

**Cultural Value Beyond Measure?
The Emergence of Impact and Impact Evaluation in
the Dutch Cultural Sector**

Lisanne Brouwer

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Abstract

In recent years artists, arts organisations and funders in the Netherlands are tentatively turning to impact, and impact evaluation, to describe the outcome of artistic activities and the value of culture. This research takes the Dutch cultural sector's use of impact (evaluation) as an object of study, exploring the impact mindshift within the sector. The impact discourse researched relates to the effect(s) the arts instill in their audience and/or society. The study aims to create clarity around the concept, making it a workable term that cultural professionals can use in a way tailored to their practice. It responds to two research questions: How is the language of impact being used in the Dutch cultural sector? What are potential reasons that the impact evaluation trend is emerging?

Through interviews with cultural professionals and discourse analysis of publications and organisational policy documents, it deconstructs the use of impact on three levels: arts advocacy and sector support, large and small arts organisations and individual artists, and arts funders. The analysis investigates several categories, both conceptual (cultural and/or social impact) and practical (strategic impact thinking and/or impact evaluation). Three reasons are identified for the emergence of the impact evaluation trend: a cultural policy shift towards evidence-based and socially engaged policy making, a shift in arts funding towards strategic philanthropy and new ways of funding, and a desire of artists and arts organisations to make or present socially engaged art. The conclusion suggests ways forward and avenues for further research.

Keywords: *impact, impact evaluation, cultural value, public value of culture, cultural policy, arts funding*

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Introduction

In November 2018, Dutch arts advocacy organisation Kunsten '92 published *Who determines the value(s)?*,¹ a publication about a fundamental issue plaguing Dutch cultural policy and subsidy in recent years. Establishing that our age is one of *liquid modernity*, a global state characterised by unremitting change, flux and uncertainty, as Zygmunt Bauman wrote at the brink of the new millennium, it asserts that the arts are nowadays also subject to liquid valuation.² What constitutes artistic quality is no longer taken for granted, and often, neither are mere artistic objectives.

*If art is made with support from public funds, it is not strange to ask for accountability for the expenses. The question however, is how to measure the effect of art. And since valuation is an intersubjective phenomenon, the question increasingly becomes: who determines the value?*³

The first chapter of the publication responds to these topical questions by introducing the idea of measuring the *impact* of the arts. As quantitative indicators and economic rationality are increasingly driving Dutch cultural policy, the cultural sector is complaining that the accountability obligation for subsidy-receivers is a 'number terror': *output*, in the form of number of productions and audience members, is valued, but *outcome*, in the form of effects on the audience, craftsmanship, originality and artistic quality, is neglected.⁴ Artists, arts institutions and arts funders are tentatively turning to the concept of impact, and impact evaluation, as a language to describe the outcome of artistic activities and the value of culture, both in response to the above-described situation and to negotiate the wider role of the arts in a liquid society.

This research takes the Dutch cultural sector's use of impact and its evaluation as an object of study. Interpreted in a myriad of ways, be it artistic, cultural and/or social, the impact language studied here has irrevocably to do with the *effect(s) the arts instill in*

¹ Author translation. All Dutch phrases in this dissertation are translated into English by the author, unless otherwise specified.

² Marianne Versteegh and Edo Dijksterhuis, ed., "Wie bepaalt de waarde(n)?," Kunsten '92, November 19, 2018, 3.

<https://www.kunsten92.nl/publicaties/overig/publicatie-wie-bepaalt-waarden-2/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 4,5.

their audience and/or society. Economic impact is outside of the scope of this research. The cultural sector, following Becker, Keizer and Schrijver, is defined as ‘the interplay of actors, practices and institutions that are involved in the production, distribution and consumption of culture.’⁵ After outlining key public value theories, this study assumes that public subsidy-receivers have a responsibility to relate their art to society, even more so when their mission contains a social goal.

This dissertation is not an account of impact measurement best practices, an in depth analysis of public cultural value or an overview of potential effects of the arts. Rather, it is an exploration of the mindshift regarding impact and impact measurement within the Dutch cultural sector, and an argument about how that shift might make the sector stronger. The aim of this research is to create clarity around the concept of impact, so that it becomes a workable term that cultural professionals can critically interpret and use in a way tailored to their specific practice. This dissertation therefore asks the following research questions:

- How is the language of impact being used in the Dutch cultural sector?
- What are potential reasons that the impact evaluation trend is emerging?

After a succinct overview of the relevant history and state of the art of Dutch cultural policy, to provide the necessary context, the literature review outlines the primary international scholarly ideas around the (public) value of culture as well as impact and evaluation, and relates them to the Dutch case. Through interviews with cultural professionals working across the sector and discourse analysis of opinion pieces, publications, and organisational policy documents, the analysis then responds to the first research question in depth. It deconstructs the use of impact on three levels: arts advocacy and sector support organisations, large and small arts organisations and individual artists, and arts funders. The results are presented in content maps that show connections, developments and contradictions surrounding impact. The discussion addresses the second question, identifying three potential reasons for the emergence of

⁵ Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, ‘Revaluing Culture - Investigation - The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy,’ Regeling, 27 October 2015, 10.; Howard S. Becker, *Art worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

the impact evaluation trend. Lastly, the conclusion responds to both research questions, presents potential ways forward for the Dutch cultural sector and suggests areas for further research.

Cultural Policy in the Netherlands: History and State of the Art

Why is the Dutch case so particularly interesting? Unlike in the UK, which has been struggling with public support for (funding) the arts since European post-war cultural policy making began,⁶ in the Netherlands arts subsidy has long been undisputed and even celebrated as part of the welfare state. Only recently the societal *draagvlak* (support base) for publicly funded culture has significantly diminished.⁷ Dutch cultural policy, developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), appears to be based on a consensus that no longer exists.⁸ This section outlines the important components of Dutch cultural policy to contextualise this research.

Vuyk explains that arts subsidy, without governmental influence on content, was long uncontested. After the Second World War, unlike the former fascist occupier and the upcoming communist block, who both used the arts to promote governmental ideology, the Netherlands chose to be a modern democracy emphasising freedom of expression and pluriformity. A flourishing arts sector was believed to contribute to that goal.⁹ Against this background, the Council for the Arts (merged into the Council for Culture in 1994) was formed. This council, established by law to advise the Dutch Government and Parliament on the arts, culture and media, is tasked with determining the quality criteria which form the basis of the allocation of government subsidies.¹⁰

Over the years, global and social developments blurred boundaries between sectors, producers and consumers, and 'high' and 'low' art. Political thinking about culture diverged.¹¹ The 2008 financial crisis led to heavy funding cuts in culture on the basis of diminishing public support (see page 12).¹² In 2009, the Basic Infrastructure (BIS) was introduced. The subsidy system now sharply divides BIS institutions that receive permanent, long-term subsidies and smaller institutions and individuals that receive

⁶ John Tusa, *Art Matters - Reflecting on Culture* (London: Methuen, 2000), 17.

⁷ Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 'Revaluing Culture,' 9.

⁸ Kees Vuyk, "Art and Politics: Beyond Autonomy," *Cultural Policy Update* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4,5.

¹⁰ "Council for Culture," Raad voor Cultuur, accessed May 17, 2019, <https://www.cultuur.nl/english/item138>.; Vuyk, "Art and Politics," 5.

¹¹ Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 'Revaluing Culture,' 9.; Vuyk, "Art and Politics," 6,7.

¹² Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 'Revaluing Culture,' 9.

project-oriented subsidies through the six sectoral government funds.¹³ In the 2021-2024 policy, the BIS is set to become even larger, leaving smaller organisations and innovation vulnerable.¹⁴

An issue plaguing both BIS and other subsidised institutions alike, as mentioned in the introduction, is the primarily quantitative indicators with which grant-receivers have to account for the subsidy they receive.¹⁵ Increasingly, cultural institutions and policy makers alike wonder whether quantitative data are a tenable instrument to capture the meaning and value of culture for society.¹⁶ Van den Broek and Gieles question whether bypassing ‘meaning or effects does not wrongly obscure the view of forms of value creation that cannot be captured in revenue and/or visitor numbers.’¹⁷ It is time to search for a new way to discuss the public value of culture.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Cultuurbeleid 2021 – 2024: Cultuur voor iedereen,” Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, Rijksoverheid, published June 11, 2019, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2019/06/11/cultuurbeleid-2021-%E2%80%93-2024-cultuur-voor-iedereen>.

¹⁵ Claartje Bunnik and Kim Putters, “Over ons, zonder ons?,” *Kunsten ‘92*, April, 2015, 1. <https://www.kunsten92.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Artikel-Bunnik-Putters-lange-versie.pdf>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Andries van den Broek and Yvette Gieles, “Het culturele leven,” *The Netherlands Institute for Social Research* (November 2018), 131.

Literature Review

If a sustainable base for culture is to be secured then cultural professionals need to think of 'advocacy' not just in terms of generating 'evidence' for their funders, but as establishing broad support with the public.

- John Holden¹⁸

I. *The (Public) Value of Culture*

The impact debate in the arts is inherently about value. Belfiore and Bennett rightly problematise the fact that in the impact discourse 'notions of "impact" and claims for the "transformative powers" of the arts have become — in debates around public arts funding — a shorthand for a much broader and complex question, namely: what are the value and function of the arts in contemporary society?'¹⁹ This section outlines the academic debate surrounding the (public) value of culture, which for historical reasons²⁰ is largely based in the Anglo-Saxon world, and relates it to the Dutch case.

Arguably the foremost cultural economist,²¹ David Throsby, begins his account of cultural value by quoting literary scholar Steven Connor, who establishes that value in the cultural discourse is 'inescapable'.²² The idea of value itself as well as the processes of ascribing, modifying and denying value, namely the process of *evaluation*, is necessary 'always and everywhere'.²³ With this explicit starting point, a relevant basis for this study, Throsby outlines a range of economic and cultural value characteristics.²⁴ In addition to *aesthetic, historical and authentic value*, he lists three types of cultural value that are especially relevant in the impact context:

¹⁸ John Holden, *Cultural Value and the Crisis of Legitimacy: Why Culture Needs a Democratic Mandate* (Demos, 2006), 13.

¹⁹ Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett, 'Beyond the "Toolkit Approach": Arts Impact Evaluation Research and the Realities of Cultural Policy-Making,' *Journal for Cultural Research* 14, no. 2 (1 April 2010): 125.

²⁰ John Holden and Jordi Baltà, "The Public Value of Culture: a literature review," *European Expert Network on Culture* (January 2012): 6.
<http://www.interarts.net/descargas/interarts2550.pdf>.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

²² David Throsby, *Economics and Culture* (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), 26.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Throsby, *Economics and Culture*, 28-29.

- *Spiritual value*: Interpreted here primarily in a secular sense, spiritual value refers to the inner qualities shared by all human beings. It conveys understanding, enlightenment and insight.
- *Social value*: A work of art may convey a sense of connection with others, and contribute to a deeper understanding of society, identity and sense of place.
- *Symbolic value*: Cultural objects exist as conveyors of meaning, which may be extracted by the individual's reading of an artwork.

Building directly on his 'value and valuation' interpretation of cultural value, Throsby recognises the difficulty in measuring what may be 'incommensurable according to any familiar quantitative or qualitative standard.'²⁵ Nevertheless, he lists possible assessment methods used in the social sciences and humanities: mapping, thick description, attitudinal analysis, content analysis and expert appraisal.²⁶

John Holden, leading cultural value scholar writing from a cultural policy perspective, succinctly describes the three types of value that publicly funded culture generates:

- *Intrinsic value*: 'the set of values that relate to the subjective experience of culture intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.'²⁷
- *Instrumental value*: this type of value relates to 'the ancillary effects of culture, where culture is used to achieve a social or economic purpose';²⁸
- *Institutional value*: 'the processes and techniques that organisations adopt in how they work to create value for the public.'²⁹

Holden's emphasis on *publicly funded* culture is no coincidence. Both he and Throsby recognise a crisis of cultural value, albeit a distinctly different one. Throsby observes a tension between 'politically conservative absolutism'³⁰ that sees the absolute and universal value of an artwork in its intrinsic worth, and the postmodernist 'left-wing

²⁵ Ibid., 28.

²⁶ Ibid., 29-30.

²⁷ Holden, *Cultural Value and the Crisis of Legitimacy*, 14.

²⁸ Ibid., 16.

²⁹ Ibid., 17.

³⁰ Throsby, *Economics and Culture*, 27.

relativism³¹ which interprets cultural value in a heterogeneous way but fails to account for how that value should then be perceived and evaluated. This postmodernist thinking has impacted cultural policy: it no longer just concerns the arts and heritage and their traditional canons, but, with the distinction between 'high art' and 'popular art' largely disappeared, culture is increasingly interpreted as a way of life. This, in combination with the radical transformation of the economic environment in which cultural goods are produced (under the influence of globalisation and technological developments), has made economics a substantive factor in cultural policy making.³²

Holden's 'crisis of legitimacy' relates to the cultural policy system as a whole: the three types of value outlined above are created and consumed within a triangular relationship between cultural professionals, politicians and policymakers, and the public.³³ This relationship is a tense one, because politicians and policymakers care most about instrumental social and especially economic outcomes, whereas cultural professionals and the public have a very different set of concerns.³⁴ He initially suggests to find a new language to express cultural value but later claims that the real issue to be addressed is the *legitimacy* of publicly funded culture.

Writing about the UK, but recognising that several countries face similar questions, Holden observes a 'nervousness about art and culture in our political discourse that results from a democratic deficit.'³⁵ He claims politicians struggle with funding culture because public approval of it is hidden and 'cultural professionals have spent too much time in a closed conversation with their funders, feeding them with statistics and 'good stories'.³⁶ Politicians do not understand what the public values about culture, and cultural professionals should create and articulate the demand for culture if they want long term and stable political support.

³¹ Ibid.

³² David Throsby, *The Economics of Cultural Policy* (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 2-3.

³³ Holden, *Cultural Value and the Crisis of Legitimacy*, 9-10.

³⁴ Ibid., 10.

³⁵ Ibid., 13.

³⁶ Ibid.

Holden's observations resonate strongly in the Dutch context. Cultural policy expert Claartje Bunnik has used his analysis as a basis for her publication *Weighted to Value*,³⁷ in which she presents a new model for grant assessment based on artistic and social value generation.³⁸ It is a response to the inability of the Dutch cultural sector to demonstrate its value to society and the political indifference towards or even attack on culture that Holden describes. Kim Putters, the director of the The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP),³⁹ illustrates Bunnik's observations by stating that in Dutch society, set against other priorities such as improving employment and urban renewal, the stimulation of art and culture is systematically prioritised last.⁴⁰ To understand why this is the case, he draws on the different types of capital as understood by foundational sociologist Pierre Bourdieu:

- *Economic capital*: a person's monetary resources, property, as well as government spending on culture;
- *Social capital*: the human resources gained through social networks;⁴¹
- *Cultural capital*: the level of competence in society's high-status culture a person has acquired.⁴²

He explains that based on the different levels of capital, Dutch society can roughly be divided into six groups: the established upper layer, the promising young, the working middle group, the comfortable pensioners, the uncertain workers and those left behind. These last two groups, roughly 30% of Dutch society, do not have much of any capital (29% against 71% in the other groups), were considerably affected by the financial crisis, and are sceptical towards political institutions, globalisation and arts and culture. This

³⁷ Claartje Bunnik, *Naar Waarde Gewogen* (Amsterdam: Boekmanstichting, 2016).

³⁸ "Kick-off lezingenreeks Waarde van Cultuur door Claartje Bunnik," Boekmanstichting, accessed May 2, 2019, <https://www.boekman.nl/actualiteit/verslagen/kick-lezingenreeks-waarde-van-cultuur-door-claartje-bunnik/>.

³⁹ "About SCP," The Netherlands Institute for Social Research, accessed May 2, 2019, <https://www.scp.nl/english/>.

⁴⁰ "Continu Onderzoek Burgerperspectieven," The Netherlands Institute for Social Research, accessed May 2, 2019, https://www.scp.nl/Publicaties/Terugkerende_monitors_en_reeksen/Continu_Onderzoek_Burgerperspectieven.

⁴¹ "Verslag bijeenkomst Naar waarde gewogen," Boekmanstichting, accessed May 2, 2019, <https://www.boekman.nl/actualiteit/verslagen/verslag-bijeenkomst-naar-waarde-gewogen/>.

⁴² Throsby, *Economics and Culture*, 48.

directly affects the public support base for the arts and cultural participation.⁴³ In Dutch society, public approval of (subsidised) culture is not only *hidden*, but in a significant part of society, it is *absent*. The legitimacy to fund culture is thus weakened considerably or absent entirely, depending on your point of view. According to Putters, the Dutch cultural sector should therefore drastically improve the demonstration of its value to Dutch society.

II. Impact and Evaluation

In recent years, the concept of impact has been used in the Dutch cultural sector partially in response to the above described situation. In 2016, Lynn Berger called it the 'magic word' of the times in her journalistic exploration of the word as used in the arts sector. Through reviewing different interpretations, she eventually ironically defined impact as being immeasurable, automatically positive and best defined according to preconceived notions of collaboration and good intentions. Its vagueness is its strength.

⁴⁴

So how does this nebulous understanding relate to the academic debate about the impact of the arts? As mentioned before, most literature inextricably links impact to the value of the arts, which also relates it to evaluation and measurement. Belfiore and Bennett problematise the way impact measurements are currently executed primarily for advocacy reasons in response to evidence-based policy making. Not only does this lead to biased research (with results 'often coinciding with the priorities of whichever governments are in power at the time'⁴⁵), but it ignores the fact that the arts can have negative impact, something Berger already observed when ironically calling impact 'inherently positive'.⁴⁶

⁴³ "Verslag bijeenkomst Naar waarde gewogen."

⁴⁴ Lynn Berger, "Het toverwoord van deze tijd is 'impact'. Maar wat betekent het?," *De Correspondent*, March 16, 2016, <https://decorrespondent.nl/4183/het-toverwoord-van-deze-tijd-is-impact-maar-wat-betekent-het/834406966041-7929c58c>.

⁴⁵ Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett, *The Social Impact of the Arts* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 7, 11.

Through techniques such as those developed by Hasan Bakhshi and Dave O'Brien, many of these instrumental impact measurements attempt to make cultural value legible within the existing economic framework of wealth and data measurement.⁴⁷ However, critics argue that this approach is detrimental to articulating intrinsic cultural value, and warn against attaching other governmental considerations to cultural policy. Measuring economic impact caused by culture might show little to no impact, and may then lead to the extinction of cultural policy altogether.⁴⁸ Instead, Belfiore and Bennett argue for an intellectual history perspective on the value and impact of arts, with room for discussion about arts censorship, using arts in promoting fascist and communist ideology and the post-colonial critique of nineteenth-century ideas of the 'civilising nature' of Western culture.⁴⁹

It is thus important to deconstruct impact as a concept - positive and/or negative, intrinsic and/or instrumental, social, economic and/or cultural - before asserting how it should be evaluated. A critical review of the practice of cultural measurement unveils a range of its own problems, as identified by Lachlan MacDowall:

- There is a lack of clarity as to what evaluation means, it currently refers to a variety of very different procedures with different aims;
- Arts and culture generally resist singular, narrowly-defined ideas of value, which is not adequately reflected in most evaluation processes;
- The complexity and non-linear, unpredictable unfolding of cultural activity cannot be accounted for with the often very limited evaluation resources.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Hasan Bakhshi, Alan Freeman, and Graham Hitchen. 'Measuring Intrinsic Value – How to Stop Worrying and Love Economics'. MPRA Paper, April 2009.

<https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/14902/>;

Dave O'Brien, 'Measuring the Value of Culture,' (London: Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2010).

⁴⁸ Quirijn Lennert van den Hoogen, 'New Local Cultural Policy Evaluation Methods in the Netherlands: Status and Perspectives,' *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 20, no. 5 (20 October 2014): 615.

⁴⁹ Belfiore and Bennett, *The Social Impact of the Arts*, 191.

⁵⁰ Lachlan MacDowall, Marnie Badham, Emma Blomkamp, and Kim Dunphy, *Making Culture Count: The Politics of Cultural Measurement* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2015), 4.

Such issues make Belfiore and Bennett argue against a ‘toolkit approach’ for arts impact evaluation, instead putting forward a humanities-based, case by case way of measuring.⁵¹ They believe this approach will more effectively change policy-makers’ deeply held beliefs in the long term: little evidence exists to show that policy making is in fact based on evidence, rather it appears that it is largely based on policy-makers unchallenged assumptions about the ‘transformative power’ of the arts.⁵² They therefore argue that conducting impact research to advocate for arts funding is a waste of time.⁵³ However, in a democratic society, public opinion ultimately influences politicians to make decisions regarding cultural funding. It is worth considering whether impact studies are as ‘useless’ for influencing the public as they are for influencing policy makers.

Dutch scholar Quirijn Lennart van den Hoogen is more pragmatic, acknowledging that evidence-based policy making is currently practiced in all areas of Dutch policy making, fitting or not. He argues that the intrinsic-instrumental divide in arts impact evaluation ‘merely leads to the question concerning the specific intrinsic nature of culture and art and the way in which this specific nature can contribute to policy objectives in the social and economic domain.’⁵⁴ Economic impact aside, when recalling Throsby’s cultural value categories, especially spiritual value and social value, the line between social and cultural impact indeed seems hard to maintain. The fact that Dutch cultural policy evaluation does not currently account for culture’s specific nature does not mean that this nature cannot be evaluated.⁵⁵ However, such evaluation would require a time and money consuming mixed-methods approach to assess the quality of the products of cultural institutions, the quality of the audience experience and the meaning of these experiences for society. Van den Hoogen echoes Belfiore and Bennett in questioning whether that would constitute money well spent.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett, “Beyond the “Toolkit Approach”: Arts Impact Evaluation Research and the Realities of Cultural Policy-Making,” *Journal for Cultural Research* 14, no. 2 (2010): 122,123.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵⁴ Van den Hoogen, ‘New Local Cultural Policy Evaluation Methods in the Netherlands,’ 615.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 616.; Ben Walmsley, ‘Towards a Balanced Scorecard: A Critical Analysis of the Culture and Sport Evidence (CASE) Programme,’ *Cultural Trends* 21, no. 4 (1 December 2012): 325–34.

Other contemporary researchers view cultural value and impact through a radically different lens. Instead of situating impact within the public subsidy debate, cultural economist Pier Luigi Sacco claims societies around the world have moved on from the public patronage system into a 'cultural and creative industries' narrative. These industries produce economic and social value and technological developments make cultural products easily accessible for audiences. Currently, we are moving towards a society in which not only *access* to cultural content is easy and affordable, but the *production* of content is as well.⁵⁷ This stimulates active cultural participation and 'transforms what previously was a separate macro-sector of the economy, the cultural and creative industry, into a web of layered, pervasive structural relations among all sectors of the economy and society.'⁵⁸ In liquid modernity, the intrinsic value of culture can no longer be separated from its economic and social impacts.⁵⁹ Sacco argues that cultural participation can have indirect impact on the creation of social and economic value in a myriad of areas such as innovation, environmental sustainability, social cohesion, soft power and local identity.⁶⁰

As part of these developments, Sacco also observes new forms of financing that leverage upon community structures, such as crowdfunding schemes. Others also signal changes in giving patterns of both individuals and philanthropic foundations. Foundations are increasingly on the lookout for something more than mere artistic outcomes, likely as a result from the blurring of boundaries between sectors mentioned above.⁶¹ Pragmatically, 'broader social and economic arguments for the arts are essential in today's political, business and economic environment. Both public and private funders are increasingly likely to demand practical outcomes and robust evaluation.'⁶² For public foundations, political accountability is also a strong factor.⁶³

⁵⁷ Pier Sacco, Guido Ferilli and Giorgio Blessi, "From Culture 1.0 to Culture 3.0: Three Socio-Technical Regimes of Social and Economic Value Creation through Culture, and Their Impact on European Cohesion Policies," *Sustainability* 10 (October 2018): 6.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (originally published: 2000).

⁶⁰ Sacco, Ferilli and Blessi, "From Culture 1.0 to Culture 3.0," 14.

⁶¹ Theresa Lloyd, *Cultural Giving* (London: Russell Press, 2006), 23.

⁶² Jamie Cowling, *For Arts Sake? Society and the arts in the 21st century* (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2004).

⁶³ Kellie Liket, Marta Rey-Garcia and Karen Maas, "Why Aren't Evaluations Working and What to Do About it: A Framework for Negotiating Meaningful Evaluation in Nonprofits," *American Journal of Evaluation* 35, no. 2 (March 2014): 171.

Kellie Liket et al. describe how nonprofits, feeling pressured to 'prove' their value, increasingly engage in evaluation but 'the utilization of these evaluations is often low and frequently results in organizations finding themselves "drowning" in data that do not contribute to their strategic decision making.'⁶⁴ Even foundations themselves, influenced by a global movement towards 'foundation effectiveness' and 'strategic philanthropy'⁶⁵ attempt to make evaluation integral to their governance. However, they too struggle to understand how to evaluate in a manner appropriate to the foundation and the organisations it supports.⁶⁶ Despite these difficulties, Dutch cultural foundations - public, private and corporate - increasingly engage with impact and evaluation, as demonstrated in the analysis.⁶⁷

In conclusion, the debate around the public value of culture and the lack of public support for arts subsidy are relatively recent developments in the Netherlands. Many scholars situate the impact discourse within this debate. Cultural impact measurement, primarily using social science methods, has grown in response to a general agreement that evidence-based cultural policy making should not rely on quantitative data alone. However, impact evaluation is highly criticised for being too instrumentally focused and ignoring the intrinsic value of the arts. Others do not make this distinction and unapologetically use impact measurement to demonstrate the social value of culture. Furthermore, philanthropic foundations increasingly see cultural impact as a way to achieve their social goals, but a lack of know-how means evaluating their programmes in order to enlarge their impact remains challenging.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 172.

⁶⁵ Edward Pauly, "The Role of Evaluation in the 21st Century Foundation," *International Network on Strategic Philanthropy* (January 2005): 4.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Vermeulen and Scheidsbach, "Inspiratie kun je meten," 3.

Methodology

The research question of this dissertation is of an exploratory nature. It therefore requires a broad array of examples of the different usages of impact within the Dutch cultural sector, although it does not claim to be a complete overview. I have chosen to focus on three levels that each have an influence the impact discussion:

- Arts advocacy and sector support: these organisations and initiatives, most of them closely connected to national cultural policy based on the arm's-length principle (which protects artistic decisions from political interference⁶⁸) or through being in the BIS, are signalling the lack of public support for culture and are actively seeking ways to discuss the impact of arts and culture.
- Large and small organisations and individual artists: their work is or might eventually be directly influenced by impact and impact evaluation, and they are also partially shaping the developments around it.
- Arts funders: as demonstrated in the literature review, their aims, objectives and forms of assessments actively steer the impact and evaluation discussion.

This study investigates the conversations about impact as they are developing among cultural professionals rather than cultural policymakers. I therefore do not explicitly analyse policy documents. Naturally, general trends in national cultural policy are taken into account.

To answer the research questions, I use a mixed methods approach of interviews and discourse analysis. Understanding how and why impact conversations are happening requires a deep qualitative understanding of the different ideas about the concept, so semi-structured interviews with cultural professionals seemed the most suitable method. Focus groups, for instance, seemed less logical, since most organisations have some sort of organisational understanding of impact and as such not hugely differing opinions among staff members, and scheduling focus groups with people from different organisations in the Netherlands was unfeasible practically.

⁶⁸ Sophie Hansen and Rod Fisher, *International Arts Briefing - The Netherlands* (London: The Arts Council of England, 1997), 10.

In fact, conducting interviews was challenging enough from abroad: as my first interviews sparked ideas to research even more organisations, I ended up conducting two interviews over the phone. As I was unable to record these interviews, and because of the absence of non-verbal communication, the data acquired is less precise and less suitable for in-depth discourse analysis than the data acquired in the face-to-face interviews. To balance this, I complement these interviews with the organisations' respective policy documents, published research and website publications. I transcribed all recorded interviews, but as they were conducted in Dutch, I did not include the transcriptions in the Appendix.

In addition to interviews, I conducted discourse analysis on organisations' publications, especially in the sector support and arts funders sections. The type of discourse analysis executed has a close association to critical linguistics, social semiotics and critical language studies approaches: 'the central semiological idea that a term's sense derives not from any inherent feature of the relationship between signifier and signified, but from the system of oppositions in which it is embedded.'⁶⁹ The organisations were selected primarily on the basis of the type of organisation, to present a varied overview, and also on the way they use impact.

One of my interviewees suggested to conduct a quantitative survey among people who previously donated to an arts crowdfunding campaign, to find out whether and how impact was a factor of consideration for them. As privacy reasons would have made gaining access to donors' contact details difficult, ethical and time constraints forced me to let go of this method. Instead I suggest this as an area for further research in the conclusion.

My research question was initially framed to find out *why* the impact trend is emerging. However, along the way interviewees and analysed documents mostly outlined *how* impact was being used and what challenges, implications and fears the concept brings about. Recognising that making valid and reliable claims on the *why* based on a small

⁶⁹ Rosalind Gill, "Discourse Analysis," in *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound*, ed. Martin W. Bauer & George Gaskell (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011), 3.

number of qualitative interviews would be challenging, I have incorporated both *how* and *why* into the question, describing and analysing *how* and pointing out potential reasons *why*. The results are presented in a visible way through content maps that identify connections and contradictions. These maps are visual-spatial representations of the main associated ideas existing within a discourse ‘for the purpose of organizing the relative importance of relationships.’⁷⁰

When starting from scratch with more space, I would have conducted interviews with several similar organisations rather than just one of each type, juxtaposing organisations clearly focused on impact with those that are not. I would include politicians, policy documents and quantitative data on public opinion. The current research project could have benefitted from more data (eg. another interview) in the arts funding section of the analysis.

Lastly, as a researcher in the cultural field with interviewees who work in it, I should recognise our bias. We are more closely connected to the sector, and even have a stake in it, than many of those in the public I write about. We are also missing crucial representation of societal groups that we discuss but do not belong to. In addition, the study is written from a Western cultural policy perspective. These are important considerations when I suggest further research into the public’s perspective on the impact conversation.

⁷⁰ “Content Mapping: A Text Analysis and Mnemonic Tool for Interpreters,” compiled by Anna Witter-Merithew, EDI 124/131, UNC DO IT Center, accessed August 7, 2019, <https://www.unco.edu/cebs/asl-interpreting/pdf/library/content-mapping.pdf>.

Analysis

1. Arts advocacy and sector support organisations

One of the documents that prompted me to research impact, as mentioned in the introduction, is *Who determines the value(s)?*, published by independent but officially recognised arts advocacy organisation Kunsten '92.⁷¹ The first chapter, *The (im)measurable impact of art*, primarily questions the measurement gap in subsidy accountability with regards to the *effect* or *outcome* of cultural projects, observing that only *output* is currently measured. Interestingly using impact in the title of the piece, but failing to define it, the authors appear to use impact, effect and outcome interchangeably, calling it 'actually immeasurable' and elusive.⁷²

Responding to the sector's wish for an accountability system with room for outcome rather than just output, they find mostly obstacles to impact evaluation. They quote several cultural professionals and policymakers who recognise that over the years the policy focus on supply has led to a neglect of the demand side - the side of the audience - and the sector now misses the connection with the wider public. This echoes Putters' observations in the literature. Societal reach is then mentioned throughout the chapter as an area the cultural sector desperately needs to improve on.

Impact evaluation is seen primarily as a necessity to marry the fact that public funding nowadays calls for accountability in measurable form with the desire to take qualitative factors into account.⁷³ A rather limited view, as becomes clear later in this analysis. The governmental cultural foundations consulted (Performing Arts Fund NL, Mondriaan Fund and Creative Industries Fund NL) are all developing their own monitoring instruments, stating they are 'still pioneering',⁷⁴ a sentiment that returns throughout this study. Simultaneously, somewhat contradictory, the foundations claim to be against uniform measurement systems, stating they assess grant-receivers on a case-by-case basis.

⁷¹ "Over Kunsten '92," Kunsten '92, accessed July 13, 2019, <https://www.kunsten92.nl/over/>.

⁷² Versteegh and Dijksterhuis, "Wie bepaalt de waarde(n)?," 5.

⁷³ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

The chapter is almost solely about funding, and situates impact and impact evaluation entirely within the accountability and public subsidy discussion. It sees challenges rather than possibilities, leaving no room for ideas about impact as potentially enriching the artistic process. Without a definition, possible distinctions between impact, outcome and effect are lost.

The Council for Culture, the Dutch cultural policy advisory body,⁷⁵ has an arguably even narrower perspective on impact. Two recent publications, *The Financing of Culture*⁷⁶ and *Culture close by, close to culture*⁷⁷ (advising on cultural policy for the years 2021-2024), hardly mention the word impact. The first publication, apart from two one-off mentions of ‘a cultural policy with international impact’⁷⁸ and a project that improves ‘environmental impact,’⁷⁹ writes only of a too small societal ‘footprint’ of the cultural sector. It states that ‘the sector is increasingly aware of this and also embarks on initiatives, but does not have enough capacity for them.’⁸⁰ This reminds of Kunsten ‘92’s arduous attitude towards impact, and raises the question as to why the council shies away from the word impact and instead uses the more neutral but somewhat meaningless ‘footprint’.

The second publication provides a possible answer: it mentions the Creative Industries Fund NL’s research into the possibility of a ‘social impact bond’ approach in which loans are paid back in societal impact. The council claims that the cultural sector struggles with this idea because it has proven ‘difficult to express the societal impact of arts and culture in monetary terms’.⁸¹ It then calls for the development of new evaluation tools to do so. The Council for Culture thus seems to understand social impact, value and evaluation in economic terms, demonstrating a very limited understanding of what impact entails according to other cultural professionals and academics.

⁷⁵ “Council for Culture,” Raad voor Cultuur, accessed July 13, 2019, <https://www.cultuur.nl/english/item138>.

⁷⁶ Raad voor Cultuur, “Financiering van Cultuur,” February 28, 2019 <https://www.cultuur.nl/upload/documents/tinymce/Financiering-van-cultuur.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Raad voor Cultuur, “Cultuur Dichtbij, Dicht Bij Cultuur,” April 12, 2019, <https://www.cultuur.nl/upload/documents/tinymce/Cultuur-dichtbij-dicht-bij-cultuur.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Raad voor Cultuur, “Cultuur Dichtbij, Dicht Bij Cultuur,” 6.

⁷⁹ Raad voor Cultuur, “Cultuur Dichtbij, Dicht Bij Cultuur,” 56.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸¹ Raad voor Cultuur, “Financiering van Cultuur,” 33.

The views of these institutions most closely connected to national cultural policy are a far cry from those of research institution Impact Centre Erasmus (ICE) and digitalisation knowledge institute DEN, who believe impact thinking and measurement are positive developments that should be encouraged. My interviewee Marjelle Vermeulen, researcher at ICE, argues for impact (evaluation) to be separated from the funding context. Like the previously discussed institutions, she recognises the accountability obligation cultural institutions and producers who receive public subsidy have, especially since the financial crisis and the policy decision to make culture 'part of the societal agenda'.⁸² However, she believes this is no different from other non-profit organisations or even for-profit companies: everyone is increasingly urged to demonstrate their value. In fact, she sees opportunities for different sectors to learn from each other.

She believes that although impact evaluation in response to this obligation can make organisations stronger, it is even more important to *learn* from impact measurement in order to understand and subsequently enlarge impact. Listing several cultural organisations with a social goal in their mission, such as the Rijksmuseum embracing its symbolic value through stating that 'art and history take on new meaning'⁸³ in their museum, she claims insights from the impact approach will help organisations achieve their aims more effectively. Impact is about the softer, social value of art: 'cultural organisations and initiatives contribute to the meaning-economy. They have the potential to create social and societal impact.'⁸⁴ And importantly, impact is measurable: several scientifically validated scales exist to measure self-confidence or the feeling of social inclusion, for instance.⁸⁵ In line with Belfiore and Bennett, Vermeulen argues against a one-size-fits-all approach for arts impact evaluation.

ICE thus understands impact within a social context: as arts and culture having an impact on society. However, Vermeulen observes that cultural professionals generally

⁸² Interview Marjelle Vermeulen.; "Cultuur beweegt. De betekenis van cultuur in een veranderende samenleving," Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, Rijksoverheid, published June 10, 2013, 1.

⁸³ "Vision and mission of the Rijksmuseum," Rijksmuseum, accessed July 14, 2019, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/organisation/vision-and-mission>.

⁸⁴ Vermeulen and Scheidsbach, "Inspiratie kun je meten," 3.

⁸⁵ Interview Marjelle Vermeulen.

interpret impact in economic terms. Within the sector, the understanding of impact is at least confusing:

Because of the many meanings and interpretations [the impact] discourse is also a confusing one. Most (small) organisations are unfamiliar with the concept of social impact, cultural initiatives originate from an intrinsic need and drive. For many cultural organisations, measuring impact is at odds with that.⁸⁶

In addition to this unclarity, two prominent fears account for the reluctance towards impact measurement, resonating with concerns expressed by Kunsten '92. Poor findings is one of them: organisations genuinely fear having no or even negative impact, and funding subsequently drying up. Vermeulen: 'Many organisations in the cultural sector feel 'I *have to* measure my impact'. They don't see the intrinsic value of it: if you're only thinking 'I *have to*' all you see is the risks.'⁸⁷ She also sees that many foundations are open towards collectively learning from evaluation, assisting to strengthen the projects they support instead of punishing them by ending their funding.

The second fear, that of the impact focus making the cultural sector primarily produce instrumental value, is a more fundamental one. *Raak of Vermaak* (see page 28) strongly argues for a fully intrinsic understanding of cultural value, but Vermeulen does not believe that making a radical distinction is particularly productive, especially for publicly subsidised organisations. 'When cultural participation leads to a feeling of wellbeing or an intrinsic feeling of happiness, there is an overlap [between intrinsic and instrumental value]. They are very much connected.'⁸⁸ She also echoes Belfiore and Bennett in pointing out that throughout history, art has been used in all kinds of instrumental ways.⁸⁹

So how should the cultural sector embrace impact evaluation according to ICE? On an organisational level, a passionate individual should work as a driving force to ensure organisations do not drown in day-to-day activities and lose track of their impact measurement and management. On a broader sectoral level, institutions with capacity for full impact evaluation trajectories should openly share experiences and results with

⁸⁶ Vermeulen and Scheidsbach, "Inspiratie kun je meten," 4.

⁸⁷ Interview Marjelle Vermeulen.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Belfiore and Bennett, *The Social Impact of the Arts*, 191.

the field, inspiring others and allowing smaller organisations to make use of existing evidence.⁹⁰ Vermeulen distinguishes between strategic impact thinking and impact measurement as two distinct components of a cycle: ideally, gathered evidence is used to strategically design future projects and so on. However, limited capacity organisations can work with an impact focus without engaging in expensive and expansive research. Foundations have an important role to play in this: they can supervise their applicants in enlarging the impact of their projects, ensuring grant-receivers are committed to the impact approach from the start, and in this way enlarge their own impact as well. Vermeulen is more sceptical about individual artists. Drawing on the example of Braenworks Academy, who measure the impact of their workshops that aim to make artists more economically successful and independent, she believes it is unlikely that individuals will go on to use impact evaluation in their own practice. They have neither the interest, the mindset, nor the capacity.

An example that clearly illustrates Kunsten '92 and ICE's diverging interpretations of impact, is their respective judgements about *The Art of Impact*, the 2014-2016 OCW-funded finance and research programme that supported art projects 'with a clear social impact.'⁹¹ Kunsten '92 (like many in the sector⁹²) uncritically copies the research report which stated that it was difficult to measure to what extent the arts and society had grown closer.⁹³ Vermeulen however, calls the programme 'a missed opportunity'⁹⁴ as no actual effect measurements were executed in any of the supported projects, despite the programme's generous subsidy.

DEN, a BIS sector-support institution that encourages digitisation across the Dutch cultural sector, strongly endorses the strategic impact thinking Vermeulen refers to, although the topic is in its infancy for them. Contrary to Kunsten '92, in a short blogpost on their website, they clearly outline their understanding of impact:

⁹⁰ Vermeulen and Scheidsbach, "Inspiratie kun je meten," 5.

⁹¹ Annelies Dijkzeul and Boris Goostens, "The Art of Impact - Inzicht in samen werken aan impact," Kwink Groep (December 2016).

⁹² Vermeulen and Scheidsbach, "Inspiratie kun je meten," 4.

⁹³ Versteegh and Dijksterhuis, ed., "Wie bepaalt de waarde(n)," 6.

⁹⁴ Interview Marjelle Vermeulen.

- *The extent to which someone remembers a certain message and the effect that a message has on the receiver. If there is a large impact, they can remember and recall quite a lot.*
- *The effect of the message can be strengthened by the impact of the medium.*
- *The power that emanates from something.*⁹⁵

In addition, they define the relationship between output, outcome and impact:

- *Output is about number of activities, visitors per target audience etc.*
- *Outcome is about the results of that*
- *Impact is about the measurable effects.*⁹⁶

Marcus Cohen, advisor at DEN, begins our conversation about impact from the intrinsic point of view of altering and improving the artistic process, detached (but not separate) from the accountability and funding discussion. In its essence, impact is a way of thinking ‘about why we are on this earth, why we do what we do, what we want to achieve and what effects we aim for.’⁹⁷ Concurring with the distinction between strategic thinking and measurement, he deconstructs the impact approach even further. The first step is a mindshift from simply making art accessible to the public towards thinking about the social effects an artist or arts organisation wants to have. Only after that shift can impact actually be used as a ‘design tool’ to genuinely alter activities, through devising a Theory of Change (T.o.C).⁹⁸ DEN thus unapologetically takes a social impact stance, believing in using art instrumentally to improve society.⁹⁹ In doing so, Cohen, inspired by Sacco, sees mostly opportunities.

More than most others, Cohen situates his thinking about impact in an international context. Seeing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)¹⁰⁰ as a useful framework, he describes how he believes the impact discourse landed in the Dutch cultural sector. The UN SDGs influence the EU agenda - creating active citizenship and

⁹⁵ “Impact: van output naar effect,” DEN, accessed July 16, 2019, <https://www.den.nl/aan-de-slag/evalueren/impact>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Interview Marcus Cohen.

⁹⁸ Marjan van Es, Irene Guijt and Isabel Vogel, “Theory of Change Thinking in Practice,” Hivos, November 2015.

⁹⁹ DEN, “Impact: van output naar effect.”

¹⁰⁰ “About the Sustainable Development Goals,” United Nations, accessed July 16, 2019, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

understanding between different cultures - and policy makers adhere to this. These values thus implicitly become the 'ruling agenda' for national governments, meaning subsidised organisations and individuals have to relate to them as well. 'Impact is the mechanism to then actively do something with them.'¹⁰¹

Cohen foresees a behavioural change to a more integral way of working, both in the above described changing relationship between art and society and on a policy and management level, resonating with Vuyk in saying that cultural policy is based on a no longer existing consensus. Similar tensions exist on the organisational level: the situation in which 'an artistic team just wants to make something, and the business team needs to make it happen'¹⁰² is no longer tenable in a digitalised world in which competition for audiences and funding is ever growing. Instead, impact thinking integrates both sides into the artistic process, with the business team already reaching out to audiences during creation, creating a community and teaching them about the making process or even incorporating the community's ideas into the work. Innovative impact practices also open up more integral funding: rather than simply applying to the usual suspects of cultural foundations, there is a range of opportunities to obtain funding under the 'innovation' umbrella.

The novelty of the topic becomes clear when discussing practical usage of impact. OCW and the public foundations are afraid to set hard targets in their accountability systems, especially when it comes to impact, as expanded upon in the third section of this analysis. Without targets, the impact mindshift is unlikely to happen top-down. Private foundations such as the VSBfonds are stimulating impact thinking through aiding artists and organisations in designing their funding application around impact.

The funding topic at last sparks the topic of measurement. In line with the previous voices, Cohen acknowledges that it is unlikely for most cultural organisations to execute a full impact measurement trajectory because of a lack of capacity and understanding. For a less invasive evaluation methodology, he shares his distinctly digital perspective: 'Digital traffic can be an indicator. [Not the number of online visitors,] but the interactions

¹⁰¹ Interview Marcus Cohen.

¹⁰² Ibid.

tell you about impact and engagement.¹⁰³ Online audience reactions provide information about impact, and the digital opens up research possibilities beyond surveys or other artificial measures separate from the creative process. Again, integration, in this case of the artistic process and evaluation, is key.

DEN's interest in impact originates in their collaboration with Europeana, a cultural heritage organisation that released the Impact Playbook, a toolkit for arts institutions to gain insight into their social value, in 2017.¹⁰⁴ Europeana is active across Europe and is thus beyond the scope of this research, but it is interesting to note Cohen's positive stand towards toolkits and semi-standardised methods. Although a quick glance over the Impact Playbook lays bare the exact simplifications (such as impact being inherently positive, and interpreted primarily in a social and economic rather than artistic sense¹⁰⁵) that trouble Belfiore and Bennett, it could also be argued that without any practical starting point, no organisation knows where to start.

One very recent and public initiative that I expect to significantly shape thinking about impact in the sector, is the campaign and publication *Raak of Vermaak* (Touched or Entertained),¹⁰⁶ organised and written by cultural advisor Johan Idema. He signals that in the Netherlands, art generates little impact on its audience.¹⁰⁷ At first glance, his understanding of impact seems opposite to that of ICE and DEN: he advocates for museums and theatres to put the visitor experience at the centre of their work, facilitating audiences to be *touched* by art. Countering ICE and DEN's instrumentalism, he refers to intrinsic impact, although refusing to call it as such because 'the different definitions often cause confusion.'¹⁰⁸ However, closer investigation shows significant similarities: ICE, DEN and *Raak of Vermaak* all advocate for strategic impact thinking about the effects arts organisations want to have, albeit referring to different types of effects. Impact research, according to Idema, should then be used as a basis for organisational

¹⁰³ Interview Marcus Cohen.

¹⁰⁴ Harry Verwayen, Julia Fallon, Julia Schellenberg, Panagiotis Kyrou, "Impact Playbook - For Museums, Libraries, Archives and Galleries," Europeana Foundation (November 2017).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Johan Idema, *Raak of Vermaak* (Amsterdam: De Balie, 2019).

¹⁰⁷ Andries van den Broek, "Kunstminnend Nederland. Interesse en bezoek, drempels en ervaringen," The Netherlands Institute for Social Research, April 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Idema, *Raak of Vermaak*, 80.

policy, much like the cycle Vermeulen described. All three see opportunities to engage audiences earlier and deeper, with *Raak of Vermaak* identifying the presentation of artworks and productions (labels, behind-the-scenes videos) as an area with the potential to drastically enlarge impact relatively easily.¹⁰⁹

Idema also presents a solution for the capacity issues that hinder organisations from executing impact evaluation. He argues that 'well executed impact research (with a sufficiently representative selection of visitors) gives an outline of adequate and reliable insight into the effect of a performance or artwork on the audience.'¹¹⁰ Simple research that divides effects into intellectual and emotional ones, or solely focuses on the intensity of the experience, suffices. Idema rejects research methods that are complex or 'too academic in nature'¹¹¹ in favour of a research method that largely ignores nuances and has no room to find unintended, negative or long term effects. Others would argue that those are precisely topics impact research should concern itself with.

Idema's publication contains more irregularities. His reluctance to define his understanding of impact leads to an explicit statement that he is not writing about instrumental societal impact whilst simultaneously referring to social goals. He argues that the instrumentalist narrative neglects the real reasons individuals engage with the arts, like gaining inspiration or self-confidence, but this is precisely the type of impact ICE refers to as social impact. He also states that impact is essential to allow broader effects of the arts, such as social cohesion - an undoubtedly social goal - to come to fruition.¹¹² Perhaps Idema should consider that making radical distinctions between intrinsic and instrumental impacts is no longer productive, as we have repeatedly seen that these boundaries are blurred.

Some think of impact as merely another way for subsidy receivers to account for how they spend public money, others aim to learn from impact research and use strategic impact thinking to improve practice and enlarge social effects. Still others want to touch people with art and make intrinsic cultural impact. Clearly, the interpretations of impact

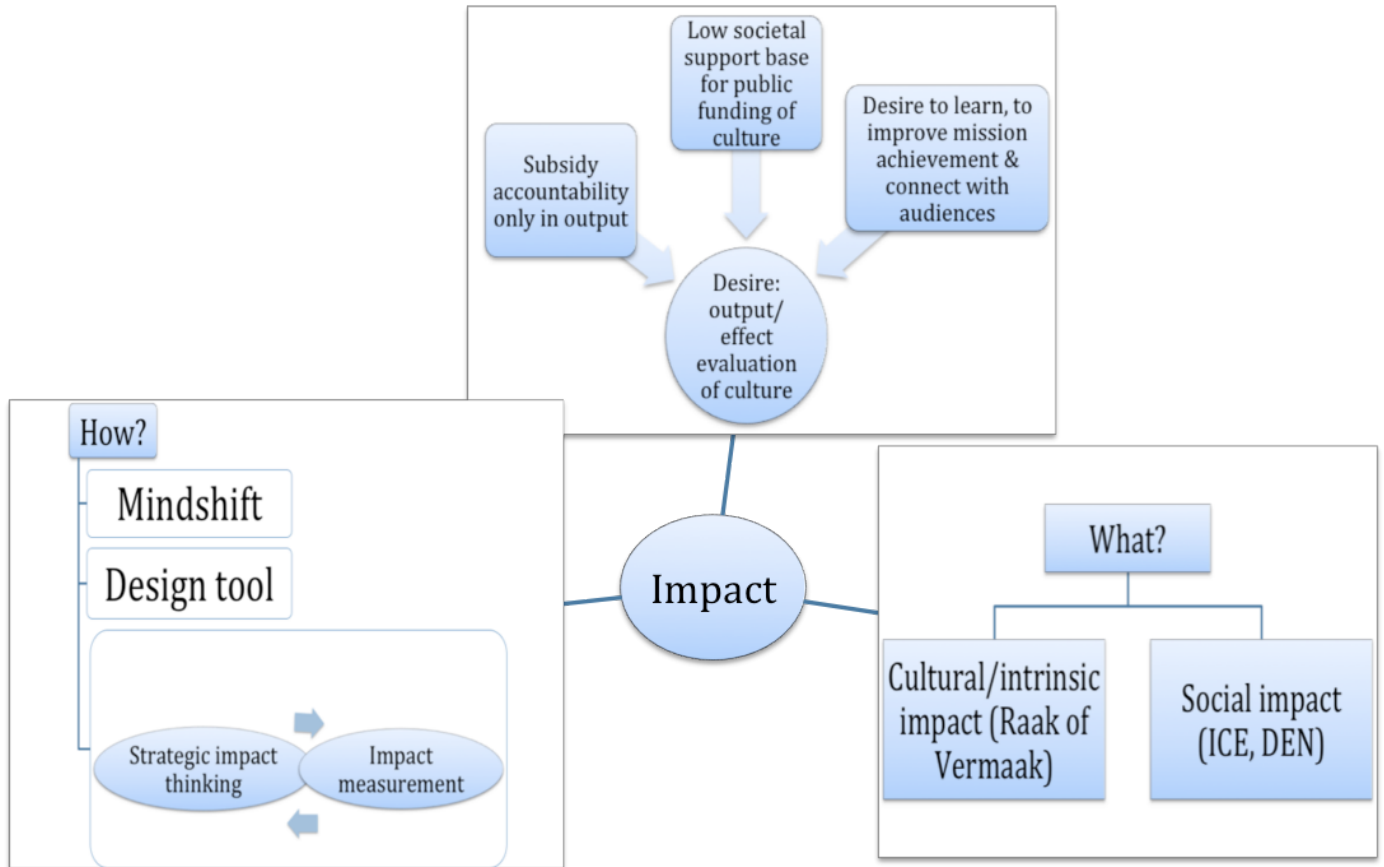
¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 69.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 43.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 44.

¹¹² Ibid., 57.

among sector support and advocacy institutions are myriad. The following content map shows the most important connections, contradictions and ideas.



II. Large and small arts organisations and individual artists

The sector support and advocacy organisations think and write about impact because it is an important topical issue for most stakeholders in the Dutch cultural sector. However, for arguably the most important actors in the cultural field - those actually producing and presenting art - impact and especially its evaluation can be a rather foreign and daunting topic. This section outlines interactions with impact on three levels of art producers and presenters: large organisations, small organisations and individual artists.

The Van Gogh Museum (VGM) in Amsterdam is a pioneer in the field of impact measurement. My interviewee Marthe de Vet is Head of Education & Interpretation, the department working to ensure visitors feel a personal connection to the collection or are touched by it. She strongly believes nonprofits have to be able to clearly explain the added value of their existence. Therefore, her department executes impact research among its four target audiences: youth (schools and families), young Amsterdammers (18-30 years), people with disabilities, and the elderly.¹¹³ Although the VGM also executes behavioural research, De Vet believes that impact research is necessary to truly foster inclusivity, an objective ingrained in their mission: ‘The Van Gogh Museum makes the life and work of Vincent van Gogh and the art of his time accessible and reaches as many people as possible in order to enrich and inspire them.’¹¹⁴

The VGM is currently executing the large-scale four-year impact measurement project *Van Gogh Connects*, in partnership with ICE.¹¹⁵ The programme aims to research how the museum can gain more relevance for young (18-30) Amsterdam residents with a Surinamese, Turkish, Antillean or Moroccan background, a third of Amsterdam’s population in that age group.¹¹⁶ The museum believes that ‘there is a growing focus on

¹¹³ “Proactive in a Changing World- Van Gogh Museum Education Policy 2017–2020,” Van Gogh Museum, 8,9.

¹¹⁴ “Mission and Strategy,” Van Gogh Museum, accessed July 16, 2019, <https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/organisation/mission-and-strategy>.

¹¹⁵ “Van Gogh Connects: learning to reach youths with a migrant background,” Van Gogh Museum, accessed July 16, 2019, <https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/organisation/van-gogh-connects>.

¹¹⁶ Marjelle Vermeulen et al., “Measuring Inclusion in Museums: A Case Study on Cultural Engagement with Young People with a Migrant Background in Amsterdam,” *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum* 12, no. 2 (2019): 1.

impact measurement in the academic world, but in the cultural sector, it is still in its infancy. The social significance of culture has been established, but there is currently very limited expertise regarding how to gauge this impact.¹¹⁷ The project is partially funded by Fonds21, which contributes to realising a new and varied audience for professional art and culture.¹¹⁸

De Vet asserts that the VGM wants to remain relevant in an ever-changing society.¹¹⁹ Closely relating relevance to impact, she believes the VGM has an obligation to understand why young people with a migrant background are not present in the museum. She feels that although suggesting a museum may just not be relevant for that group is sacrilege in the sector, fear of irrelevance is likely one of the reasons many cultural institutions are hesitant to conduct impact measurement. Especially large institutions in a less stable (financial and/or governance) position are afraid to lose sponsors should their evaluation show no or negative impact.¹²⁰ However, De Vet is convinced meanings of collections change over time, and relevance and impact change along with them.

Both ICE and VGM are committed to sharing the results of *Van Gogh Connects* with the field, so they jointly published an article reporting on the preliminary findings. The VGM does not only use impact research to improve the relationship with their target group, but also to ‘gain a better understanding of the different perspectives, values, perceptions, and interests of these groups’.¹²¹ As limited literature is available on the latter aim, the research is socially and academically relevant. After the first year of the research, the most important findings are:

- The vocational educational students in the research sample prefer to participate in active rather than passive cultural activities.
- The personal life of Vincent van Gogh is relevant to the students.

¹¹⁷ Van Gogh Museum, “Van Gogh Connects: learning to reach youths with a migrant background.”

¹¹⁸ “Wat doet Fonds 21?,” Fonds 21, accessed July 17, 2019, <https://www.fonds21.nl/over-fonds-21/wat-doet-fonds-21>.

¹¹⁹ Vermeulen and Jacqueline Scheidsbach, “Inspiratie kun je meten,” 5.

¹²⁰ Interview Marthe de Vet.

¹²¹ Vermeulen et al., “Measuring Inclusion in Museums,” 2.

- The VGM can potentially positively impact specific factors that result in a feeling of social inclusion amongst the students in the research sample.¹²²

By sharing the results with the broader sector, the VGM hopes to inspire smaller institutions to use their comparative flexibility to experiment with impact, leaning on the evidence that the larger but more cumbersome institutions provide. Their openness has led to other effects as well: the VGM's position in society is changing, the impact research opens different types of networks, enlarges their group of societal stakeholders and improves their reputation. De Vet specifically emphasises the aim to be relevant for the VGM's local Amsterdam. Knowledge gained from local activities, barring they are successful as De Vet admits there is a lot of trial and error, are subsequently applied on a wider level: for example when local outreach programmes with the elderly spark the realisation that the museum's website needs to be age-friendly.

A large part of our conversation dealt with the sustainable governance change necessary to alter the museum's practice with regards to impact. De Vet is well aware that words such as diversity, inclusivity and accessibility often turn into hollow phrases in the museum sector. The VGM's impact research is a way to concretise the words and bring them into practice. In the past, other departments unproductively thought of the Education department as 'working with niche groups'.¹²³ However, slowly but surely the organisational culture is changing, and previously taboo topics are increasingly open for discussion. This requires an attitude of vulnerability, and a mentality in which people, including the highest management teams, do not shy away from saying 'we don't know this, we have to learn'. The VGM's new way of working in 'core teams' per target group has fostered such a culture. Each core team is made up of people from different departments such as Education, Marketing, Human Resources, Visitor Service and Facility. For *Van Gogh Connects* they created a think tank made up of VGM employees in the target group, and members of the Board as well as the management team regularly attend think tank meetings. De Vet adds the disclaimer that the VGM is in a comfortable financial position, with high visitor numbers, which allows room for the vulnerability needed for a successful impact approach in a large institution.

¹²² Ibid., 19.

¹²³ Interview Marthe de Vet.

Interestingly, the Development department has been able to capitalise upon the museum's commitment to impact research and sharing of the results. Because of its impact evaluation, the museum can properly explain its added value, which makes it increasingly interesting for sponsors. De Vet mentions an anonymous donation received after the donor learned of the impact of a VGM school project as an example. Unsurprisingly, the impact research departments and projects thus have started to work in close collaboration with Development.

For some large institutions, embracing the impact approach is challenging, despite good intentions. The research project *Collaboration in the Performing Arts*,¹²⁴ initiated and supported by the Performing Arts Fund NL (see page 39), investigated the success of the alliances formed recently between theatre venues and theatre groups throughout the country, partially using an impact approach. Ten new alliances joined an intensive impact trajectory supervised by impact measurement professionals. All stakeholders, funders and definitely also the institutions showed great enthusiasm for employing an impact focus.¹²⁵ Six institutions completed the trajectory successfully, writing and implementing an impact strategy, but four dropped out because day-to-day business was prioritised. Despite a real effort to turn the conversation away from numbers and towards the added value of collaboration, even these large, intensively supervised organisations struggled to genuinely shift their attitudes towards impact.

Smaller organisations are in some ways more innately impact-focused, for example because of their rootedness in local communities or their specific artform. Impact Makers, initiated by my interviewee Bernadette Kuiper and inspired by the British example of Doc Society,¹²⁶ uses the power of stories to achieve social change. Echoing Sacco, Kuiper believes the documentary film sector (and the cultural sector in general) is a closed ecosystem based on a world that no longer exists. Expensively produced documentaries are broadcast once and then stored away without having made any

¹²⁴ Lisa Wolters and Pauline Modderman, "Samenwerking in de podiumkunsten," Kwink Groep (December 2018), 9.

¹²⁵ Interview Marianne van de Velde and Floris Vermeulen.

¹²⁶ "Hello & Welcome," Doc Society, accessed July 19, 2019, <https://docsociety.org/#whatwedo>.

social impact, while many other filmmakers struggle to tell their story without sufficient funds.

Impact Makers designs impact campaigns around documentaries and theatre performances. These are two distinctly different artforms: film is an increasingly democratic medium in which technological developments have turned consumers into producers, as Cohen observed as well. Kuiper feels the theatre world, however, is even more closed off from society, making impact campaigns challenging undertakings. The campaigns are designed to achieve concrete societal change, for example through using a story to pressure politicians for policy change.¹²⁷ Kuiper admits her approach was initially met with some resistance, but she has noticed that the 'art for art's sake' discussion is mostly a conceptual one: at the end of the day, most artists want to make work with impact. This is exemplified through the popularity of Impact Makers' workshops.

As for evaluation, Impact Makers is still in the pilot stage. They built the impact campaign around one documentary film and one theatre piece for the pilot *Impact langs de lat*¹²⁸ (Impact along the bar), subsidised by Performing Arts Fund NL and VSBfonds, among others. Avance, a company specialised in impact measurement, conducted evaluations of the campaigns.¹²⁹ In collaboration with the foundations involved, the evidence gathered will be used to create a freely available impact toolkit to help artists understand their target audiences and think about their impact. As seen in the literature and previously in the analysis, the toolkit-approach is heavily criticised for being unable to grasp the wide variety of artforms, expressions and audiences. It will be insightful to see how this toolkit responds to that critique.

Although impact has different funding sources than just the cultural foundations, such as foundations with a social goal, Kuiper is sceptical about philanthropists. They demand

¹²⁷ "Hoe helpen wij met het maken van impact?," Impact Makers, accessed July 19, 2019, <https://impactmakers.nl/activiteiten>.

¹²⁸ "Impact langs de lat," Performing Arts Fund NL, last modified April 17, 2018, https://fondspodiumkunsten.nl/nl/actueel/nieuws/impact_langs_de_lat/.

¹²⁹ "Avance - the impact engineers," Avance, accessed July 21, 2019, <https://www.avance-impact.nl/en/>.

evidence of social return on investment, but current impact evaluation data are still too anecdotal. In fact, at this stage she feels artists and organisations should have all the space they need to experiment and fail, as long as they are transparent about it; Kuiper seems to share De Vet's ideas about experimentation in small organisations.

A brief example of a small organisation interested in impact is PS|Theater in Leiden, a theatre group firmly rooted in their city, sharing stories from the community with the community. At a DEN event, they showed interest in gaining insight into the potential effect of their performances and activities.¹³⁰ After a strong marketing campaign, PS|Theater reached almost double the number of visitors they expected. Their format - an experience rather than 'just' a performance - seems to appeal to audiences. Impact thinking and measurement could help them understand what drives their visitors to then further improve their format, says DEN.¹³¹ PS|Theater also uses impact explicitly in its annual report, but seems to partially confuse it with output:

*We have also comfortably achieved the intended number of stakeholders. Through the commitment of the city scout, our longer presence in Meerburg and Roomburg and through the larger team of makers in the field research we have increased our impact in 2018.*¹³²

Confusion about the term thus exists even within organisations that actively seek to improve their knowledge about impact, another sign that more clarity around the meaning of the term for the cultural sector is imperative.

Another perspective entirely is given by young, individually operating artist Roos Tulen. Although she graduated the Willem de Kooning Academy with a degree in Fine Arts, her work is not of material nature: she sculpts her audiences' feelings, creating an experience for them in which they, without fully realising, become performers in her artwork.¹³³ An example is *Diner voor Gelukszoekers*,¹³⁴ a 'total experience' that connects

¹³⁰ "Koffie met Impact," DEN, accessed July 20, 2019, <https://www.den.nl/publications/43/koffie-met-impact>.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Bestuursverslag 2018, PS|Theater, 16.

¹³³ Interview Roos Tulen.

¹³⁴ Dinner for 'Happiness Seekers'; this artwork reclaims the word 'gelukszoeker,' a derogatory term for migrants.

refugees and people who were born in the Netherlands.¹³⁵ Tulen describes it as a very impactful work. She is convinced art needs the audience to be art; without people seeing or experiencing it, it does not have a right to exist. For her, impact is thus all that matters: without impact there is no art. However, Tulen believes the many uses and understandings of the word have led to it having a negative connotation. She names the ubiquitous use of phrases such as ‘negative environmental impact’ as an example of why people refrain from using or embracing the word.

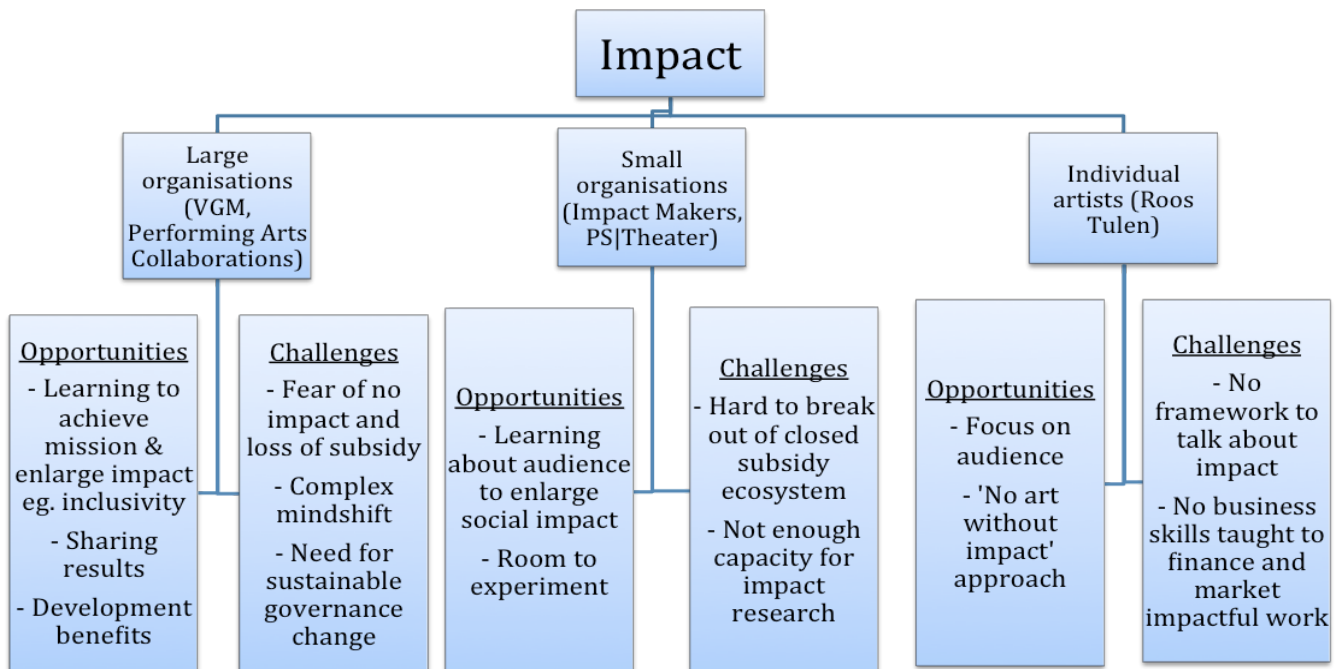
It is difficult to secure funding for such an interdisciplinary and ‘hard-to-explain’ approach to making art. Her training lacked modules in business topics such as Marketing and Fundraising. She feels her academy should have offered those, if only for her to be able to effectively share her art with a wide range of people. Writing subsidy applications is further complicated by the audience-dependent nature of Tulen’s work, as well as the numerical data collection that foundations require which she feels is entirely non enthralling and irrelevant. She rather wishes a (potential) funder would experience her work and its impact for themselves. Tulen evaluates her art through conversations with audience members to get a sense of whether and how they were touched by the work or experienced a shift in perspective. She does this regularly but unstructured, and appeared unfamiliar with evaluating impact in a more structural way, something Vermeulen signaled among most individual artists.

To partially fund one of her projects, Tulen ran a crowdfunding campaign. Most donations came from people already in her network, but she did feel as though she had created a stronger bond with her existing audience through the campaign: many of them came to her exhibition, people she feels otherwise would not have come. This image fits within Cohen’s line of thinking: she was able to enlarge her output, and potentially her impact, by reaching her audiences early and engaging them more directly with the work.

Unsurprisingly, the organisations consulted on the three different levels of large organisations, small organisations and individual artists show fairly different interactions with impact and impact measurement. The VGM and the organisations involved in the

¹³⁵ “Diner voor Gelukszoekers,” Seeds for Future, accessed July 20, 2019, <http://roostulen.com/?p=192>.

alliances project attempt to integrate impact into their organisations through large scale, professionally led impact research projects, given they have the money and support to do so. The smaller organisations researched mostly work on the level of strategic impact thinking, with more anecdotal evidence. Lastly, individual artist Roos Tulen does not necessarily think in terms of evaluation, but is committed to making impactful work. These different types of interactions with impact are visualised in the content map below.



III. Arts funders: public and private foundations and philanthropists

Throughout this analysis it has become clear that funders have a significant influence on the impact discussion. This section closely investigates the attitudes towards impact in one of the six governmental cultural foundations, and also highlights impact initiatives from other funders: a province, a large private foundation and a philanthropic organisation.

In recent years, the Performing Arts Fund NL (FPK) has engaged in several impact-related initiatives, such as the aforementioned projects *Collaboration in the Performing Arts* and *Impact langs de lat*. Another example is their freely available impact measurement tool: the Monitor Performing Arts.¹³⁶ Although FPK undeniably cares about impact, my interviewees Marianne van de Velde, Policy Advisor, and Floris Vermeulen, Head of Music and responsible for the Monitor, admit to having a complicated relationship with the term. They are committed to demonstrating the value of culture and champion the idea of ‘broadening and deepening the conversation’¹³⁷ with the organisations they support, as well as steering away from a sole focus on numerical data. However, the mindshift towards impact is a complex one for all stakeholders. The implementation of the Monitor Performing Arts illustrates this.

The Monitor, Vermeulen calls it a toolkit, is designed to help organisations understand the impact of their artistic efforts and their meaning for society and their stakeholders. Importantly, FPK does not have access to the data institutions enter into the website. However, when released in 2015, despite a clear explanation that the data would not be visible for someone other than the user, the foundation found the Monitor was not used regularly. This was likely due to arts organisations’ time and capacity issues but also due to a widespread fear that the results of the measurements would influence the assessment of the next round of applications.

¹³⁶ “Monitor Podiumkunsten,” Performing Arts NL, accessed July 20, 2019, <http://monitor.nfpa.nl/>.

¹³⁷ Interview Marianne van de Velde and Floris Vermeulen.

Vermeulen explains that FPK never had the intention to do so. Rather, they wanted to give institutions a tool for starting the conversation about value and impact beyond numerical data.

FPK appears to put the responsibility for initiating impact thinking primarily with the arts organisations rather than with themselves. This raises questions about the role of cultural foundations: simply providing subsidy or using other methods to ensure a healthy and financially sustainable sector? After seriously considering to make using the Monitor compulsory for grant-receivers, FPK eventually decided not to. A primary reason for this was the fact that the foundation would then have to enforce the use as well as assess the results, something they 'chose not to do'.¹³⁸ Nowadays, the consequence-free tool is not used on a large scale, although questions from the Monitor are present in their handbook for writing Annual Reports.

The search for a workable way to discuss value and impact remains. Van de Velde sees a clear mindshift among young artists towards making socially-engaged work, but notices they do not have the ability to articulate their value and 'talk beyond generalities' either. She explains the current 'split' or 'paradox' with regards to impact: although most organisations are enthusiastic about impact thinking, it just does not seem to be prioritised. Van de Velde: 'Thinking about impact analysis goes so much further than that list that you have to tick off. And no matter how much people grumble about lists, they *are easy*'.¹³⁹ Measuring impact means organisations have to show their vulnerability, which can be scary and may not turn out well for all of them, in which case numbers can actually be more pleasant.

The foundation seems to think predominantly in a 'numerical data versus impact measurement' dichotomy. Given the societal and political climate, Van de Velde and Vermeulen believe it is unlikely they will be able to let go of numbers altogether if impact research becomes a more common practice. They worry that measuring impact will thus mean more work for all parties involved. However, perhaps letting go of the dichotomy to find innovative ways to merge the two together could be a more productive approach. Their current numerical data collection is not even called evaluation, just accountability,

¹³⁸ Interview Floris Vermeulen.

¹³⁹ Interview Marianne Van de Velde.

and Van de Velde likes the term impact evaluation as something that goes beyond accountability. Maybe it could be integrated with the foundation's own project evaluations that they execute through advisors who attend performances.

When it comes to FPK's own impact, a similar picture surfaces. Van de Velde says it is 'a loaded term' within the organisation. She feels the vagueness of the concept means that it gets thrown around too easily in their discussions, and is sometimes seen as a rather hollow solution to many of the foundation's and the sector's issues. Nevertheless, there exists a great wish to map out FPK's impact, not in the least because the Review Committee of the governmental cultural foundations have repeatedly urged them to engage with outcome and impact.

Van de Velde feels the cultural sector could learn a lot from the charity sector's impact practice. As M. Vermeulen said, creating and measuring impact is something different sectors should collaborate on and learn from each other about. Unfortunately, FPK's current efforts to map out their impact have been put on hold because day-to-day business took priority, similar to arts organisations in the field. When asked what is necessary to fully get the impact approach off the ground within the foundation, Van de Velde echoes M. Vermeulen in saying that a driving force of passionate individuals within the organisation is needed. F. Vermeulen adds that the governmental foundations have to collaborate on this.

In the Netherlands, provinces also contribute to the arts. One province is applauded by both Cohen and M. Vermeulen: Brabant. In 2015, the province founded Brabant C, an investment fund that aims to 'strengthen the cultural system and contributes to innovation in the financing of culture'¹⁴⁰ and focuses on impact financing.¹⁴¹ The province's expertise centre and implementation branch for culture also sees the necessity of social impact and of its measurement.¹⁴² Cohen has noticed Brabant's development in how they offer their services: 'they are very active in supervising art

¹⁴⁰ "Over Brabant C," Brabant C, accessed July 21, 2019, <http://www.brabantc.nl/over-brabant-c/>.

¹⁴¹ Vermeulen and Scheidsbach, "Inspiratie kun je meten," 3.

¹⁴² Ibid.

projects, and whereas they used to have different decentralised budgets, nowadays they have one centralised office where artists can get personalised help.¹⁴³

Brabant C's Annual Report even mentions impact in one of its chapter titles, Impact for Brabant,¹⁴⁴ and crucially takes the following stance: 'Projects create societal impact and social value. There is a broader return than just meaning in a cultural or financial sense.'¹⁴⁵ Brabant C is clear in their interpretation of impact: the projects they support have to create meaning or value not only in a cultural or financial sense, but explicitly in a social sense. Holden would deem this an instrumental use of culture, Throsby would simply see social value as one of the different value types art can create. The fact that Brabant dares to take this stance is significant in the light of all previously discussed difficulties in relation to the impact thinking mindshift. Even national cultural policy and national bodies such as the Council for Culture are not using or even understanding the word impact in such a pronounced way, if at all.

It is not just the public foundations that care about impact. In fact, some private foundations have been at the forefront of impact-based strategic philanthropy. Almost all interviewees mentioned VSBfonds as the most prominent foundation with a distinct impact approach. The foundation supports art projects with a clear audience focus, that are aimed at achieving optimum societal effect.¹⁴⁶ They even have a Research and Impact Coordinator as part of their Managing Board,¹⁴⁷ who has designed a Theory of Change to gain insight into the social effects of the projects they support. The foundation has also recently updated its donation policy to ensure more effective connection to relevant themes in society.¹⁴⁸ The use of the word effective fits in a general international movement towards foundation effectiveness.¹⁴⁹ Impact is mentioned time and again in

¹⁴³ Interview Marcus Cohen.

¹⁴⁴ "Impact voor Brabant," Brabant C Jaarverslag 2018, <https://www.brabantc-jaarverslag.nl/magazine/brabant-c-jaarverslag-2018/maatschappelijke-effecten/>.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ "Kunstproducties," VSBfonds, accessed July 24, 2019, <https://www.vsbfonds.nl/kunst-cultuur/beleid/kunstproducties>.

¹⁴⁷ "Organisatie," VSBfonds, accessed July 24, 2019, <https://www.vsbfonds.nl/over-vsbfonds/wie-zijn-wij/organisatie>.

¹⁴⁸ "Jaarverslag 2018," Stichting VSBfonds, Utrecht: April 24, 2019, 5.

¹⁴⁹ Pauly, "The Role of Evaluation in the 21st Century Foundation," 4.

the grant criteria, always in relation to the foundation's focus on 'active citizenship', social goals and an explicit necessity of target audiences.¹⁵⁰

A last brief perspective I want to highlight is that of private philanthropists or investors. Since the budget cuts in culture due to the financial crisis, there is a renewed interest in arts philanthropy. Investor Martijn van der Vorm has founded a philanthropic organisation, Stichting Droom en Daad, that invests in 'projects that contribute to making Rotterdam beautiful and attractive, liveable for residents and loveable for visitors.'¹⁵¹ Interestingly, the organisation gained publicity as an indicator of a wider trend: they want a seat at the table in the projects they invest in (in this particular example: a representative of Droom en Daad was to become a Trustee at the museum if they were to make a donation).¹⁵² However, this is against the Governance Code for Culture, the rules for good governance and supervision in the cultural sector in the Netherlands. In response to the discussion, Droom en Daad's director explained that nowadays, patrons no longer give blank cheques, but want involvement. 'We manage conscious capital: we are an involved investor, we want you to be doing well. So well that in the long term, we can withdraw our funding. We do not expect financial, but social returns.'¹⁵³ Although he does not use the term impact, his words fit in the wider trend of arts funders increasingly focussing on social effects.

To conclude, arts funders influence the way art producers and organisations think about their impact and social effects through increasingly adjusting their criteria in that direction. The public foundations, at least FPK, have to negotiate a paradox in which impact (evaluation) is regarded with enthusiasm, but the practical execution does not always seem to come to fruition. Private foundations such as the VSBfonds are more free to set their grant criteria, and follow strategic philanthropy and foundation

¹⁵⁰ VSBfonds, "Kunstproducties. "; "Oproep voor Doc Impact Programma," VSBfonds, accessed July 24, 2019,

<https://www.vsbfonds.nl/over-vsbfonds/nieuws/oproep-voor-doc-impact-programma>.

¹⁵¹ "Home," Stichting Droom en Daad, accessed July 24, 2019,

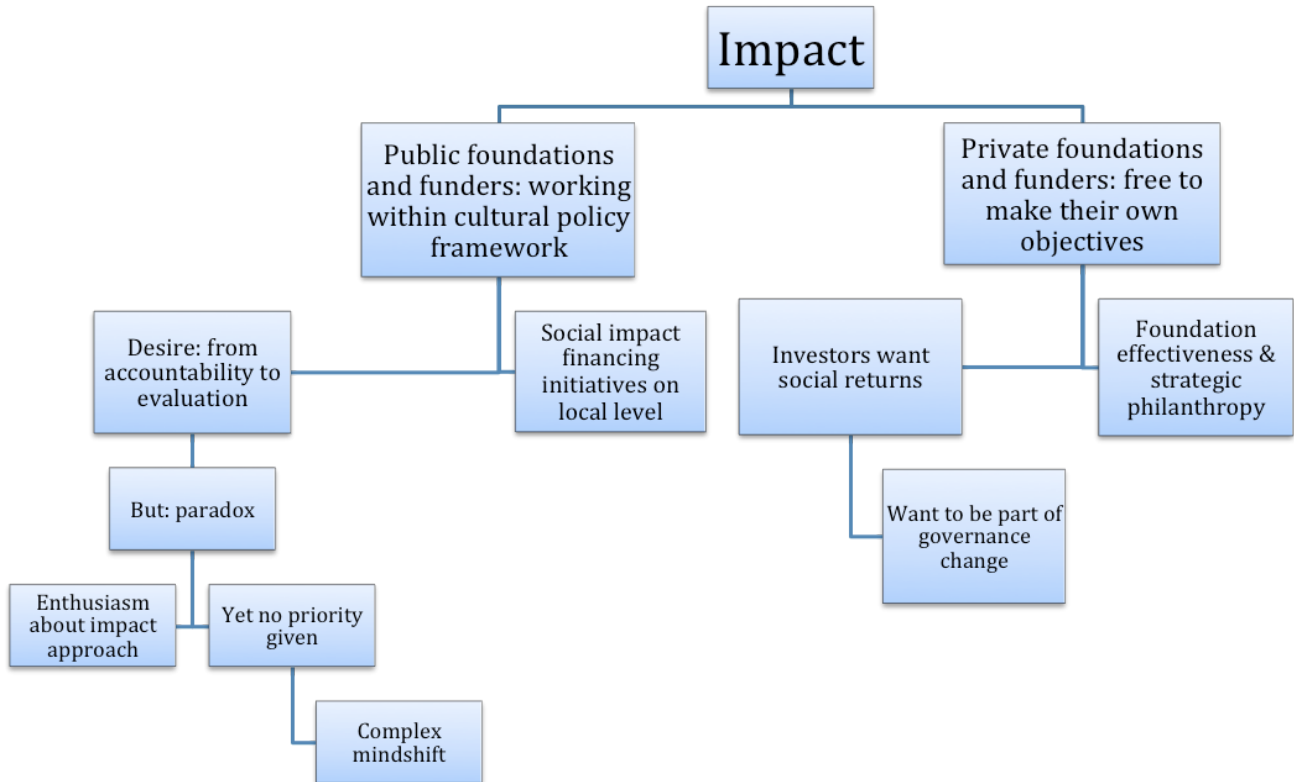
https://stichtingdroomendaad.nl/en/home_EN/.

¹⁵² Michiel Kruijt and Bart Dirks, "De nieuwe mecenas wil invloed op cultuursector, wen er maar aan," *De Volkskrant*, May 15, 2019,

<https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/de-nieuwe-mecenas-wil-invloed-op-cultuursector-wen-er-maar-aan~bc2be21b/>.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

effectiveness trends in doing so. Private investors increasingly expect influence and social returns. The following content map illustrates these observations.



Discussion

The analysis has identified different levels on which the impact discussion unfolds: from conceptual ideas about cultural or social impact, to practical discussions about how to fit impact evaluation into the cultural policy and funding system. To deepen our understanding of the impact evaluation trend, it is important to grasp why this trend is emerging in the Netherlands over the last few years. This discussion therefore interprets the data presented in the analysis to identify three potential reasons the impact evaluation trend is emerging.

1. A cultural policy shift towards evidence-based and socially engaged policy making

In recent years, cultural policy making has gone through two substantial shifts that interact with each other: a shift towards evidence-based policy making and a shift towards socially engaged policy making. Throsby wrote that globalisation, digitisation and postmodernist thinking about culture have made cultural policy more economically focused.¹⁵⁴ This has led to a quantitative evidence-based policy making approach across all policy areas, which Van den Hoogen said to be ‘highly problematic’¹⁵⁵ for the cultural sector. The way Kunsten ‘92, Performing Arts Fund NL and others search for a new balance between discussing output and outcome in the accountability system for subsidy receivers, to get away from the ‘number terror’ or ‘the politics of data gathering,’¹⁵⁶ is illustrative of this. Impact evaluation is needed to marry the policy necessity of accountability with the fact that cultural value is difficult to grasp numerically.

Another important influence of globalisation is that international politics are increasingly becoming the ruling agenda for national governments. As Cohen explained, the UN Sustainable Development Goals and EU Cohesion policies ultimately steer Dutch cultural policy making. The interpretation of the UN SDGs has likely contributed to culture being seen as part of the societal agenda on national policy level and the Council of Culture wanting the sector to have a larger societal footprint. Using strategic impact

¹⁵⁴ Throsby, *The Economics of Cultural Policy*, 2-3.

¹⁵⁵ Van den Hoogen, “New Local Cultural Policy Evaluation Methods in the Netherlands,” 614.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

thinking as a design tool for artistic production and presentation is then a concrete way of responding to social policy aims for culture. While M. Vermeulen, De Vet, Kuiper and others embrace this way of social impact thinking and research and do not make a clear distinction between Holden's intrinsic and instrumental cultural value, Idema wants to use impact research precisely to combat instrumental cultural policy. One way or the other, these two discussed policy shifts have significantly influenced the emergence of the impact evaluation trend.

2. A shift in arts funding towards strategic philanthropy and new ways of funding

Evidence-based policy making and the increased focus on the social impact of the arts on a policy level has naturally trickled down to the level of cultural trusts and foundations, which more and more pay attention to the results of the activities they support and feel the need to demonstrate their added value. According to Pauly, this emphasis on results 'is part of broad "foundation effectiveness" and "strategic philanthropy" movements that are global in scope.'¹⁵⁷ This is exemplified in Brabant's impact financing with social objectives and Performing Arts Fund NL's impact measurement efforts. Interestingly and perhaps surprisingly, private foundations such as the VSBfonds and private investors such as Droom en Daad are frontrunners in this development, rather than the public foundations who are struggling with the accountability paradox. These academic claims and foundation objectives are backed up by De Vet's evidence: the VGM's impact evaluation has significantly supported its Development department in obtaining social impact related funding and donations. The shift towards strategic philanthropy and social objectives among arts funders, themselves influenced by policy developments, thus has a significant effect on the emergence of the impact evaluation trend.

In addition, new ways of funding the arts, such as crowdfunding, have become more popular for several reasons. Van den Hoogen writes that in the Netherlands, cultural politics have looked to this form of private funding 'to mitigate the impact of budget cuts to the cultural sector during the economic downturn'¹⁵⁸ and 'as a possible means of

¹⁵⁷ Pauly, "The Role of Evaluation in the 21st Century Foundation," 4.

¹⁵⁸ Quirijn Lennert van den Hoogen, "Values in crowdfunding in the Netherlands," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* (February 2018): 1.

re-establishing the connection between the arts and society¹⁵⁹ in response to the low societal support base for culture Putters writes about. As crowdfunding involves audience members in the artistic process before a finished product exists, it is part of the more integral way of working that Cohen described and Sacco foresees.¹⁶⁰ Tulen's crowdfunding experience supports this view because she felt she was able to enlarge her impact as her audience members felt more engaged with her project. These new ways of funding contribute to the impact trend because their success depends on the impact arts have on their community.

3. A desire of artists and arts organisations to make or present socially engaged art

The third potential reason for the emergence of the impact trend is slightly more ambiguous than the other two. Of course, artists across all time periods have created socially engaged work, desiring to have some sort of impact on their audience. Nevertheless, the Dutch subsidy system has traditionally been focused on serving artists and arts organisations, rather than responding to developments on the side of the audience and society.¹⁶¹ Over the last twenty years, this emphasis has shifted to such an extent that Van de Velde and F. Vermeulen believe that the younger generation of artists has completely geared its focus towards the audience, making work primarily 'because people want to be present at it.'¹⁶² However, Van de Velde remarks that even those socially-engaged artists are still searching for a framework to talk about the impact of their work. Tulen's pronounced focus on audience impact and struggle to explain the value of her art to funders is a telling example of this.

Both De Vet and Kuiper have mentioned the low support base for culture in society as a reason to learn about and enlarge the impact of the arts. De Vet is explicit about staying relevant 'in a changing world,'¹⁶³ echoing Bauman's constant state of flux. Although relevance is an important factor, it is not the sole reason for impact measurement. The

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Sacco, Ferilli and Blessi, "From Culture 1.0 to Culture 3.0," 7.

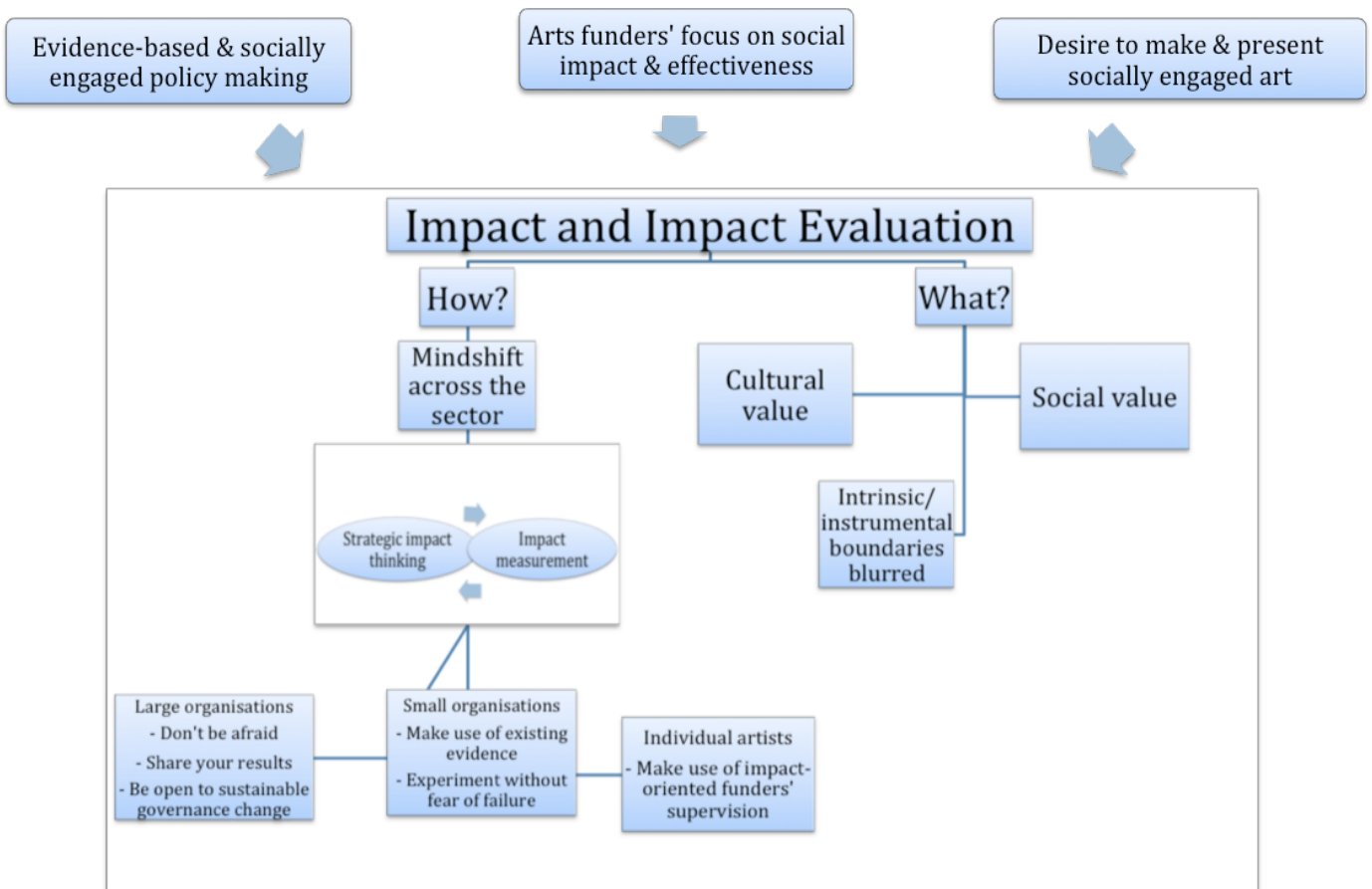
¹⁶¹ Rick van der Ploeg, "Cultuur als Confrontatie," Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap (Den Haag: 1999) 5.

¹⁶² Interview Marianne van de Velde and Floris Vermeulen.

¹⁶³ Vermeulen and Scheidsbach, "Inspiratie kun je meten," 5.

organisations mentioned in this research (although chosen for their engagement with impact and thus in no way representative of the entire sector) seem to have a genuine desire to learn about their (primarily social) impact, in order to improve their practice and work towards achieving their mission more effectively. This increased focus on the audience and socially engaged work thus appears to not be solely imposed top-down and can be seen as a separate reason for the emergence of the impact evaluation trend.

The following content map combines the findings from the analysis and the discussion.



Conclusion

It is not surprising that, due to the complexities of the term impact, there are many possible answers to the question regarding *how* the language of impact is being used in the Dutch cultural sector. It has been repeated time and again that impact (evaluation) is still in its infancy in the cultural field, and as such the term brings about confusion: many institutions and professionals unfamiliar with the current debate think about it in monetary or economic terms. However, the real conceptual debate among individuals and organisations working with impact is whether it should be understood in intrinsic, cultural terms or in a more instrumental, social way. Others feel this distinction cannot or should no longer be made and believe the debate is thus a nonsensical one.

When it comes to the more practical use of an impact approach, some organisations, such as Impact Makers and DEN, use impact primarily as a design tool to create work or campaigns to enlarge the social impact of a particular artwork or production. Other organisations, such as the Van Gogh Museum, emphasise impact measurement a lot more, using evidence they collect through impact evaluation to feed into the design of their new programmes. This emphasis on measurement also shines through on the level of arts funders, with public foundations having to negotiate how to deal with the cultural policy of accountability focused on numerical data gathering first mentioned in the introduction of this study. For foundations such as Performing Arts Fund NL and their grant receivers, the impact mindshift is complex: they are stuck in a paradox in which there is enthusiasm about the impact approach but capacity issues, and in many cases fear of not having (enough) impact, mean it is not prioritised in day-to-day activities.

The subsidy system in which accountability in the form of quantitative indicators is paramount, is part of a larger shift towards evidence-based policy making that is one of the potential reasons *why* the impact evaluation trend is emerging in the Dutch cultural sector. Together with international politics such as the UN SDGs, it has led to a (social) impact evaluation approach that should marry accountability with the elusiveness of cultural value. These developments in turn have led to cultural foundations adopting a foundation effectiveness and strategic philanthropy stance, and the emergence of new ways of funding such as crowdfunding, which likely contributed to the impact trend.

Lastly, a renewed focus on the audience among artists and arts organisations, partially in response to the low societal support base for culture in recent years, contributed to the use of impact as a way to design socially engaged cultural productions.

This study aimed to create clarity around the concept of impact, to prevent it from being automatically interpreted in monetary terms or be confused with output. Impact is about the long term, measurable effects that the arts instill in their audience. How can the Dutch cultural sector proceed to use impact as a workable term and impact evaluation in a productive way to make the sector stronger? The following recommendations follow from the results of this research:

- Several toolkits (Impact Playbook, Monitor Performing Arts, the to-be-released Impact Makers toolkit) have been mentioned throughout this research, but both scholars and interviewees have also spoken sceptically about one-size-fits-all impact measurement systems. Toolkits are a good starting point when beginning to think about impact, but should always be reviewed critically and adjusted to suit the artform and project they will be used for.
- Large organisations with the capacity for full-scale impact trajectories should aim to share their knowledge with the field, allowing smaller organisations to use existing evidence to design impactful projects and use their less bureaucratic organisational culture to experiment with impact and impact research that suits their needs.
- Organisations using the impact approach should work towards a sustainable governance and organisational culture change across the whole institution.
- Foundations can enlarge their own impact by ensuring grant-receivers are committed to the impact approach from the start and supervising their applicants in enlarging the impact of their projects, relieving the capacity issues small organisations struggle with.
- Foundations and organisations alike can learn from other sectors, such as the wider charity sector, also in terms of impact-related philanthropy.
- Digitisation opens up avenues for innovative impact measurement, for example through online interactions in response to an artwork.

In addition, I recommend art academies, their lack of business skills modules and their influence on creating an impact-focused sector as an area for further research.

Moreover, a study on the public interpretations of the impact of culture, also in relation to philanthropy, would add a much-needed perspective to the existing literature. As for the practical embracing of the impact approach in small organisations, PS|Theater would be a good case-study.

Impact is thus much more than a way to measure the value of culture to account for a received public subsidy. It is a term with much likeness to Bauman's liquid society itself: uncertain, confusing and ever-changing depending on the context in which it is used. Nevertheless, when interpreted and evaluated in a meaningful way, tailored towards the specific artist, arts organisation or artwork, it is a powerful tool to achieve an artistic mission, whatever that may be.

Appendix

List of Interviewees

Name	Organisation	Date of Interview
Marcus Cohen	DEN - knowledge institute for culture & digitalisation	11 April 2019
Bernadette Kuiper	Impact Makers	24 June 2019
Roos Tulen	Roos Tulen	16 July 2019
Marianne van de Velde & Floris Vermeulen	Performing Arts Fund NL	12 April 2019
Marthe de Vet	Van Gogh Museum	15 May 2019
Marjelle Vermeulen	Impact Centre Erasmus, Erasmus University	15 April 2019

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