commission.

This project, which will culminate with another conference to be held in March 2004 aims to identify and document the competencies acquired by young people through their active involvement in arts and culture; and to evaluate the impact of cultural education. Report available from www.bkj.de

Investing in Creativity: A Study of the Support Structure for US Artists, USA

Maria Rosario Jackson et al (Urban Institute, 2003, US)

This report presents the overall findings of 'Investing in Creativity: A Study of the Support Structure for US Artists' as part of the Urban Institute's Culture, Creativity and Communities programme. This programme is a research and dissemination initiative investigating the role of the arts, culture and creative expression in communities and their intersection with various policy areas. This report offers a new framework for analysis and provides information on the status of the support structures available for artists both at US national level and locally. Available from www.ccc.urban.org

Online

oerl.sri.com/

This is an excellent evaluation resource funded by the National Science Foundation in the USA. <http://oerl.sri.com/>

www.wkkf.org

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook. This valuable document traces the history of evaluation paradigms and explains three main types of evaluations-- project-level, cluster, and program/policymaking evaluation. It serves as a blueprint for programs as they plan for writing an evaluation component, preparing a budget, choosing an evaluator, evaluation implementation and use the evaluation data that they have collected. www.wkkf.org

www.evaluationforall.org.uk/

This is the evaluation toolkit from the Scottish arts Council aimed at developing self evaluation skills in arts organisations. <http://www.evaluationforall.org.uk/>

www.ngonet.org

This site is an electronic networking resource for the development of non-governmental organisations in the central and East European regions. It is administered by Freedom House in Budapest. www.ngonet.org

www.powerofculture.nl

This is the new redesigned site of The power of Culture. It features new sections on events, news and its background articles and essays are now arranged by themes. News reports and items from the old website can still be accessed via the archive section. www.powerofculture.nl

www.opendemocracy.net

This is an online global magazine of politics and culture. In its pages readers are encouraged to engage with other sides of the argument, not just the ones that are popular - or promoted by the large companies who dominate the media today.

www.opendemocracy.net

([back to top](#))

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