The Role of Evaluation within Cultural Governance:
Lessons from European Capital of Culture programmes

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Background

Embedded evaluation design and strategic development

- Programme Manager for Impacts 08 – Liverpool European Capital of Culture (ECoC) Research programme (2005-2010)

- Advisor to ECC Policy Group research on best practice in research and delivery of ECoCs (2010)

- Evaluation advisor to Aarhus 2017 ECoC and RethinkIMPACTS 2017, Aarhus ECoC evaluation programme (2010-2018)

- Evaluation advisor to Hull UK City of Culture (UKCC) 2017

- Working on Social Return on Investment study of Coventry UKCC 2021

- Evaluator or Critical Friend to range of UK based arts organisations and cultural programmes attempting to enhance social impacts of arts and culture – eg Creative People and Places programme

- Research into impact of evaluation on practice for artists, and exploring potential use of artists' practice within evaluation.

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What is the purpose of evaluation within cultural programmes?

- Not simply a check and audit, or to understand impact AT END (though both important)

- Evaluation is about understanding what works: to affect governance, planning and delivery DURING PROCESS

- Evaluation can (should) be a force for change by challenging assumptions:
  - Co-create understanding of outcomes by asking:
    - What's working? And for whom? Whose voices are being heard? Who is defining what 'working' looks like? Which impacts matter most?
  - Co-create understanding of practice and process by asking:
    - What is it about how we are running this that is effective – or that gets in the way of the process? Are the right people making the decisions? At the right time? At the right level? Are there better ways of running this?

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Making evaluation work: holistic approach

inclusion, outreach, diversity

access & participation

creativity
production
consumption

cultural vibrancy

image & perceptions

media coverage
people's views

employment
visitor trends
investment

economy & tourism

governance & delivery

aims + objectives
policy, strategy

IMPACTS 08
European Capital of Culture Research Programme

well-being
quality of life
equalities

built heritage
public realm
sustainability

Covered within Impacts 18

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Making evaluation work: embedding learning

- Importance of engagement between evaluation, governance and delivery team to build a relationship of trust – 'Critical Friend'

- Understanding of the value of sharing what doesn't work, as well as what works – allowing failure leads to innovation

- Development of good monitoring to allow management information for intelligence for planning

- Use of intelligence and findings within reflection sessions for learning and spotting new opportunities around delivery

- Interim analysis of learning – share internally informally as well as externally – effect change as well as enhance transparency

- Offering spaces where multiple voices can challenge assumptions

- Recognise the value that evaluation can have in linking to wider research community – academic and policy research

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Conclusions

- Evaluation has a strong role to play in supporting effective governance, transparency and trust development

- Evaluation is about challenging and supporting a programme to work and to innovate – as well as checking if it does

- Importance of taking a holistic approach to impacts of a programme

- Importance of taking an embedded approach to evaluation – from the start, in partnership with the programme – but with enough distance to give challenge

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Links for further information

Ruth Melville: www.ruthmelville.net

Impacts 08 Research programme: https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/impacts08/

Impacts 18 Research programme (exploring impacts of Liverpool 08 10 years on) http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/impacts18/

ECC Policy Group report: An international framework of good practice in research and delivery of the European Capital of Culture programme, https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/impacts08/pdf/pdf/ECoC_Policy_Group_Framework.pdf

Aarhus 2017 delivery programme report: http://www.aarhus2017.dk/en/welcome-future/publication/index.html

rethink IMPACTS 2017 evaluation research site: https://projects.au.dk/aarhus2017/rethinkimpacts-2017/

Creative People and Places programme: Action Learning programme across England in areas of low cultural engagement, creating social and cultural impact – site has a wealth of research and learning including discussion about value of failure, https://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/

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