eNCATC

The European network on cultural management and policy

"How Culture Works in Practice" REPORT

OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP

Organized in the frame of the ENCATC Evaluation Working Sessions, this online Workshop on "How Culture Works in Practice" took place online via the platform Zoom on the 19th of October 2020. It was organized in partnership with ENCATC's member the Goethe-Institut. The event was held in the context of a broader discussion of the field of evaluation, which is since 2016 regularly taken up by ENCATC to offer opportunities to its members and wider community to deepen and broaden theory, education and practice in this concern as to meet the needs and importance of measuring and collecting quantitative and qualitative data. The focus of this meeting was devoted to get a deeper understanding of evaluation practices, such as the evaluation framework "Culture Works" created by the Goethe-Institut and foster the exchange between ENCATC members on experiences and approaches of tackling crucial questions of evaluation processes, such as on purposes and methods, but also to identify common challenges and obstacles in establishing evaluation frameworks according to their specific contexts.

MAIN POINTS FROM PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

INTRODUCTIONS

GiannaLia Cogliandro Beyens, ENCATC Secretary General

GiannaLia shared some welcoming words, where she stressed the importance of the exchange on the development of evaluation and thanked the participants for joining the online workshop on "How Culture Works in Practice". She introduced the agenda and guests of the workshop and thanked the Goethe-Institut for the partnership in organizing this event. She explained that the course of the event was divided into three parts, namely the presentation by Franziska Höfler on the Goethe-Institute's impact-oriented evaluation concept "Culture works", which was followed by discussions in sub-groups on different topics and the subsequent joint discussion and plenary summary of the results and outcomes moderated by Sina Lebert (Goethe-Institut). The three sub-groups were moderated by two ENCATC members, namely Johan Kolsteeg (University of Groningen, NL) and Miriam Šebová (Technical University of Kosice, SVK), the third one was moderated by Anke Simone Schad-Spindler (External evaluation specialist for the GI, A), who was invited by the Goethe-Institut. The topics were the following:

1. Purpose: What are the expectations of evaluation? Legitimation vs. learning? Transparency? What's the benefit and for whom?

2. Toolbox: How could an evaluation project look like with the objective to create a toolbox for evaluating cultural work?

3. Indicators and methodology: What are good indicators for cultural work? What methods are suitable? How to bring indicators and methodology together with a process-oriented approach and unintended effects?

INPUTS

Presentation of Goethe-Institutes' evaluation concept for cultural work "Culture works" by Franziska Höfler, Consultant for Evaluation and Quality Management at Goethe-Institut e.V. (2018-2020)


Franziska presented the impact-oriented evaluation concept "Culture works", which was developed in the years 2013 to 2016 to evaluate the impact of Goethe-Institutes' international cultural work, but equally seeks to inspire other institutions by the findings of this publication and their approach.

She started with explaining the process and development of the evaluation concept and which driving forces influenced its creation. According to Franziska this can be divided into two components, namely on the one hand the challenges of for example the understanding and role of arts (arts for art's sake), the complexity of assessing and defining the quality of art and the impossibility to measure the direct social impact of cultural projects as societal dynamics are determined by complexity and underlie a variety of influences. On the other hand, she also stressed the necessity of measurements as they serve the legitimization of (public) funding (in the case of the Goethe-Institut the German Foreign Office), they support strategic decision-making processes and last but not least they build the basis for internal and organizational learning.

Taking this into account, she made it clear that the process of finding adequate criteria for one's own evaluation concept is a process which, in the case of the Goethe-Institut, began in 2007 and culminated in the publication "Culture Works" in 2016. The success of establishing a suitable evaluation concept was in the case of the Goethe-Instiut increased by involving interdisciplinary and intercultural working groups, which also included external experts, and the development of evaluation criteria for international cultural work, which were based on well-established evaluation standards (OECD-DAC). Furthermore, Franziska noted the importance of developing a dynamic impact-oriented model for the Goethe-Institut as it helps them in their daily work and in making strategic decisions. However, the most prominent point made by Franziska was her emphasis on the identification of premises for the evaluation of cultural work, which according to her are, that:

- *impact is based on relevance*. Relevance thereby is highly connected to having meaning for partners, target groups and stakeholders. Therefore, continuous and equal exchange with local actors (in the frame of international cultural work) is needed to build long-term and trustful partnerships. The goal pursued with the focus on relevance is subject to the thesis that the more relevant a project is, the greater the potential to generate and multiply long-term impact and that only if cultural work is relevant culture can work.

- *there is the need to make room for the unforeseeable, as it is often intended in cultural work.* This is closely linked to the intrinsic value of aesthetic creativity. The predictability of interventions in the social space are therefore very limited. No result is also a result.

- *reception is an active process.* Perception is adapted, translated and transformed by people into their social praxis. Being aware of this helps to open the evaluation for complex and even unexpected effects and results.

- *Diversity of methods improves the quality of evaluation.* To get a more holistic result, it is according to Franziska not only important to use different theoretical approaches, as well as quantitative and qualitative data, but with regard to cultural work it is particularly important to use dialogue-oriented methods as to capture the before mentioned complexity and unpredictability better.

- *It is the working approach that makes the differences.* In so far, that guiding principles and standards of international cultural work, such as context-sensitive actions, fair cooperation, high quality and innovation need to be assessed, whether and to which extent they were met.
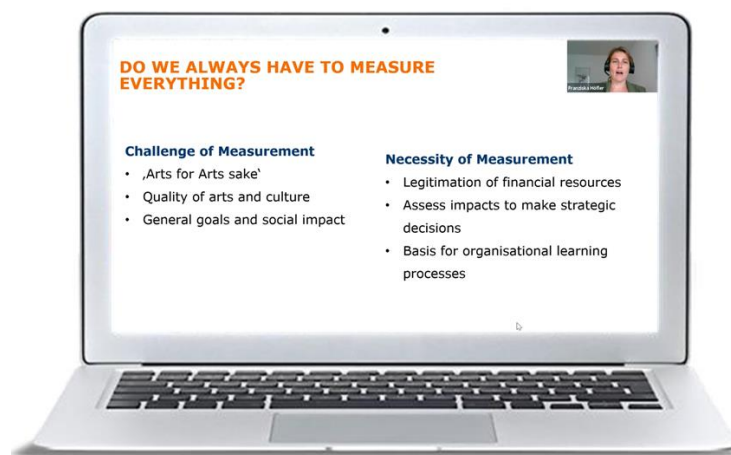
In addition, she spoke about the challenges that have now become apparent in practice since the evaluation concept was established. Firstly, she mentioned the methodological obstacle of finding a balance between standardization and project-based research designs. The latter would make it more applicable to target groups, local contexts and project objectives, but is also more time-consuming. This results in the need for more money and more time. Something that was picked up later in the discussion as well, was that sponsors and funders often prefer quantitative over qualitative data, although the importance of qualitative data was highlighted already for several reasons. Secondly, the obstacle of finding a way to measure impact with regard to project or program evaluation was mentioned by her. The problem mapped out is that although the trend is towards program evaluation, cultural work is organized and structured in projects, which can only lead to theory-based assumptions on how it contributed to social change. Additionally, impact is mostly individual, indirect and to be seen in the long-term. Thus following Franziska it is important to develop smart indicators for output and outcome to measure and evaluate impact at all and to benefit from the findings with regard to strategic decision-making processes and internal learnings. The indicators thereby are meant for the projects and could follow SMART criteria (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) to check if they were achieved. Lastly, she mentioned the tension between budget and impact as to find a good cost-benefit ratio for a purposeful evaluation. In this concern it is important to find an agreement on purpose and benefit of the evaluation with all parties involved, although the scope can be limited by this.

She concluded in pointing out that with the experience of doing structural evaluation with this concept for the Goethe-Institut for several years now, it has created more acceptance of evaluation (Discussion on: Does everything need to be measured?) and it made it easier to communicate internally and externally (sponsors, partners etc.).

Indicators and methodology: What are good indicators for cultural work? What methods are suitable? How to bring indicators and methodology together with a process-oriented approach and unintended effects? Plenary summary by Johan Kolsteeg, Assistant Professor, University of Groningen

The working group moderated by Johan focused in their session on the criteria and challenges, which were introduced in the presentation by the Goethe-Institut.

For example, Johan notes that with regard to the agreement on purpose with all parties, power issues can also play a role in the evaluation process. Especially on the level of who sets up the indicators and who ultimately implements and experiences the projects can be very different. He pleads to keep this in mind when designing an evaluation concept. Connected to that is the tension between standardization of methods and the context- and project-specific adaption of evaluation concepts. According to Johan there is a wide variety of goals and according methods and the purpose is then the decisive factor in choosing appropriate methods for the evaluation. He questions if an ethical standardization could be tried to be achieved by finding an agreed purpose with all parties.

The question of whether the emphasis should lay on the program or rather the project was discussed with the outcome that it depends on the purpose of the evaluation as well, so it might be useful to look beyond the project to include dimensions of sustainability. In addition to this aspect, the group opts for looking at projects in the long term and to re-evaluate them long after their completion in order to integrate the long-term impact(s). This is why Johan once more pointed out the process-driven dimension of evaluation, because the process does not end with the project.

Purpose: What are the expectations of evaluation? Legitimation vs. learning? Transparency? What's the benefit and for whom? Plenary summary by Anke Simone Schad-Spindler, External evaluation specialist for the Goethe-Institut, Freelancer in the field of Research, Facilitation and Evaluation in the cultural and educational sector

This session divided its discussion into three subtopics, namely: What purposes of evaluation the participants experienced in their own evaluations? - Who is setting the purposes? Accordingly, what is the agency and how to respond to that? - And lastly, which approaches, modes and roles can be found in working with purposes in evaluation?

First of all, Anke emphasized again that purpose is something pluralistic, which is why it is important to talk about purposes in plural as to be aware of the different dimension. According to the group there is the danger of losing the real (critical) story when telling the evaluation story. In addition, to reflect more on the agency, it is important to stress that although there might be an ideal world where evaluation can and should help to act on evidence-based grounds, it is mostly a political question of who actually defines what evidence is. This led to the focus on the position of the evaluator. Where, according to Anke, there is again the question to ask whether there can be such a thing as an external evaluator at all, because evaluators are always situated and have their own blind spots and biases also regarding their professional knowledge. This resulted in the first recommendation: An evaluation should include as many perspectives as possible, beginning even before the start of the evaluation process as to recheck the different purposes. This would lead to the aim of creating ownership of the process as well as to increase the acceptance of the results of the evaluation. However, it needs to be added that purposes underlie the dynamic of the evaluation process, which is why they are central before and also during the process. Thus evaluation is a communicative process. This leads to the responsibilities of evaluators, because they can unveil stories and make people feel seen and first and

foremost valued. In this case the role of an evaluator is according to the group findings also able to promote feedback culture in an organization. Ultimately, Anke distinguishes between the explicit purposes and the implicit purposes, whereas the latter articulate when working with as many stakeholders as possible.

Toolbox: How could an evaluation project look like with the objective to create a toolbox for evaluating cultural work? Plenary Summary by Miriam Šebová, Associate Professor, Technical University of Kosice

Miriam reported on the session on toolboxes, which was thematically diverse. It covered experiences in doing evaluations for the European Capital of Culture with the evaluation toolbox of the British Council working with the approach of [Theory of Change](#) for example or the work of Red Nose International. However, she mapped out the shared experiences of the difficulty to find and meet the expectations of evaluations in combination with the challenge to find suitable methods and frameworks. It was recognized that to some extent the current methodologies are limited and need to be developed further. For example, it is unclear what the proxy-indicators could be to assess how people feel or artistic and creative forms could be included as to get an idea of how artists conceptualize it.

The dilemma of qualitative and quantitative data was described, whereas the first is argued to be usually more valuable for research and evaluation, although more demanding and less structured, and the latter much more limited but more required and appreciated by decision-makers.

MAIN POINTS FROM THE DISCUSSIONS

- Sharing knowledge about evaluation methods, processes and outcomes can be important for the sector and evaluators involved in cultural work to enhance reflection on their role and their modes and approaches.

- The development of evaluation has to be taken into account as some years ago other indicators were important and concepts as for example sustainability were assessed differently, which is why it is important to assess much more complex and coherent now.

- It is important to reflect on in how far evaluation can answer the needs of cultural work more regularly including the obstacles and challenges and by doing that to include more perspectives from various fields (institutions, practitioners, researchers, funders).

- The long-term aspects of evaluation need to be developed further and more projects and programs need to be reproached long after they have ended.
- Indicators and objectives must be included in the design of projects upfront to be able to evaluate its (long-term) impacts.

- There shouldn't be a hierarchy of methods, neither qualitative nor quantitative. Furthermore, there is the need to develop methodologies further and include creative methods as well.

- There is a tension in the understanding of how culture works, which is why it is important to not repeat top-down expectations/frameworks but to approach it from a bottom-up perspective also methodological wise in evaluation processes.

- Lastly, the assumption that individual projects lead to collective and longitude impacts needs to be interrogated.

ENCATC IS THE LEADING EUROPEAN NETWORK ON CULTURAL MANAGEMENT AND POLICY.

It is an independent membership organisation gathering over 100 higher education institutions and cultural organisations in over 40 countries. ENCATC was founded in 1992 to represent, advocate and promote cultural management and cultural policy education, professionalize the cultural sector to make it sustainable, and to create a platform of discussion and exchange at the European and international level.

ENCATC holds the status of an NGO in official partnership with UNESCO, of observer to the Steering Committee for Culture of the Council of Europe, and is co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.

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