

**RESEARCHERS NETWORK PRESENTATION 17.6.10****PhD thesis: Investigating the role of participatory arts in social change in Timor-Leste****OBJECTIVE**

This project seeks to investigate the contribution of community-based arts programs to social change in Timor-Leste (East Timor). It will examine arts initiatives that have a self-identified social change agenda, to develop an understanding of their working processes, their concept of their contribution to change, as well as impacts on project leaders, participants and host communities. Case study data will be provided by initiatives led by international and national NGOs, as well as those led by individuals, foreigners and Timorese.

**Brief summary: The role of arts programs in social change in Timor-Leste.**

Over the last fifty years, major questions in human development programs have unfolded around issues such as: How can the benefits of economic, social and cultural development be shared? And, how can respect for different cultures be considered in the charting of new directions for human progress? These challenges are at the forefront in aid work within developing nations.

The emerging nation of Timor-Leste faces many social, economic, political and cultural challenges since gaining its independence in 2002. Aid and development, and other organisations, as well as concerned citizens from other nations have been offering and providing assistance to Timor-Leste in a range of ways. An emerging aspect of this work is the area of community based arts, often associated with social justice or social change agendas (Arts Access Australia, 2006; Davidson, 2006). This emergence is related to current recognition, from the broadest international policy charter (United Nations, 1948 and 1976), to the most specific studies about arts projects, that participation in the arts and culture has significant value for human beings; as a basic human right (Pascual, 2008) as an intrinsically meaningful experience (Holden, 2004) and as activity that can be instrumental in achieving many valued outcomes including those in social, health, economic and educational domains (AEGIS, 2004; Barraket, 2005). Community-based arts, known also as community cultural development, is an area of arts practice that has been developing around the world throughout the twentieth century (Adams and Goldbard, 2001), gradually becoming more established as a professional area of work around the world, since the 1970s (Pitts and Watt, 2001). In this practice, artists work with communities through the medium of the arts on outcomes ostensibly of benefit to those communities. Art forms employed in this practice cover the whole spectrum of the arts; performing, (such as music, dance, circus, theatre), visual (such as painting, drawing, sculpture, craft, textile arts), literary arts (such as creative writing, playwriting and poetry) and media arts (such as filmmaking, multimedia and digital art).

However best intentions will not guarantee desired outcomes for all parties in any relationship, and it is important that the outcomes of these arts initiatives are examined dispassionately (Anderson, 2000). Host organisations can face competing agendas. While they need to ensure that their initiatives have a positive impact on host communities

(individuals and institutions) and make the best use of resources, they must also fulfil their own charter and the expectations of donors or funders, while also providing a safe and worthwhile experience for individuals involved in program delivery (Anderson, 1999; Roche, 1999).

The practice of community cultural development can be fraught, especially in vulnerable communities, as artists' training is often solely in the arts, and many have little experience with skills such as cross-cultural communication, negotiation, principles of therapeutic relationships or evaluation practice. Arts projects are often set up imperfectly; with common characteristics being low levels of funding, high expectations and short timeframes (Arts Access Australia 2006, Zelizer 2007). Frequently there are values clashes between project artists and sponsors, and often the 'theories of change' between the project activities and desired outcomes are not well considered. While the art and science of the evaluation of arts programs is emerging, there is much improvement still to be made, (McQueen-Thompson et al 2002) and this also is often not a well developed aspect of arts project planning (Sloan 2008).

This research project will investigate current community-based arts programs in Timor-Leste; both initiatives that are connected with organisations and individuals from other countries, from aid organizations to overseas arts organisations and individual artists and artworkers, as well as those led by Timorese citizens. Quantitative methodologies; in-depth interviews, Most Significant Change (Davies and Dart 2005), and Theory of Change (Anderson 2005) will be used to explore

- what does the organisation or individual do? artforms, participants (numbers, ages, gender, participation level), location, activities, funders, goals (stated or implicit).
- what are the 'theories of change' (either implicit or explicit) about the work of these individuals and organisations: ie. how do project organisers and leaders, conceptualise the changes they seek, and how are their arts programs devised to meet those changes?
- how are the impacts of that work considered: what evaluation strategies, if any, are employed to measure the outcomes of the work and how effectively do these capture its quality, impacts and outcomes?
- what are the outcomes of the initiatives; from the perspective of various levels of stakeholders; funders, hosts, organisers, leaders, participants, communities?

It is intended that research findings will provide information about the impacts, at individual and community and national levels, of these arts projects, especially their contribution to desired social change. In synthesizing findings, the researcher anticipates being able to develop and recommend strategies that could increase the positive impacts of current and future projects.

## **1. Research Problem**

1.1 My Interest: how I came to this topic, its relevance for me, and my intentions in exploring it. Introducing my background as a community-based artist, dance therapist and in professional development of the field of community cultural development, my previous

training in arts (History and Psychology), arts education and research, particularly, phenomenology and hermeneutics. The growth of the field of community cultural development and practitioners' interest and engagement with diverse communities, including those overseas, related to a social justice agenda. My cognisance of much goodwill among artists and arts workers about contributing to challenges faced by disadvantaged communities, but low level of considerations of issues beyond artistic merit, such as interest in reflective practice, theory based work, evaluation of impact/outcomes. The growing awareness of cultural development professionals of the need for tools and practices around evaluation; my work in developing tools for evaluation in local government context in Australia. My awareness of a significant number of past and current initiatives led by artists and arts organisations from Australia working in Timor. How I anticipate the research findings might be useful for the field of development, for arts in communities more broadly and for the people of Timor.

### **Chapter Three: Theory 10,000 words**

This chapter will introduce theories that underpin the research. Theories relating to each of the discipline areas, community based arts, international development and evaluation, will be introduced, and the way they inform the central question of the thesis; the contribution that arts programs can make to social change, will be explored in depth.

The basic premise of this thesis, which underpins the author's professional practice and the work of cultural development professionals and policy-makers internationally is Jon Hawkes' concept of the four pillars of sustainability (2001). Hawkes developed this concept, that for a sustainable community in which citizens reach their potential, four dimensions of public policy and planning need to be considered. Along with traditional policy concerns of economic viability, the early twentieth century framing of social equity as a priority and the later twentieth century priority of environmental sustainability, he posits that cultural vitality must be considered. This four pillars concept, adopted by governments all around the world, provides a framework for understanding the significant of culture in development practice, and within culture, creative expression through the arts.

Moving from culture to arts more specifically, this chapter will also introduce the theories of artists and social change agents whose ideas have significantly influenced the practice of community based arts. Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal is internationally recognised for his work around self-advocacy for people who are oppressed, using a combination of theatre and social action in a technique known as 'Theatre of the Oppressed'. Boal in turn was strongly influenced by fellow Brazilian educational philosopher Paulo Friere and his ideas about empowerment through popular education. Occurring at the same time, from the middle of twentieth century, a movement of understanding of the personal empowerment and social change possible through the artform of dance has occurred. The profession of dance movement therapy and the theory underpinning it, of personal growth and healing possible through the experience of dance, grew out of American modern dancers' responses to the impacts of trauma experienced by soldiers returned from the Second World War. A different but related conception of the power of dance has been promoted by contemporary choreographer and activist Anna Halprin. Her internationally recognised Life-Art process has had international influence on practitioners and their communities, who consider it a powerful way to provoke inquiry, communicate knowledge, inspire understanding and transform society.

In investigating theories relevant to international development, the work of economist Amartya Sen will be examined, particularly his writing about development as freedom (1999). Sen proposes that the expansion of human freedom should both be viewed as the primary end and the principal means of development. This theory will be examined in relation to inclusion of a cultural perspective and opportunities for arts participation within international development practice, and how through these practices, individuals and their communities ostensibly can experience enhanced lives and expanded freedoms.

Related to the field of evaluation will be introduced the theory of change, a form of which will also be employed as a research methodology (Anderson 2005). The conceptual framework of theory of change will be explored for its elucidation of the relationship between actions, which in this study are the development and implementation of arts programs, and the social changes sought by those who lead or manage the programs.

#### **Chapter Four: Methodology 10,000 words**

This chapter describes the methodologies to be used in the project and reasons for these choices. The literature around relative merits of quantitative and qualitative methods will be introduced, and the preference in the field of community arts for the application of qualitative methods. Challenges around the measurement of values in the arts, and the concepts of intrinsic, instrumental and institutional values will be discussed, with reference to the literature. The chosen methodologies, ethnographic in-depth interviews, Theory of Change and Most Significant Change, will be introduced and the reasons for those choices, including application of the methods in other relevant areas of study. Other possible methodologies that were considered but decided against will be mentioned briefly, including the Delphi technique. The data collection process; when and how this will occur and who and what will provide data. Procedures for data collection and ethical issues, especially related to research in a foreign country and the anticipated language, logistic and cultural difficulties, as well as the strategies to manage these.

#### **Findings Chapter: draft ideas so far**

Analysis of the data is expected to contribute to findings about the impacts of arts projects under investigation on individuals, the local and the wider communities. Through this process, it is hoped to identify what processes lead to change and what components of artistic programs contribute the most to changes that are sought.

If artists and organisations are funded to present artworks or organise programs that have a particular intention, ie delivering a particular message, how can they be better skilled to do so? How can they better understand what processes have impact and be mindful of these in development of their work?

**Factors to consider: which of these factors are influential, or most influential in making change?**

**artform:** does any artform have a greater likelihood of impact?

For example, is a message that is delivered through an enjoyable or fun experience such as humour (comedy) more likely to be retained or internalized than one that is received in a solemn or serious setting (serious theatre)?

Can the artistic experience feel empowering such that audiences feel that they have a role to play in the change?

Is an artform that is more familiar to a particular cultural group the most effective way to share ideas or as a vehicle for a message?

How does the impact of the experience of live artforms such as music or dance compare with virtual artforms like film, digital art....?

**Content:** how can the content of arts performances/events contribute to change?

How do artists/arts orgs decide what content should be included to attempt to contribute to changed perspectives of their audiences? Do they operate from any strategic concepts or 'theory of change' in developing material to be presented?

If so, how do we / they know that this presentation has the desired effect?

If we could know that this artwork has the desired effect, how could this information or concept be shared with others to maximise their effectiveness?

**Artistic ways of knowing:** how can we consider other ways of knowing/experiencing that are not easily accessible in words? (Conquergood 2002). Audience members may have an experience in engaging with the arts that they are unable to conceptualise in words, at least for the immediate moment, or in the form of a response to a survey. This doesn't mean that the event has no impact. The impact might be at a sub-conscious level or a felt or body level, (Downes 2000). Or, the experience might be better explored through discussion and reflection at a later date, perhaps with others who have shared the experience.

**Production values and artistic virtuosity:** are arts events with higher production values (more professional presentation, staging, sets, artists) more likely to contribute to change? Are arts activities that involve artists with more sophisticated professional talent more likely to make change?

**Artist:** how does the actual artist's personal qualities and characteristics (their age, gender, skill, presentation) impact the audience's experience of the message? How does the artists' or leaders' similarity and difference from participants, (language, cultural background, age, gender, skill level) make a difference to the impact of the process? How does the involvement of artists from other countries impact the change process? For example, would young male Timorese leaders be more likely to impact other young male Timorese or is it possible that the artistic experience transcends life experience? .... could an older man have more empathy for the experience of young woman experiencing domestic violence, after seeing a performance in which her story was presented?

**Motivation for participation:** How is impact different when the different contexts of participants are considered? For example, does a person's decision to be involved in an arts program (involvement in the organising or implementation), make them more likely to receive the message, than those who are involved serendipitously or as a result of someone else's decision (such as a performance in a public place organised by an NGO)?

Is there a greater or lesser impact when an audience member has some kind of stake in the performance? For example, knowing a cast or crew member, or that the content of the show is about their place or community.

**Context/setting:** where is the activity held; geographically and type of venue?

**Preparation and follow up:** is the impact stronger when participants have had any pre-information about the event? (pre-performance information such as media report, information from family or friends or at school)

Or any kind of follow-up afterwards? (eg. meet-the-artist after the show; informal discussion with friends, family, community group; media attention; school homework task, women's group discussion)...

**'Strength of dose':** Is change more likely if a 'strong dose' is applied in a concentrated geographic area, or spread more widely? For example, if a performance or exhibition was performed in multiple venues around an identified neighbourhood, (schools, community centres, etc) over a small timeframe, would this lead to greater community discussion amongst audience members, and then greater agreement and possible community change, than a series of one-off events spread across a wider area?

### Values around change

How important is it that all stakeholders have shared values or understandings about the changes that are sought? How important is it for the stakeholders to have shared values about the necessity for change, the likelihood of change through the arts, or the methods needed to afford change through the arts? How much does it matter of the focus placed on the arts: do those organisations who prioritise arts have greater impact with their arts work than those who use arts as part of another program and those who use arts without really intending to.

These differences and the impact this might make to the different levels of stakeholders could be explored through MSC discussions.

For example, stakeholders involved in the same arts project might have different values, as described in the example below.

**CASE EXAMPLE:** The different values and goals of stakeholders supporting an arts project to promote peace in Timor

**The Timorese government** might fund an arts project to promote peace to

- improve their image with their own people
- improve their image with international constituencies,
- increase tourism and economic investment by foreigners, and to,
- promote peace in Timor to improve the life experience of Timorese people.

**Governments from other countries** might fund the project to

- improve their own border security and reduce illegal immigration, and,
- promote peace in Timor to improve the life experience of Timorese people.

**Funding agencies or international NGOs** might fund an arts project to promote peace to

- understand different mechanisms for promulgating peace
- achieve the Millenium Development Goals
- improve the public profile of their country or organisation, and,
- promote peace in Timor to improve the life experience of Timorese people.

**Researchers** may seek to research an arts project that promotes peace

- because of professional interests in health program evaluation, the contribution of the arts to social change or peace studies,
- for financial reasons – the research project provided employment for themselves
- to develop their research expertise, such as a PhD project
- to assist with achievement of the MDGs
- improve the public profile of their country or organisation, and to
- promote peace in Timor to improve the life experience of Timorese people.

**Organisations applying for the grant** for an arts project to promote peace might be motivated by a desire to

- expand their regular activities
- address a recognised local social or community issue, such as to reduce levels of youth violence (for eg local government)
- to provide a creative opportunity for their clients, and to
- promote peace in Timor to improve the life experience of Timorese people.

**Venue hosting the performance/event** might be motivated to be involved in an arts project to promote peace in order to

- expand regular programming options or add value to current activities
- attract participants that they do not ordinarily attract (such as martial arts group members), and to
- promote peace in Timor to improve the life experience of Timorese people.

**Artists** undertaking the project might be involved in an arts project to promote peace because they wish to

- take up an employment opportunity (could be any employment opportunity)
- to use their artistic skills in a new way, and to
- promote peace in Timor to improve the life experience of Timorese people.

**Community leaders, decision makers (government representatives and politicians) and related professionals (eg social workers)** who are involved in an arts project to promote peace to, for example by attending a performance, might do so in order to

- learn about new ways of addressing long standing community issues
- support the local organisation or group presenting the work,
- to improve their image amongst a particular community, and to
- promote peace in Timor to improve the life experience of Timorese people.

**Community members** who are involved in an arts project to promote peace to might do so because

- they want be involved in a group activity, could be any activity
- support a friend or family member who is involved
- to learn skills that might assist them to get a job, and to
- promote peace in Timor to improve the life experience of Timorese people.

**People who don't attend** but hear about the event from family friends or in the media

- might be indirectly impacted by new thinking or ideas from those who are involved, regardless of whether they were interested to be involved.

### **Relationship between ideas and behaviour change**

If the hypothesis is that involvement in an arts activity can lead to a changed attitude about an issue (explored through all the above factors), then the next hypothesis to explore must be whether the resultant change in attitude or ideas actually translates to changes in behaviour. If it does, then does the change occur only for those people who have been involved in the event? Or could this change also have an impact on others, eg family members, communities, workplaces, social groups, etc. of those attending? Prevention scientist John Toumbourou's research would indicate that this trickle down impact can occur; social and community leaders 'get' these new ideas first, and others then follow. A dosage of 10% of any community is enough for an initiative to have an impact more broadly. Gladwell's book *The Tipping Point* provides a frame for this thought- only a certain percentage of any is required in order for a tipping point to be reached. However, sociologist Deborah Warr might argue that this influence doesn't necessarily occur amongst communities with limited interrelationships with others outside their neighbourhood, as is the case with most Timorese people, who live very in small communities very isolated from the outside world.

Of further significance would be the difference between the impact from attendance at an arts event to creative participation in cultural development activities. If there is a difference, why is it?

Factors in hypothesised greater impact from active participation could be

- depth of engagement with the issue, and therefore development of more sophisticated understanding
- length of time engaged with issue
- the actual creative experience itself, including the high that comes from performing
- relationships formed with others involved
- intention to seek or make change through participation
- skill development or personal growth through the performance

### **Measuring change**

How will it be possible to tell if change has occurred? Do any of the initiatives use any objectively verifiable data about incidences of the issue they seek to change? If so, what is the approximate time period between before and after?

For example, a quantitative study could examine

Pre and post test of levels of conflict in a particular area,

- after a 'strong dose' of a particular arts activity or performance..

Compared with an area that has not had such an event

- without any arts events related to the topic.

Attendance may have a lesser impact on more people, participation may have a stronger impact on a smaller number of people.

**Research fidelity** is less of a challenge with arts performances where the same content is presented by the same performers at different times. It is much more challenging with participatory arts events where the actual purpose of the event is to be uniquely meaningful experience for those participants in that place and time.

The literature review discusses issues of fidelity; that is, for programs to be properly evaluable, they need to have fidelity. However this study did not seek to consider initiatives that are replicable. Programs studied most often are wholly driven or related to personal motivations of leaders and have few shared characteristics.