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SYMBOLIC IMPLEMENTATION OF CULTURAL PARTICIPATION PROGRAMMES
THE CASE OF PANAMA'S 500-YEAR FUND

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ABSTRACT

THE MOST COMMON CONCEPT OF SUCCESS IN CULTURAL PROGRAMMES IS COLOURED BY DIEHARD RATIONAL ECONOMIC NARRATIVES. PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES, HOWEVER, HAPPEN WITHIN A SET OF INSTITUTIONS THAT GUIDE THE ACTIONS OF AGENTS WITH SOMETIMES CONFLICTING INTERESTS. IN SOME CASES, THE PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAMME COULD BE DEFINING THESE RULES AND ALLOWING ACCESS TO NEW AGENTS. THIS IS THE CASE IN CULTURAL PARTICIPATION PROJECTS THAT ADDRESS COMPLEX SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DILEMMAS. IN THIS PAPER, WE REFLECT ON OUR EXPERIENCES AS BOTH DESIGNERS AND EVALUATORS OF PANAMA'S 500-YEAR FUND, AN INITIATIVE TO COMMEMORATE THE FOUNDATION OF PANAMA CITY IN 1519. WE EXPLORE HOW THE EXISTING INSTITUTIONS AND AGENTS IN PANAMA CITY'S CULTURAL SECTOR CAME INTO CONTACT WITH PROFESSIONALS DEALING WITH ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ISSUES, AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS. WE ARGUE THAT THERE WAS A SYMBOLIC IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS FUND. THIS FACILITATED A RESOURCE-INTENSIVE PROCESS TO REDUCE AMBIGUITY ABOUT GOALS AND WAYS OF WORKING.

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Introduction

The most common concept of success in cultural programmes is coloured by diehard rational economic narratives of how to plan, implement and evaluate what we do and why we do it. If a programme does not have a clear theory of change or does not reach its stated objectives, we tend to label it as a failure. Absent from these accounts is the recognition that planning and implementation processes in any field happen within a set of explicit and implicit rules of the game (or institutions) that guide the actions of agents with sometimes conflicting interests (FitzGerald, O'Malley & Ó Broin, 2019). In some cases, the very purpose of a programme could be to negotiate and develop the future rules of the game (Delfín, 2012), reach a consensus on who will be able or not be able to be part of the programme, and what instruments should be used to deliver the work.

These dynamics are even more prevalent in the cultural sector when the objectives are presented in terms of addressing complex social and economic dilemmas. In many cases, ready-made indicators are applied to measure success without much consideration about context and processes. This fails to take into account the resource-intensive process of negotiating new goals and instruments. Agents in the cultural sector, and professionals that deal directly with economic and social issues (such as community development officers and social workers) have to invest valuable time and effort to reduce any ambiguity in stated goals and agree which instruments to use to implement the programme. This usually involves the design and implementation of symbolic programmes, which leaves limited time for output delivery. By symbolic, we mean that the stated objectives are unlikely to be reached, but a set of symbols or signals emerge to announce that new fused goals and ways of doing things start to be confirmed, and reciprocally, a set of old goals and instruments start to be reaffirmed or eliminated (Matland, 1995).

This paper reflects on our experiences as both programme designers and evaluators of Panama's 500-year Fund, an initiative to commemorate the foundation of Panama City in 1519.[1] This competitive fund was managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and funded by the City of Panama. Between 2016 and 2019, it provided $330,000 (around £254,000) in total to 22 projects. Although a relatively small programme, it was the first time the cultural sector in Panama was asked to formally apply to a competitive fund at the national level to help develop citizenship, increase social cohesion and strengthen community participation.

For our reflection, we will focus on 4 projects, using an institutional theoretical framework (Stanziola, 2012; Johnson & Greenwood, 2007). Specifically, we will reflect on how agents and institutions shaped the design, implementation and evaluation of these projects. We will argue that the differences in the results obtained by the projects reflect primarily their internal level of agreement around goals and instruments to deliver the project, and how they involved community members. Whilst instances of not reaching stated goals are posited as expected characteristics of symbolic programmes (and not as failures), we do identify within that process challenges around limited and top-down community involvement.

The article concludes that the 500-year Fund reflects at a micro level the complex dynamics of formalisation of cultural policy making and work in Panama. The design and implementation of the Fund helped to increase alignment of goals and instruments amongst different agents engaged in cultural activities, but not with those outside their traditional relational space. This article contributes to the cultural policy literature by providing further evidence of the need for cultural managers and funders to recognise and value the ambiguity and consensus-building process behind this type of initiatives. It also challenges binary understandings of success and failure, positing instead the complexity of designing and evaluating programmes against diverse goals and ways of working. By pretending that they are following administrative rational approaches to programme implementation, they only add transaction costs to an already onerous process of setting common goals, agreeing instruments, and working collaboratively with professionals from other sectors.

The relational nature of participation programme design and implementation

There seems to be a consensus that programmes funded by government must not only add public value (Moore, 1995; Walker, 2000), but do so in an efficient way. This has been accompanied by the prevalence of tools such as theories of change or logic models for programme design. Whilst programme delivery and evaluation practices are more complex and diverse, they too

remain dominated by linear flowcharts of actions, and summative assessments using indicators to attempt to establish causality and find ways to scale a programme. However, the actual practice of delivering programmes highlights how not-so-rational agents and ever-evolving institutions shape these processes (Peyton & Scicchitano, 2017). The actions of the agents involved in programmes could be at times self-interested, but also guided by considerations of reciprocity and altruism as they assume that their interactions are unlikely to be a one-off occurrence. In turn, these actions are both shaped and constrained by a social web of explicit, implicit and sometimes fleeting rules of the game with norms about how to behave with other agents (or institutions), and signals that serve as incentives about what type of results are expected (Johnson & Greenwood, 2007).

This becomes more complex when the programmes are designed and implemented using a community arts approach. Different from participatory art, community art is not a previously organised and controlled set of activities where people join in. In addition to expectations that members of the community take part in the event, community art is at its most basic level a shared and collective experience where initial and stated objectives are only starting points for communities to shape in order to reflect their own capabilities and interests. This means that the process and results are not pre-determined. Instead, they are the result of different interests and views coming together to agree goals and ways of working. As Matarasso (2019) summarises it, participation is "a form of cultural democratisation (or giving people access to the arts), while (community arts) aspires to cultural democracy."

This means that the agents delivering the actual activities in these communities have the additional task of navigating the relational space of people whose main commonality is their close proximity. Implementing these programmes becomes a careful balancing act between meeting the requirements of funders, the complex and varied needs of community members, and the particular interests of the agents delivering the activities. As Gray (2015) highlights, ambiguity is a structural characteristic of the cultural sector. When this ambiguity is present in conditions of uncertainty, it is almost inevitable that cultural programmes will be centred around argument and debate rather than consensus and unity.

Using this institutional perspective means that to understand the actions and results of programmes we should understand these rules and what place agents occupy in the relational space where these programmes take place. We should also understand what power those agents have to formally or informally confirm or challenge existing rules, be it by themselves or by forming coalitions of common interests. This implies moving the focus away from goal achievement and rational economic accounts of success or failure. Instead, we should place the spotlight on how agents use their contacts, expertise and power to influence programme design, and what resources and instruments are used to achieve these objectives (see Prince, 2010).

Based on the literature described above, we make the following seven assumptions about the role of institutions and agents in the design and implementation of programmes in the cultural sector that follow a community arts approach, and enter for the first time a social and economic public policy landscape.

First, the actual rules of the game for designing and delivering programmes will be ambiguous and contested. When agents with expertise in a specific field are given access to spaces where their skills are not commonly used, an almost inevitable process of negotiation and experimentation ensues. In these scenarios, the only common objective is defining the rules of the game, roles, objectives and accepted instruments.

Second, this ambiguity is used as a tool to facilitate entrance of new agents into a field. The more ambiguous the language used to describe the objectives of the programme, the easier it is for the different agents to interpret the same narrative in different ways and justify their entrance.

Third, the eventual selection of goals and instruments would depend on the time, funding and other resources these agents have available. For instance, for short term, one-off funding agreements, there will be the incentives to provide an immediate interpretation of the problem and propose any implementation approach regardless of its potential effectiveness.

Fourth, regardless of the resources available, arts and cultural agents are likely to rely on those instruments with which they are familiar. It is unlikely that, without the proper training and in-depth understanding of complex social and economic dynamics, they will use tools that would address social or economic issues, or that agents with other expertise are familiar with and validate.

Fifth, the motivations of the agents involved in the programme are likely to be influenced by their position as core or periphery members. For instance, there will be agents at the core of the relational space of the programme (e.g. they are in charge of

making strategic decisions and/or distributing funds) and those at the periphery (e.g. those delivering the project or that are new to the space, and hold close ties to other relational spaces, such as cultural workers) (Bilton, 2007). Agents at the core are likely to be interested in arriving and demonstrating consensus. This means they will favour more moderate options than periphery agents and will be more likely to incorporate different but still conflicting interpretations of the objectives. They are also likely to be flexible about the use of different instruments to deal with these issues. On the other hand, periphery agents will be less concerned about increasing clarity. Instead, they are likely to focus on using their existing resources (e.g. their artistic expertise) to enter and stay in this new relational space (Sabatier, 1998).

Sixth, core agents play the role of bouncers in the creation of these new relational spaces, deciding which agents can enter and under which terms. Even in this space with limited rational decision making, this process could allow experts in programme design, evaluation and research to be part of the consensus process. Core agents open the door for them so they can bring research and evaluation techniques that may or may not align with the symbolic nature of the programme. These experts are used as tools to create a neutral space to lead discussions to help clarify programme objectives and means. In other words, planning and evidence are not about effectiveness. They are about reducing ambiguity about a new agenda.

Seventh and finally, periphery agents delivering community arts projects are likely to use their own version of the objectives of the programme to guide their interaction with the community, with limited or no incentives to modify them and simultaneously take into account the specific needs of the community.

The 500-year Fund under the institutional lens
A brief look at cultural policy in Panama

For most of the 20th Century, Latin American cultural policy favoured programmes to build a homogeneous national identity, mainly by consolidating the hegemony of Spanish or Portuguese as the official language among the hundreds that are spoken in the region. It also tended to promote Hispanic culture and ideology, investing in initiatives to increase the demand for products judged of high artistic quality, the publication of cultural magazines using obtuse academic language (García Canclini, 1995; Mantecón, 2008; Sánchez et al., 2016), and engaging in audience development or formation. Some of these dynamics were present in Panama, a Central American country of 4.2 million people. Despite having the second highest GDP per capita in Latin America at $16,630 (IMF, 2019), Panama has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the region as measured by the Gini Index at 49.9 (see World Bank, 2019). It is also a multicultural country, where more than 9 languages are spoken. However, most of the programmed artistic activity is in Spanish and takes place in the extended metropolitan area of Panama City, where more than 70% of the country's economic activity takes place. Like the rest of Latin America, efforts to promote cultural activities came hand in hand with explicit and implicit policies to sublimate cultural diversity.

However, for the past twenty years, cultural policy in this region has experienced a gentle revolution orchestrated primarily by intergovernmental bodies such as UNESCO and by the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB). Using ambiguous definitions for culture and the cultural and creative sector, these organisations have been making the case that a stronger cultural public sector should command up to 1% of the government budget as it can help increase productivity by igniting innovation. This Orange Economy, as the IDB describes this sector, is posited as a tool that can significantly contribute to solving the complex and persistent social and economic inequalities that are persistent throughout the region (IDB, 2017). Whilst these international organisations recognise that there is a need for workers in this sector to acquire the skills to assess, design and implement social and economic programmes, they have nonetheless been providing sizable funding and assistance for cultural organisations that wish to deliver programmes with social and economic objectives. Although the evidence of the impact of these programmes in Latin America is still mostly absent, the official narrative from these international organisations is that it is not possible to discuss social and economic development without the involvement of the cultural sector.

In Panama, this influence translated most recently into the creation of a new Ministry of Culture in 2019, replacing a non-departmental public body with a similar remit but focused primarily on promoting nationalistic ideals. The Act that created this new Ministry is very clear about the new turn in cultural policy: this new institution is meant to serve as the fourth pillar of development and will contribute to the achievements of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Asamblea Nacional de

Panamá, 2019). In effect, this new body is seen as a culmination of more than ten years of attempts at refocusing cultural policy in Panama. In particular, from 2014 to 2019 the City of Panama launched and implemented its first ever Cultural Strategy. It included considerations about valuing Panamanian identity, history and traditions, but also mentioned the role of culture in job and income creation, following the Orange Economy agenda (Alcaldía de Panamá, 2016). Different from the role that local authorities play in countries such as England, the City of Panama was not translating central government cultural policy in order to sell it and implement it amongst its constituents. Instead, they were formally testing an international agenda on the role of culture in local development initiatives, with the hope of eventually using that process to inform the creation of the Ministry of Culture.

The 500-year Fund: Negotiating rules of the game

It is in this setting that the City of Panama announced the 500-year Fund for the cultural sector. Organisations and artists could for the first time in Panama apply to a competitive fund for up to $15,000 (£12,000) for projects that would pursue one of the following objectives: 1) improve quality of life for citizens of Panama City, 2) develop citizenship skills, 3) build an international reputation for Panama as a cultural hub, 4) register and disseminate the historic memory of neighbourhoods and the history of Panama City, and 5) reinforce the management and production capabilities of the arts and cultural sector. Only the second objective was fully consistent with the community arts approach that the Fund aimed to follow, and the first objective indirectly was so. Whilst objective five incorporated elements of management and productions capabilities, it did not explicitly require projects to consider issues such as pricing or generating a return. All projects were free to community members, other than the opportunity cost of their participation.

Despite the multiplicity of stated objectives, the Fund represented a major shift in the rules of the game of cultural programmes in Panama. Although some larger cultural organisations had experience applying to international funds and organisations, at the national level there were no formal processes or protocols to apply for funds of this type. A broad and simplistic flowchart of funding bids in Panama until recently would have included sending a short letter to the President of the country, First Lady, Ministers or members of Congress asking for support. Who received the funding and by how much depended primarily on political connections.

Anticipating a lack of trust in a new competitive funding process amongst members of the cultural sector, the City of Panama hired the management services of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In effect, the City transferred all the funding available for this fund to the UNDP, who was responsible for its administration and monitoring. This type of partnership between the public sector in Panama and the UNDP is not unique, as it is seen as a way to reduce bureaucracy in programme delivery, depoliticise decision-making processes, and increase transparency and long-term planning. What is relevant in this case is the willingness of the UNDP to work with the cultural sector in programmes with social and community objectives. Different from UNESCO, the UNDP has had a more tempered view on the impact the cultural sector can have on development. This is evidenced in the most recent set of sustainable development goals that, despite heavy lobbying, fails to include cultural indicators or tools. The Fund meant the opportunity for the cultural sector to come into contact with international experts in development and exchange views on approaches and instruments on the topic.

At the strategic level, the work was overseen by a Board created by the City of Panama to organise a wider programme of events, research and publications around the foundation of Panama City in 1519. The UNDP hired one of the authors of this paper to design the application and selection process. Similar to the person appointed to manage the overall work for the UNDP, the consultant had experience both in the cultural sector and in the social sciences. This was seen as an opportunity to have agents that could bridge the different interests, views and instruments that were shaping the programme. However, there was an explicit expectation from the core agents of the Fund that the application process had to follow a rational economic approach, with a theory of change framework. This assumed that these projects were going to be able to follow an administrative linear approach to project management where stated objectives remain intact, with the involvement of the community seen mostly as "taking part" and not as shaping the activities. Similarly, there was a keen interest in using input-output models to assess the economic impact of the programme, but this was dismissed early in the process due to funding constraints. The request to engage in economic impact analysis in a programme where participants were not required to generate additional income or that did not explicitly deal with structural or economic dynamics highlights how rational economic and administrative approaches add to the confusion of the delivery of programmes such as this one.

With the UNDP managing the process, most of the feedback and comments about the application form and the process were around the need to link the projects to results for the general community, and not necessarily to artistic outputs. This meant that the form asked applicants for a narrative focused on how citizens would benefit and how they would be involved in the implementation of the project. Applicants were expected to describe the community need, the resources, and instruments they would use to address them, and identify the expected outputs and outcomes. This highlights the conflict between having a programme with new agents and new ways of working that forced into the process linear administrative approaches to planning and implementation. One could argue that logic model frameworks could be used as a tool to guide a conversation about the role and rules for these new agents and to reflect on new ways of working. In this case, however, this tool was used to monitor whether loosely worded and at times conflicting objectives were being met and to approve payments.

As part of the process to design the application and selection process, a workshop with members of the strategic team of the programme (the City of Panama, the UNDP and the Strategic Board of the programme) was to take place to generate consensus about the Fund's objectives. Whilst several attempts were made to hold these workshops, it was eventually decided to ask the consultant to make a proposal of such objectives for their assessment. The first and only proposal reduced the objectives from 12 to 5 and was accepted without modifications via email. Those objectives (listed above) were rapidly incorporated into the application process, without clear definitions or boundaries.

A lot of attention was paid, however, to whether and how the very application form could serve as a barrier for cultural organisations to participate in the Fund. It was felt that complex forms could increase the transaction cost of applying, deterring smaller organisations and individual artists, and providing an advantage to larger more established organisations. As a result, the final form asked broad questions against the already broad objectives of the programme. This double ambiguity allowed later for flexibility of interpretation of the proposals received, increasing the power of the selection committee to decide who was in or out.

Another important shift in the rules of the game was the process of selecting the winning proposals. A committee of international and national experts in history, historic preservation, urban planning and community participation were hired to evaluate and make funding recommendations to the UNDP, the City of Panama and the Strategic Board. In both rounds, the recommendations of the selection committee were accepted by the core agents. This meant that the UNDP and the City of Panama gave this panel of international and local experts the final say on who would be allowed to be part of the programme. This implied reducing the role of political and personal criteria in deciding who to fund, other than the dynamics that are usually present in selection committees. More importantly, the mostly culture-focused narratives presented in the application were evaluated by agents with different understandings, interpretations and instruments to address the stated objectives. A missed opportunity was not bringing the applicants or chosen projects to receive detailed feedback from the committee members, in particular in the first round. This would have allowed for a stronger process of goals and instrument clarification before each project started using the insights and experience of experts in a variety of fields. Instead, a process of adequation of the chosen proposals took place in the second round with personnel from the UNDP. This also included a series of 3 knowledge exchange and evaluation workshops facilitated by one of the authors of this paper to fine tune the logic model of each project. In reality, the workshops served as an opportunity to reduce some ambiguity about what was meant by community participation and historic memory. It did not, however, include a review of proposed instruments for cultural participation of the chosen projects and considerations about their potential effectiveness or suitability. However, it was an opportunity to discuss with the chosen projects about the difference of views that existed between the applicants and the Fund, and that the selection process had a limited impact in reducing this gap.

In broad terms, many of them were planning to implement an artistic project the way they had always done it, without much consideration to the stated objectives of the Fund or having a clear understanding of the composition and needs of the communities. These discussions did not go any farther than sending a message that some project designs and planned implementation needed to be refined. Any additional step to fine tune them was not taken as it would have come into conflict with very tight budget schedules and rules.

The 500-year Fund: Project implementation

In this section, we focus on projects from the second round of the Fund, for personal and technical reasons. Firstly, one of the authors was hired to evaluate this round, providing us valuable observations about the way these projects were delivered.2 Secondly, the artists and cultural managers received additional training and support to align their activities more closely to the objectives of the Fund, as explained previously. This allows us to reflect on artistic practices with some common background and understanding about how to deliver this type of projects.

We have chosen four of the twelve projects from the second round. These projects focused in registering and disseminating the historic memory of neighbourhoods and developing citizenship skills through community participation. These projects faced complex challenges around negotiating not only their relational space with the core members of the Fund, but also with members of the community. They present a variety of results in terms of clarity of their objectives, use of instruments and perceived level of success or failure. Additionally, they all occurred in neighbourhoods that are perceived to be facing social and economic vulnerabilities.

The projects are described below. We are naming the projects with letters (A, B, C and D) as a way of focusing the reflection and analysis not on specific organisations but on their characteristics and the behaviours we captured in our evaluation processes:

1) Project A was led by one of the largest contemporary dance sociocultural organisations in Panama. This project combined intergenerational story-telling about a neighbourhood and contemporary dance. Primary school students (ages 6 to 12) interviewed older members of the community about the history of the neighbourhood. These stories were then used to inspire a contemporary dance piece interpreted by the young interviewers.

2) Project B was led by a sociocultural movie production company. This project aimed at producing a short film with young members of the community.

3) Project C was led by one of the most influential visual artists of Panama. It involved a cultural festival where young participants (ages 3 to 12) selected their favourite short stories among several that were narrated to them. After this, a group of visual artists used the selected stories as inspirations for painting murals on the walls of buildings in the community.

4) Project D was designed and implemented by a theatre production company. It involved workshops to raise awareness about the environmental challenges faced by the community. They worked with 7 primary schools. It included the presentation of a play, with professional actors, inspired by the interaction with these schools.

Projects B and C took place in Curundú, a neighbourhood close to the business, financial and tourist centre of the City, but characterised by high levels of economic vulnerability, racial discrimination and violence. Projects A and D took place in several areas with diverse socio-economic profiles.

Natural networkers

The team behind Projects A and B had experience in community arts approaches and combining instruments from the fields of the arts, psychology and social work. Both identified, since their application process, that a crucial step in the implementation of the project would be to find and engage the "natural networkers" of the community. These are community members who belong to political parties, social movement groups or religious leaders. They are not necessarily experts in a particular social, cultural or economic subject, but have deep knowledge of the community, its actors and dynamics. They are perceived by the community as effective filters of newcomers. They grant access to new agents and help them develop trust with the rest of the community. Different from the other two projects, Projects A and B had an extensive list of contacts outside the cultural sector to identify these natural networkers, and took full advantage of this resource.

In the case of Project A, every participant interviewed two months after the project finished as part of the evaluation was enthusiastic about their experiences. Several community members mentioned an improvement in the self-esteem of children in terms of their ethnic identity. Older people reported that they felt they had made a contribution to the community with the project, and that there had been some improvement in intergenerational communication in the community. Additionally, several of the children discovered a passion for contemporary dance and have been involved in other similar programmes ever since. This improvement in trust and social cohesion, as well as the participation in social organisations, is known to have positive effects on social participation. This in turn is a requirement for improving the quality of democracies (Levine & Molina, 2007; Putnam, 2010).

This project is the result of more than a decade of trial and error, negotiation and systematisation of a social cultural programme that the implementing organisation has done in different communities in the City of Panama. For the organisation, the application process should have requested more information from applicants about the instruments they would use, in particular in relation to community engagement and collaboration in interdisciplinary settings. During the knowledge exchange and evaluation workshops, Project A served as an example of how to implement activities with the community. However, it was felt by many of the other Fund recipients that they did not have the resources, funding or know-how to replicate the best practice they were learning from this group.

Finally, this was the first project to start and complete their plan of activities. A key element in ensuring a timely delivery was finding a balance between having clear objectives and boundaries for their projects, and having processes to incorporate feedback from participants, without changing the nature of what they were aiming to accomplish. This contrasts with Project B, where a founding principle of community arts – changing plans to respond to the vision and interests of participants – was implemented to its full extent by changing significantly their original stated objectives.

Prioritising community needs

The manager of Project B had more than forty years of experience leading community participation projects. At the various workshops held with the Fund's participants, she repeatedly asked for stronger guidance on the definition of community participation, analysis of cases studies to identify what works and what does not, and for a set of guidelines of what to avoid when involving community members in art projects. However, any attempts by one of the authors of this paper at addressing her valid concerns were confronted with the doubts and questions from most of the participants who were struggling with bringing together their individual artistic or cultural practices and the complex social dynamics they were encountering in their communities. In that respect, the workshops failed to provide in-depth support about how to undertake these projects, focusing instead on the why. Participants received consistent information explaining that the Fund was not focused on artistic outputs, but social outcomes.

For this organisation, the goal was to arrive at any film-related activity that emerged not necessarily from a set of predefined objectives from the Fund, but from developing trust, and from dealing with conflict amongst community members. In other words, they were willing to forgo the stated artistic objectives if that meant an opportunity to establish stronger ties amongst community members. Similarly, this was the only project that undertook a serious needs assessment of the community where they worked. In the administrative and rational eyes of funders, this came at a high cost. Different from Project A, that found a balance between delivering the project on time and receiving feedback from the community, Project B finished four months behind schedule, and it is likely that the Fund did not cover the full cost of the time and expertise of the team delivering the project.

The results were in line with a community arts approach. The community participants increased their organisational and community participation capabilities. This became apparent at a final evaluation workshop facilitated by the authors. Project B's manager attended the workshop with 4 community participants who had taken over the project and had become their de facto managers. The young participants (ages 18 to 20) had received informal training as cultural managers in this process and had appropriated the project to the point that they modified it substantially. At the workshop, they were active participants in conversations about goal settings and how to identify natural networkers in this type of project.

The project was also able to strengthen the feeling of community belonging among members through the production of a video documentary by the participants. They developed the storyboard, led the casting process, shot and edited a video that

addressed subjects such as the socioeconomic and racial discrimination they face, the levels of violence in their community and their perception of the factors that are affecting the social fabric of the place where they live. The participants also led the process of installing a permanent tent on the garden area of the building to show cinema to residents for free.

Clash of ideologies

Project C started with a strong artistic focus. As they implemented the project, they began to engage symbolically with the social focus of the Fund. The organisation applied and participated in the workshops using strong artistic narratives but showing a limited understanding of the needs of the community in which they were planning to work. Without a needs assessment, they decided to work primarily with the youngest members of their chosen community and organise a cultural festival. This event was promoted without many resources and with some involvement from community members. In fact, at the start of the programme their links with relevant adults of the community were used primarily to explain what was going to be done in the community, without identifying and directly engaging natural networkers.

At the Festival, the artists read short stories to young children that covered topics such as solidarity, peace, collaboration, democracy, respect for the environment, plurality and different ethnic identities. However, the methodology used by the artists to select those stories remained unclear. At the end of the Festival, they asked the participants to select their favourite stories. From that list, the artists chose the stories that would be used to paint murals on the buildings where these young people lived.

The limited relationship with key actors of the neighbourhood had some negative consequences in the final stage of the project. During the painting process, there was limited participation of the community: the artists conceived and painted the murals practically on their own assuming that notifying the building's resident of what was going on would be enough. But it was not. Two murals caused tensions with some members of the community. In particular, a mural with the image of a horse was seen by a religious leader from the area as contrary to the beliefs of the community as it conveyed diabolical messages. The leader demanded for the mural to be removed immediately. This caught the attention of the media, as the Fund was associated with the City of Panama, whose Mayor was running for President at the time. When interviewed by the media about the mural and the concerns of the community, the artists did not directly address the issue. Instead, they choose to position the murals as instruments that would help the economic development of the neighbourhood. This artistic work would improve the aesthetics of the community, they explained. This in turn would attract tourists to the area, who would buy in local restaurants and shops (Aponte, 2019). Other artists expressed support for the project, and described the concerns of the community as superficial, radical and as an attempt to curtail artistic freedom (Armuelles, 2019).

The incident could be seen as an example of a symbolic appropriation of the Orange Economy narrative, which came to reinforce rather simplistic and discriminative views on the area. For instance, imbedded in this approach to community participation is the idea that there is a community deficit that artists can solve, without considering the strong social exclusion and racist structures operating around them. Project C illustrates how artists could use their own version of the objectives of the programme to guide their work with the community. With limited or no incentives to modify their artistic practices, they failed to integrate the specific needs of the community into the project and continued using the instruments with which they were familiar.

After a few days of intense media coverage, the artists decided to paint over the two murals.

Clash of symbolic implementations

When Project D started implementing their work in 7 primary schools, they faced a lack of enthusiasm from the schools' principals. The project managers assumed that this was the result of trying to implement a cultural project that was not part of the schools' curriculum nor requested by the schools. They soon understood that these schools were experiencing their own symbolic implementation of new policies of increasing the level of cultural activities at schools during the weekends, and a programme to extend the contact hours with students by 60% from Monday to Friday through sports and cultural activities. The local and central government had announced these policies were being implemented, but in reality, they were in the process of being negotiated as pilots with the different participating schools. As the schools were negotiating their own rules of the game, plan of activities, instruments, incentives scheme and funding with the Ministry of Education and the City of Panama, getting involved in Project D was a commitment that they were not ready to make yet. The project managers had limited power or leverage to

negotiate with these schools and in many cases had to bring in officers from the City of Panama to help them. After a lengthy process, there was limited time, incentives or resources to integrate the new educational policies with the existing curriculum and the objectives of the Fund. As a result, the schools became mere performance spaces where an external project took place.

Despite this situation, the artists decided to continue their original goal of reaching a wide range of schools. They acknowledged that they did not have the resources to bring fully on-board all key agents but felt that the best way to persuade them of the value of their artistic work and ensure future access was by giving them the opportunity to experience the work. Once access was granted, the project managers were mainly interested in delivering the project. Different from Project B, they dealt with the short term, one-off nature of the 500-year Fund by arriving at an immediate interpretation of the needs of the different communities and proposing similar implementation approaches regardless of its potential effectiveness, in particular writing, rehearsing and performing a play. Whilst Project B was prepared to forgo the artistic output and emphasise processes to model community engagement among young people, Project D felt that delivering the project as stated in their logic model and meeting the contract deadlines were the priority, using instruments with which they were familiar.

Whilst all the planned activities took place in all the schools, with some delays, their impact was not clear. Indeed, it became apparent during the evaluation interviews that most of the participants had very few memories of the project six months after it happened. For example, none of the participants interviewed remembered what the project was about and in one school no one remembered the project had happened at all. The dispersion of the project in seven different schools diluted the impact of the project, as the team of Project D was not able to spend a significant amount of time in each one of them, which would probably have been avoidable with more time and resources to establish stronger links with teachers and principals.

These four projects could be seen as cases of failure and success in terms of the explicit stated objectives and timely delivery. They were agent-driven and had to negotiate complex relational spaces to meet the not so clear expectations of the funder. Their experiences suggest that it would have been more appropriate to design and evaluate the Fund in terms of whether and how it allowed entrance of new agents in the relational space where issues around community participation, citizenship skills and preserving the historic memory are addressed. Similarly, the design and the evaluation should have focused on ensuring the right tools were used to help participants reduce ambiguity about goals and instruments. Instead, the design and evaluation process mainly focused on administrative tasks that assumed that a linear approach to identifying needs to reaching outcomes could ever be obtained in situations like this.

Conclusion

The 500-year Fund reflects the complex dynamics of formalising cultural policy making and implementing it in Panama. In response to international trends and agendas, nationalistic approaches to cultural policy and individual artistic practices are giving space to collaborative, multicultural, objective-driven, socially engaged practices. For the past ten years, this has involved rethinking some artistic practices in terms of attendance, participation and social impact.

Our experiences as designers and evaluators of the programme and the experiences we captured from participants suggest that the funding and selection process for both rounds of the Fund failed to provide a precise framework for applicants to adjust their narratives and approaches in order to better respond to the social and community objectives of the programme. The very ambiguity of the objectives and the pressure to reduce the transaction costs of completing an application meant that applicants could continue to use old norms and practices to enter this new world. However, it was this ambiguity that allowed for a wide range of artists and cultural workers to enter this space. Once in this new relational space, the Fund helped increase understanding amongst different agents engaged in cultural activities of a new set of potential goals and instruments through learning by doing and meetings and workshops to reflect on their practice.

On the other hand, there was less alignment between the participants and agents outside the cultural sector. There was limited time, funding and opportunities for artists to meet individually and as groups with experts in community engagement, developing citizenship skills, historians and others to reflect on processes and instruments, and explore new ways of working. Similarly, for community participation projects, the application process and funding should have included time and resources for projects to engage in processes to identify natural networkers in each community and undertake a collaborative needs

assessment before starting the project. In effect, our theoretical framework assumed that more could have been accomplished in terms of clarifying goals and identifying effective instruments. Instead, most of the added value of the Fund was to open doors to artists in new fields, potentially increasing the size of the labour market for artists in Panama.

There is no doubt that more could have been done to provide clearer parameters about the type of projects that could receive funding and what type of processes and instruments they needed to use to address the objectives of the programme, in particular how to involve community members. One key implication for designers and evaluators is the need to be more open and transparent about the symbolic nature of these types of programmes. It is understandable that in the context of limited funding and the predominance of an administrative monitoring and evaluation culture that the nature of these programmes should be hidden or not fully disclosed. This comes, however, only to add transaction costs to the already onerous process of reducing goal ambiguity, testing new tools and working collaboratively with professionals from other sectors. Emphasis should be given to using planning and evaluation tools to collectively imagine new ways of doing things and their potential outcomes. This means that the core agents need to recognise value and promote the symbolic and experimental nature of cultural programmes of this type, instead of pretending to pursue rational economic and linear administrative approaches to programme management. This would reduce the likelihood of using monitoring and evaluation to provide perverse incentives for projects to act as if they were delivering agreed outputs, even if that means that participants do not always feel part of the project or understand what is going on or why.

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Endnotes

1   The two reports in Spanish and data that resulted from these projects are available online at
https://www.academia.edu/39949068/Primer_estudio_de_participaci%C3%B3n_y_consumo_cultural_y_
art%C3%ADstico_Ciudad_de_Panam%C3%A1_2019

2   The projects were evaluated using mixed methods including direct observation, semi structured interviews and content analysis. An evaluation framework was developed with key questions around the objectives of the Fund to explore issues of process and results in the short term, emphasising differences between community and participatory art (Matarasso, 2019). As a way of addressing the diversity of the projects, the methodology was finalised and adapted in collaboration with the project managers. Every project was evaluated through at least two different tools: direct observation in different stages of the process (Projects A, B and C), semi-structured interviews with participants (Projects A, B and D) and content analysis of the cultural outputs used or produced in the project (Projects B, C and D). Our positions in this process intersected many spaces. We were helping articulate or make explicit the different understandings, tools and processes of the programme and the old and new values that were behind it. Our agreement to participate in the design and evaluation in some way positions us as at least interested in projects where democratic values such as equality and tolerance guide cultural practices (as opposed to pursuing aesthetic values, for instance). The methodology of the evaluation was operationalised in a transparent way in order to reduce some of our inherent biases as part of the team that designed the programme. This included engaging in a number of workshops where part of the reflections of good and not so good practice focused on the very design and evaluation process. Grids were conceived for the evaluation of every project, including both qualitative and quantitative items and all the collected data were treated regardless of our own normative ideals. In this sense, we could speak of an axiological neutrality supplemented by the views of Putnam and Sen quoted by Daoust (2015), for whom «*it is possible to imagine objective concepts intermingling descriptive and normative content*».