

# The Qualitative Impact framework

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## What is the article about?

We present the Qualitative Impact framework, a new framework to grasp the impact of cultural organizations. We define Qualitative Impact as the effects of art activities on individual visitors, participants, artists, art sectors, communities and society that are based on the values of a cultural organization. The framework offers an alternative approach to the practice of researching arts' impact, which is unique in several aspects. Firstly, values are at its heart and they define the scope of the impact of an organization. In addition, the framework connects the value-driven language of cultural organizations and the more effect oriented policy community. As a result, the framework will aid the policy community to communicate the legitimacy of the funding for cultural organizations and it will help cultural organizations to research their impact in order to learn about, improve or communicate the impact of their art activities. Next to that, we also hope the framework will stimulate the debate in the scientific arena.

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aemuse represents a new generation of thinkers and entrepreneurs. Each of our projects aims to contribute to the quality of our future society. Our expertise is to provide organizations with a unique insight into their impact as to further develop and improve their way of working.

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## Introduction

The past few years have seen a growing attention for research into the impact of the arts, mostly initiated by the policy community. There is an increasing sense of urgency to justify the consumption of public money, due to the decline in available public funds and the firm hold of neoliberalism over present governments. In order to justify their consumption of public as well as private funds, cultural organizations need to address the perennial question why the arts are important. Since answers are often unsatisfactory, financial support for the arts has shrunk and cultural organizations are faced with ever more challenges and obstacles. They attempt to develop new ways of generating income, and they seek new models of organizing the production and presentation of the arts.

Historically, cultural organizations have had difficulties communicating their *impact*: the way cultural organizations affect their environment. In order to communicate their impact they are in need of a language and a model to describe the various ways they generate this impact. The policy community is aware of the instrumental or quantitative impact of cultural organizations. There is an urgent need to look beyond quantifiable results and examine qualitative issues (McCarthy, 2004). Of course, numbers help to answer questions concerning the financial side of the organization, but they do not account for its impact: how innovative its programs were, how it affected visitors and participants or what effect it had on its environment. While no one disputes the importance of fiscal prudence, the foremost outcomes of arts experiences are not numerical data (Brown, 2007: 5).

Both the policy community and cultural organizations are aware that they need to expand their horizon to assess the impact of the arts, but as of yet, it is chiefly discussed in the academic realm. Examples are Anderson (1995); Moore (1995); Klammer (1996); Throsby (2001) and McCloskey (2006). These researchers adopt a

cultural economic perspective to grasp the economic process of a cultural diminish or disappear.

We present a framework with a broad perspective on the impact of a cultural organization by demonstrating the interconnection between the values of an organization and the effects of their art activities on both an individual and wider level. We want to stress the importance of values to articulate and evaluate the impact of cultural organizations. To do so, we have developed the Qualitative Impact framework.

In general, cultural organizations are exceptionally concerned with intrinsic values of, for instance, an artistic or social nature. Often, they attach importance to matters such as craftsmanship, innovation, beauty or creativity. The policy community, on the other hand, speaks in a language of quantifiable and instrumental effects of cultural organizations' activities. The Qualitative Impact framework brings the two worlds together by providing cultural organizations and the policy community with a shared language to communicate the unique value of the arts to society and an alternative approach to research the impact of the arts. We also hope to inspire scientists that are concerned with arts' impact research.

## Qualitative Impact framework

What is Qualitative Impact? We define Qualitative Impact as the effects of value-based activities on an individual and a wider level. The Qualitative Impact framework is distinctive from other impact assessment frameworks because it makes the interconnection between values, activities and effects visible (figure 1). To put it differently, it is a holistic framework for organizations to assess their impact. And it provides the policy community in the cultural sector with a model to communicate the value of arts for society as well as for their own work in policy making and evaluating.

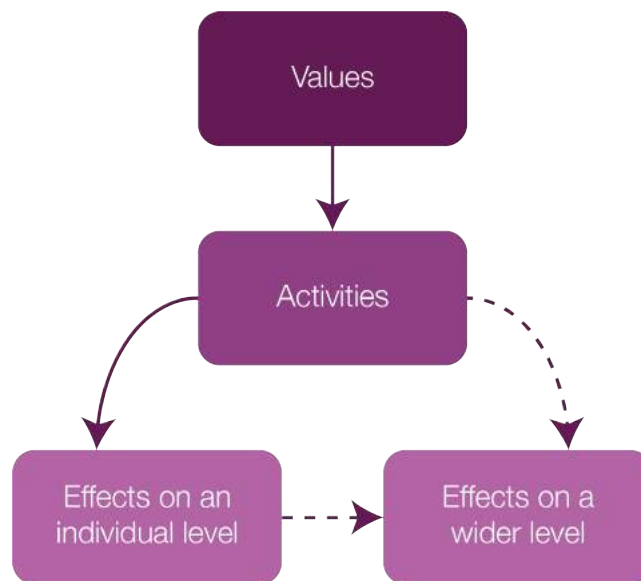


Figure 1: Qualitative Impact of cultural organizations

We have developed this framework during our work as cultural consultants, and in this capacity we have conducted over fifty interviews with cultural organizations and government officials. This being said, Qualitative Impact is not only realized by cultural organizations. This framework has been developed based on experiences

in the cultural sector, but other organizations that perform value-driven activities can also make use of this framework.

The framework first asks for a definition of the values of organizations, and then investigates the effects that come about when people engage with their activities. These effects can be experienced on an individual level, and in turn they can affect the wider level. Sometimes an art activity can have a direct wider-level effect, without the interference of the individual experience.

In the following chapters we explain the separate components of the Qualitative Impact framework in detail from the perspective of cultural organizations and focus on why the connection between the components is essential to assess the impact of these organizations.

## Ingredients of the framework

### Values

The starting point of the Qualitative Impact framework is the definition of the value(s) of a cultural organization: the *raison d'être* of the cultural organization. Values are the motivating principles within an organization and as such, they are at the core of its Qualitative Impact. This is why values are the first and foremost component of our framework.

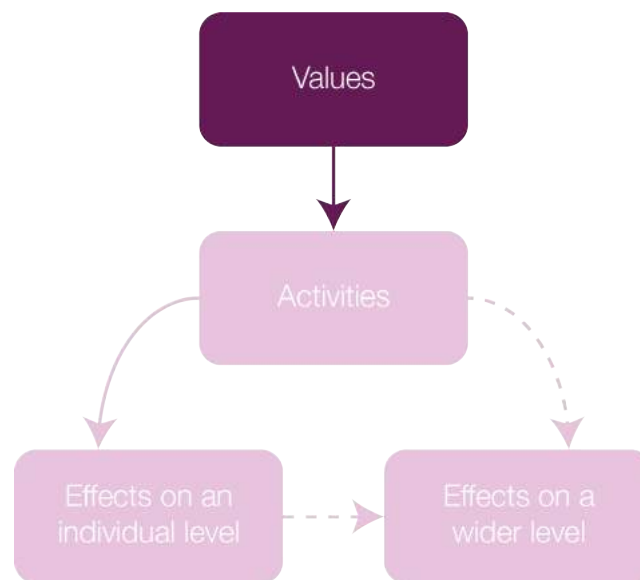


Figure 2: values in the Qualitative Impact framework

Classical philosophers started the discussion of values. Aristotle thought that all actions are directed at some good. He meant that all actions strive to reach certain qualities or values: the good. Plato uses the word *technē* to mean "art," but also "craft," "skill," or "expertise". In short, a *technē* is a determinate area of expertise, and cultural organizations have their own, unique, *technē* (Angier, 2010: 17). In



addition, Aristotle's theory suggests that it is important to know the aim – or *telos* – of an activity, in order to master the activity. We combine the notions of Plato and Aristotle in order to appreciate the specific fields an organization works in and the values that motivate its actions. A well-defined *telos* will give cultural organizations more control over their field or *technē*. Doing so requires accurate knowledge of the *telos* in order for it to be teachable, reliable, and certifiable, and have ends that are beneficial (Aristotle, Book I Sec. 1).

How is the *telos* of a *technē* determined? To identify the *telos* of cultural organizations, one must discover the meaning of a *technē* within the community of practitioners of cultural organizations (Bruni and Sugden, 2013: 144). The ideas concerning *technē* and *telos* of Plato and Aristotle teach us that cultural organizations possess expertise and aims that are unique to them, and we define the *telos* of their *technē* as their values (figure 2). In the table below we have made up some examples of Dutch cultural organizations and their possible *technē* and *telos*. Important to remember is the fact that one organization can have multiple *technēs* and *teloi*.

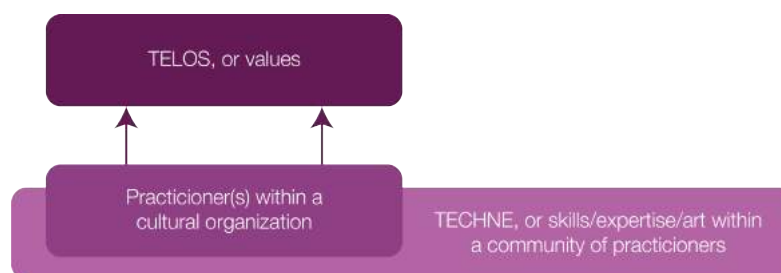


Figure 3: The *technē* and *telos* of cultural organizations

Understanding values like innovation, continuity and craftsmanship give meaning and direction to the work of cultural organizations. This is why we underline the importance of the value(s) of cultural organizations in their assessment of Qualitative Impact. When a cultural organization has not defined its value(s) the assessment of its impact is impossible.

Cultural organization	Technē	Telos
International Film Festival Rotterdam	directing films	innovation
Asko Schönberg Ensemble	playing music	craftsmanship
Rijksmuseum Amsterdam	conservation of objects	continuity
Conny Janssen Danst (dance company)	choreographing	authenticity

## Activities

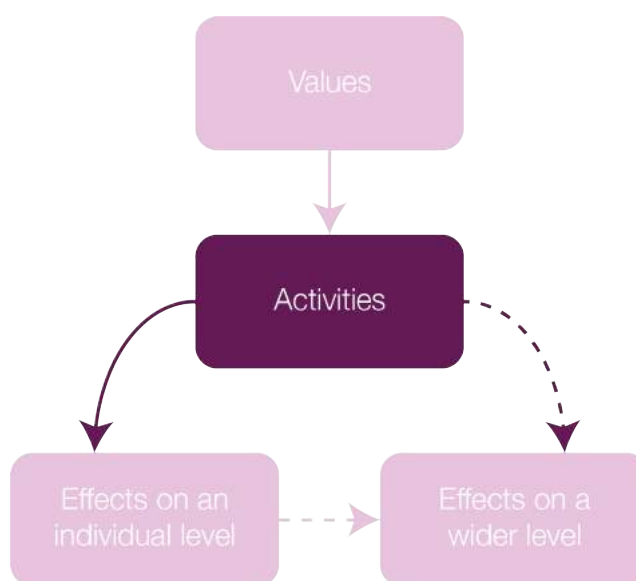


Figure 4: activities in the Qualitative Impact framework

The next component of the framework is the connection between the values and the art activities. There are many different kinds of cultural organizations and they all perform a wide array of art activities. It seems as though cultural organizations

continuously expand their art activities in order to obtain quantifiable results or to access new sources of income. For example, in recent years, we have seen cultural organizations start abundant art education programs. One can wonder if these programs are value-based or are organized for different reasons, such as approval from the policy community or the generation of added income. We are of the opinion that when an art activity is not value-based, it will not generate Qualitative Impact. Next to that, cultural organizations that are value-driven are more defensible when facing challenges and obstacles. Conversely, pursuing a new activity that does not suit an organization's values can negatively affect its credibility with different audiences or the commitment of its employees. This is why the connection between the activities of a cultural organization and their values is essential to the Qualitative Impact framework.

## Effects

Oscar Wilde asserted that the arts should have no use, or as he puts it: "All art is quite useless" (Wilde, 1890). The idea that works of art, artists, and cultural organizations enjoy autonomy within society has a respectable history. The Qualitative Impact framework, on the other hand, asserts that activities can have certain benefits. Laermans states that the arts are influential and communicative, as well as autonomous. (Laermans, 2009: 126). It is exactly in their communicative and influential capacities that we see the potential effects of art activities. The effects of value-based activities are the final component of the Qualitative Impact framework.

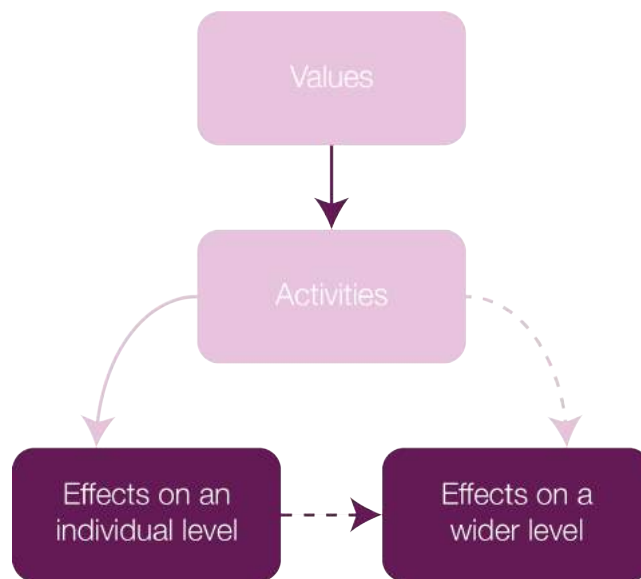


Figure 5: effects in the Qualitative Impact framework

Recently, influential work has been done to summarize the results of research into arts' impact by scholars such as Pascal Gielen (2014) and Vassilka Shishkova (2015). We are not going to repeat their research, but in order to explain the Qualitative Impact framework we will use some of its examples of potential effects cultural organizations can realize with their activities. We make a distinction between effects in several domains:

- Personal experience
- Health and cognitive effects
- Economic effects
- Social effects
- Artistic effects

These domains tell us something about the site where the effects of art activities occur. Often, research projects will choose one domain when looking at the impact of art activities.

## Personal experience

What draws people to the arts is the expectation that encountering a work of art can be a rewarding experience, one that offers them pleasure, emotional stimulation and meaning (McCarthy: 2004, 59). As such, we believe that art activities are a gateway to an individual and emotional experience for visitors, participants or artists.

An art activity can have a positive and surprising effect on a visitor. The following quote, collected from the website of Maas Theater en Dans in Rotterdam, shows an example of such a reaction:

*"The play surprised and moved us! The show, performed on the waterside, felt like watching a movie. We were sitting on the boat, with headphones on, getting a great view of everything that was happening. Brilliant!"*

(Play: 'Toen wij van Rotterdam vertrokken' 2015, <http://www.maastd.nl/>)

But, visiting museum can also be a more melancholic experience as this quote, obtained from the Facebook page of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, shows:

*"I have been longing to visit Vincent van Gogh Museum. I find it educational. Getting closer to his entire collections as well as others whom he associated with it's a bittersweet feeling for me. While reading all the captions of his works and really seeing them I cannot help relating to his loneliness and the sadness of almost all his works. I thought he was trying to reach out for someone to make him whole. The Museum is great and I am glad I came."*

([https://www.facebook.com/VanGoghMuseum?fref=ts&ref=br\\_tf](https://www.facebook.com/VanGoghMuseum?fref=ts&ref=br_tf))

An art activity can even realize a cathartic effect on participants. The reaction to a new exhibition by Marres Centre for Contemporary Culture in Maastricht found on their Facebook page, shows just that: *"There is such a special exhibition at the*

*moment you have to experience it! Let your senses work and leave as a reborn human being.“*

(Exhibition: The Winter Anti Depression Show 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/marresccc?fref=ts>)

The examples are mainly positive but they also show that we simply cannot expect to predict how individuals will react to an art activity (Belfiore & Bennett 2007b). As of yet, cultural organizations struggle to assess the personal experiences brought about by their activities. Researchers such as Brown (2013), Radbourne et al. (2010), Wilders (2011) and Van Maanen et al (2013) investigate the personal experiences sparked by art activities. These studies are often referred to as intrinsic impact studies. A review of these studies leads to the conclusion that, despite great improvements in our understanding of aesthetic responses, the mechanisms by which people are affected by the arts are still largely unclear. We hope that the Qualitative Impact framework will aid the understanding of cultural organizations about their impact on individuals.

### **Health and cognitive effects**

Art activities can lead to an individual and emotional experience, but can also have other effects on an individual and wider level, such as cognitive and health effects. Preminger (2012), Cuypers et al. (2012), and Walmsley (2011) shed some light on these kinds of effects. To get an insight into the cognitive effects, most researchers look to the cognitive benefit obtained from arts education. Arts education revolves around the question how human beings reflect on their environment using the arts. Although there are only very few studies focusing on the cognitive effects of art activities on an individual level, the literature is unequivocal: art activities contribute positively to increased self-reflection.

Next to the cognitive effects, recent research underlines the health benefits of art activities on an individual level. The focus of this research is the connection between arts participation and the wellbeing of individuals. Grossi (2012) for

example, studied the connection between art activities and mental health. He successfully demonstrates the influence of art participation for the psychological wellbeing of individuals. Especially elderly people benefit from the engagement with art activities, because it stimulates them to stay active (Gielen 2014, 41). The cognitive and health effects are more instrumental than the individual and emotional experience. Although the literature on the evidence of potential cognitive and health effects is scant, cultural organizations that aim for cognitive and/or health effects will often have educational or health related values next to their artistic values.

### Economic effects

Economic effects are the effects of art activities that result in direct or indirect benefits such as spending, employee income, and regeneration of areas. These effects occur at an individual and wider level. Some examples:

- Art activities as a tourist attraction. Tourists will spend directly on the museum visit and may also shop, eat at a local restaurant and/or stay at a hotel in the community (see for example Frey 2006).
- Art activities as an attraction for highly skilled, high-wage residents, and (creative) businesses. Due to the availability of creative talent and/or high-skilled workers, agglomeration effects in cities may occur (see for example Florida 2003).

An often-heard argument for paying less attention to these economic effects is the fact that cultural organizations feel that it is not their goal to create economic stimulus and they do not feel comfortable monetizing their work. But we do leave room for the economic effects of cultural organizations in the Qualitative Impact framework, as long as those effects stem from value-based activities.

## Social effects

Some effects of art activities are social, and only occur at a wider level. Research into the social effects of art activities concerns the connection between ethnicity, arts participation and social cohesion. Some examples:

- Art activities as a resource for unlocking assets and building resilience in communities. Those who engage in art activities are able to question the norms and values within their society (see for example Burnell 2012).
- Art activities as an improvement of young people's wellbeing. The activities enhanced the social capital of young participants (see for example Hampshire and Matthijsse 2010).
- Art activities as an assessment of the quality of life (see for example Brouwer 2008).

Other social effects are also partly economic. Livability, for example, can have an economic effect on the prices of real estate, but also has a social effect on safety in a neighborhood. Proof of social effects is of particularly strong interest to the policy community, but a positive correlation between arts participation and social effects is not always clearly manifested. Most of the time, the effects under scrutiny are positive. Newman (2013), however, demonstrates that arts participation can also have a negative social effect, such as a feeling of exclusion rather than inclusion (Newman 2013). Without a doubt, a great deal of research seeks to unveil the social effects of art activities, and the overall conclusion is that art activities indeed have certain social effects (Gielen: 2014, 87).

## Artistic effects

Among the effects that cultural organizations can realize, we want to explicitly mention artistic effects on an individual and wider level. These are the effects that cultural organizations have within their field, their production chain or art form.



These effects have a direct link to their value-based activities. Unfortunately, there is still a lack of research into this particular topic.

### Research issues

When researching the effects of art activities, many problems present themselves, the most prominent of which is that of causality. How do you prove there is a direct relation between individual and wider effects? Was it solely the art activity that realized a certain social effect? Was it partly the activity? Or could another type of activity, for instance sports or education, have produced the same effect? (Guetzkow: 2006, 17) And, when we look at health effects of art: does participating in art activities make you healthier? Or do healthier people participate in art activities?

A problem that comes into play when moving from the individual to the wider level is how to 'sum up' the individual results in order to make a statement about the whole spectrum. How can personal experiences be aggregated if they cannot be turned into numbers? Next to that, most studies of wider level effects suffer from selection bias problems. Selection bias means that the sample (i.e., the people and/or organizations that one is studying) is not representative of the entire population, leading to biased conclusions. The existence of self-selection bias in arts research is plausible, since people who choose to participate in the arts may be different from other people, and this difference could account for the observed outcome, rather than a real effect of the art activity.

Another obstacle in the field of arts' impact research consists in potential external aims of researchers and organizations involved. Will the policy community use the results to make a case for arts funding? Is it an advocacy project? Or do we see a group of scientists conducting research out of intrinsic motivation and curiosity? It is important take the 'messenger' of the piece of research into account in order to understand the particular perspective on arts' impact.

Research funded by the policy community, for example, will often look for socio-economic impact, hoping to find evidence to support the wisdom of existing policies (Belfiore & Bennett 2010). All results can be used, but the motivations of the researchers need to be taken into account.

## Working with Qualitative Impact

What purpose does the Qualitative Impact framework serve? The answer will depend on the intended user: whether they are scientists, members of the policy community or employees of cultural organizations. We will explain the multiple purposes of the framework using the Performing Arts Monitor we developed with Performing Arts Fund NL case as an example.

The Performing Arts Fund NL is the most important cultural fund for music, musical theatre, dance and theatre in the Netherlands and provides support on behalf of the government to every form of the professional performing arts. From 2012 onwards the Fund has been developing a self-evaluation tool for subsidized organizations, which is partly based on the Qualitative Impact framework. aemuse has contributed to the creation of the Performing Arts Monitor.

The Monitor offers both subjects (values and effects) and methods (qualitative and quantitative) for evaluation of the internal organization and external stakeholders, in order for cultural organizations to get a better grasp of the impact of their artistic efforts. The tool was developed in cooperation with subsidized organizations, within which we conducted extensive interviews, group sessions and testing. By making this tool available online at no cost to the users, the Fund wants to encourage the self-evaluation of beneficiaries.

### Qualitative Impact and the scientific arena

The Performing Arts Monitor has contributed to the scientific body of knowledge about the impact of arts. It serves as an addition to existing research and other toolkits that have been developed, for example by the Australia Arts Council. The Performing Arts Fund NL and aemuse have been part of numerous discussions, presentations and meetings with colleagues around the world and we are eager to continue in this strain.

In general, we hope that the Qualitative Impact framework will stimulate debate in the scientific arena about arts' impact and that we contribute to its understanding. Scholars can use the framework as a point of departure for specific research, for example on intrinsic benefits of the arts for museum visitors, or a potential relation between art activities and local community effects. We also hope that it entuses researchers to direct their attention towards the artistic effects of arts activities as well as the socioeconomic and health effects that are now often the focal point of research.

### **Qualitative Impact and the policy community**

What is the use of the Performing Arts Monitor for the policy community? The Performing Arts Fund NL, being part of this community, hopes more cultural organizations get a better understanding of their impact. The next step is for them to better communicate this impact in their plans and grant applications. If this is accomplished, the Fund itself becomes better equipped to legitimize the added value of the performing arts to society.

Next to legitimizing spending public funds on the arts, members of the policy community, including private and public donors, can use the Qualitative Impact framework for other purposes. For example, by gaining a better understanding of the motivating principles of cultural organizations and practitioners within those organizations, the relation between policy makers, donors and arts practitioners can become stronger and better informed. For subsidizing bodies within the policy community the framework could be used even more extensively. The framework could serve as an accounting tool; a base for policy formulation and funding criteria and it could help decisions over grant applications.

### **Qualitative Impact and cultural organizations**

The Qualitative Impact framework, as part of a self-evaluation tool or as a general research perspective, is particularly useful for cultural organizations. It answers to

the demand of a language and model to describe the various ways they create impact.

Researching, evaluating or monitoring Qualitative Impact as a cultural organization is not a solo undertaking. Cultural organizations need to involve their stakeholders when researching their impact. Stakeholders who are specifically important in the Qualitative Impact research are the ones subject to the effects of the art activities. They are not just the visitors of a performance, but also, for example, the dancers working for a dance company.

Cultural organizations can use the findings of their Qualitative Impact research in several ways:

- to make adjustments in the activities of the organization and thereby enhance or strategically steer the impact of the organization;
- to communicate the impact of the organization to the outside world, for marketing or legitimation purposes;
- and/or to consider taking a different strategy and assess whether the values they used to have are still valid, or if the activities they produce still underline their values.

## Conclusion

We have presented a new framework that focuses on the Qualitative Impact of cultural organizations. It proposes an alternative approach to the arts' impact assessment question. Its unique ingredient, Qualitative Impact, consists in the effects of art activities on individual visitors, participants and artists but also on art sectors, communities and society insofar as these effects are based on the values of a cultural organization.

We want to develop a new language that does justice to the impact of cultural organizations in all its variety. By developing this new language, we allow scientists, the policy community and cultural organizations to communicate the impact of the arts in qualitative as well as more familiar quantitative terms. This new language will also create a common ground between the policy community and the cultural organizations.

We hope the framework can contribute to the (research) practice of cultural organizations. In our practice as consultants, we see an urgent need to provide the organizations with practical research subjects and methods for impact assessment. The framework therefore explicitly uses their perspective and their unique qualities, which we hope will add to a recognizable framework for cultural organizations. All in all, our hope is that the framework challenges cultural organizations to make their goal values explicit and become (even) more value-driven.

The Qualitative Impact framework is the result of our (research) work in the past years. Of course, we still see a number of other avenues to explore. We as of yet lack case studies of the (qualitative) impact of the work of individual artists. And, from the viewpoint of the policy community, if the framework is going to be used as accounting tool for granted subsidies, more research has to be done into the inevitable changes in accounting processes within governmental organizations. We

would like to expand our knowledge of other public sectors such as education or health. As we noted earlier, the Qualitative Impact framework is based on our research in the cultural sector but not solely suited for cultural organizations. In most cases, other organizations cope with the same challenges as cultural organizations, and we believe that our Qualitative Impact framework can also be of use to them.

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