11. Documentation

Aidan Celeste
Raphael Vella

Planning for Documentation

Documentation is an essential component of any artistic venture today, particularly ephemeral processes like workshops, because it provides evidence of actions that were conducted, people who participated at different stages, materials that were employed in the production process, duration and times of day of different activities, and a good deal more. Documents of artworks and collaborations produced by the creative team itself as well as external sources (for example, newspaper stories) help future researchers and others to make sense of current artistic productions.

The various qualities and possibilities of documentation need to be planned ahead, to en-sure that different creative phases, artistic aspects and people's perspectives are saved for posterity once projects are terminated. Naturally, you need to keep in mind that documentation is not the thing itself, and often cannot be considered as a valid 'substitute' for the real event or object. Moreover, documentation does not only preserve representations of material artefacts or texts but should ideally also refer back to the actual practices of documentation themselves. In other words, the question 'who is documenting materials and processes?' is at least as significant as 'what is being documented?' The information that is selected, gathered or preserved, relies to some extent, on the persons taking photographs, the people being interviewed, or those who are taking notes in the background. While objects have physical qualities that might be there for all to see (colours, dimensions, media, and so on), their interpretation and presentation in a different medium (for example, a text that analyses an artwork, a photograph that represents a dancer's performance) is influenced by structural, cultural, personal, representational and other criteria. Artists and researchers may have their own reasons for documenting processes in specific ways, but you might also consider participants' photographs or those taken by members of an audience as significant, additional material that your research might benefit from. In the documentation of some forms of art, like performance and new media, the audience's experience of a piece is often overlooked. In order to fill this gap in experiential documentation, researchers and artists ought to consider underlining the experience of the general audience, creating a varied documentation of how the artworks appeared (Muller, 2008, p. 3). Such experiential material helps to contextualise objects and processes and highlights the possibility that artists' and researchers' intentions and plans do not always correlate with those of an audience.

The documentation of participatory projects needs to take collaborative aspects into account. Audio-visual files can capture these collaborative aspects; for instance, interviews can be held with different collaborators. Ideally, the documentation of participatory arts projects will trace the development of a project from its inception, representing different stages as they develop. This requires long term support and commitment. Documentation in video is also bulky in terms of storage, so it might help to identify early on the most essential aspects of a project. Some questions to consider are;

• Which kind of document best represents the artist's intentions?

• Which documents exemplify researchers' goals and data most effectively?

• Are material processes visible in photographs or videos taken during workshops or in the studio?

• Are participatory practices also visible?

• Can a work's dimensions and format be properly gauged in photographs?

• Is the broader cultural, natural or urban context evident in the documentation?
• Has the right resolution been used for this document's (online or printing) purposes?

• Does the length of the video convey enough information about the project?

• Can I collect photographic evidence from others who were present during an event? How do their photographs differ from those of the artist or researcher?

schemes. Including documents that help policymakers better visualise the impact of the arts on individual participants and communities can help to strengthen policies focusing on social welfare rather than populist principles. Supported by photographic and other types of documents, policies can articulate more effectively a school's, museum's or other institution's commitment towards the promotion of the arts and towards a more demonstrable participation in cultural activities. When planning for documentation in relation to policy-making, artists would benefit from reflecting about the following questions:

• How can documentation become a catalyst for real change?

• Will the planned documentation inspire the confidence of different stakeholders?

• Will documentation communicate the project's vision clearly to policymakers?

• Which kinds of documents would be able to help policymakers identify priorities in this specific town or environment?

• Will documentation indicate future creative and research possibilities to residents, other stakeholders and members of the art community?

Documentation, partnerships and policy

The documentation of an artistic project reflects that project's philosophy and mission. Visible outcomes provide potential partners in other projects, granting agencies and policymakers concrete evidence of successful strategies and other facets of good practice. Documentation produced by artists and researchers can also become part of independent or civic art databases that can be invaluable resources for cultural agencies, NGOs, businesses and policymakers. Well-planned documentation of artistic projects can facilitate the development of new models of artistic production as well as new funding

Basic references for project documentation

These four pieces of information create a robust reference project documentation:

• Creator
• Title
• Date
• General Description of Object

These four pieces of information are aligned for every file about the same project in an archive. They are useful to connect items which are distributed across different ranges, be these an array in the records of an archive, a collection, a library, or otherwise. This

alignment functions as a common point of reference and, essentially, is used to make it easier to find information about the same project across different items and their specific location. Thus, a project can be recorded as:

Jordan Wolfson. Coloured Sculpture. 2016. Installation in the South Tank at Tate Modern 03 May to 31 August 2018.

Digital media has inherited the same pieces of information from archival practice. In order to sift through any type of document and its content, archives depend on a Finding Aid. This template holds these four pieces of information together, such that a user is given a quick reference to what kind of content is available and where to find it. In traditional archives, this information is split into a layered hierarchy which, firstly, refers to an accumulation of material, described as a Collection or Fonds; secondly, a range of files which are comparable and share a common association, i.e. described as a Series; thirdly, a File which is used to hold multiple documents under the same Finding Aid and the four pieces of information listed here.

Following the Dublin Core Metadata Initiative, this alignment of tags was streamlined for digitisation in archives across the world. Here is a combination of tags for a single point of reference of multiple items in a file.

• **Creator -** Write the Name and Surname of the Lead Author(s) (if necessary, use semicolon for additional authors)

• **Title -** Write the full title of the project by the lead author (if necessary, use semicolon)

• **Date -** Write the date of its original presentation (format date by yyyymmdd)

• **General description -** Write about the object in the context of a presentation (avoid repetition and be precise)

If documentation includes audiovisual material, having versions of it in different versions will allow the project to be presented easily;

• **A Low-Quality File -** This can be used for quick previews, such as a thumbnail in a list among other files

• **An Online-Quality File -** This can be used as a mezzanine file to share on personal devices and online platforms. It is also used for formal presentations, general access and reuse, such as exhibitions and festivals.

• **A High-Quality File -** This can be used as preservation master, and ideally is locked in storage for safekeeping.

A usable online copy of a video can reach up to 1080p, and be available in MP4, H.264, MOV, or a WMV at 1920x1080. These requirements can change depending on systematic constraints, such as the internet connection, the platform running your media, or a project's collaborators. If participants do not have access to a device which can provide the minimum requirements for an online copy, a set of

still images can be used and combined with an interview to describe the same project.

The copyright notices needed for documentation can vary by jurisdiction, however generally, the fields marked below are necessary. A differentiation should be made between the rights holder (for example, the artist), the owner of the object (such as a collector or a production company), and the owner or producer of the object's reproduction (for example, the photographer).

On the other hand, an Alternative Copyleft Notice allows for levels of reuse and remix, such that any user is allowed to copy, distribute, and modify it under the Free Art License. Such an approach allows for an open and free sharing of material.

REFERENCES

Muller, L. (2008). *Towards an oral history of new media art*. Daniel Langlois Foundation. *www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page. php?NumPage=2096*

CONCLUSION

Raphael Vella

Evidence of the important roles that participatory arts research may play in a variety of applied social contexts, ranging from work with ethnic groups, urban communities, mental health settings, schools and many others is present in a broad range of literature. Whilst benefiting from such literature and other specific examples of good practice in the field of the arts, this toolkit has a more generic goal – that of bridging the more academic disciplines of qualitative and quantitative research with the day-to-day practices of artists and other stakeholders engaged in collaborative productions and processes. The two areas are neither mutually exclusive, nor do they exist in opposition to each other, and we hope that this toolkit goes some way in showing that they can be part of a fruitful dialogue. Arts-based methods of research are increasingly mixing creative and reflexive processes generated by artists with qualitative and other methods that usually carry a stronger association with the social sciences (Sullivan 2005).

Yet challenges exist in most arts projects that attempt to bring together the needs and agendas of different cultural institutions, NGOs, university departments, artistic practitioners, community members, gatekeepers, and so on. The toolkit does not aim to iron out differences or disagreements; rather, it discusses issues related to recruitment, participatory strategies, methodologies, education, documentation and other relevant areas from various perspectives, including online realities that have become more dominant than ever in present times. While the toolkit does offer practical suggestions for those researchers and artists who venture to work in naturalistic and other settings, it often presents information in the form of questions or points to reflect on.

One question that artists and researchers working with participants certainly need to reflect on is related to a balance of artistic impact, civic engagement and quantifiable outcomes that are expected in participatory arts projects of this sort. While the arts can certainly have a profound impact on community life, researchers need to explore ways of shedding light on specific strategies and processes that work better in different contexts. However, research can only clarify such situations if it is supported by rigorous artistic practitioners who engage others in critical thinking processes by asking difficult, innovative and, occasionally, confrontational questions. We hope that this toolkit helps to contextualise artistic work within wider political processes that can affect and restrict social life, but that can also be transformed.

REFERENCES

Sullivan, G. (2005). *Art practice as research: Inquiry in the visual arts*. Sage.

CONTRIBUTORS

Aidan Celeste is an artist with skills in research and production for interdisciplinary practice. This practice began through work on the V2_Lab's (nl) Data in the 21st Century in 2015, and is now extended to socially engaged artistic practices on the Maltese islands, including FUSE led by Elyse Tonna and the Valletta Design Cluster (VCA), and AMASS by at the University of Malta.

Isabelle Gatt is Senior lecturer in Drama Education at the Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education and also lectures in Creativity and Arts Education at the Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Faculty of Education, University of Malta. Isabelle is also a theatre practitioner working on theatre community projects in schools, rehab centres and with marginalised communities in Malta and in Italy.

Margerita Pulè is an artist, curator and cultural manager, with a Master's Degree in Fine Arts. She is founder and director of Unfinished Art Space, an independent and nomadic space showing contemporary art in Malta, and a founder member of Magna Żmien, a movement for the digitisation of sound and image home collections.

Milosh Raykov is an Associate Professor in the Department of Education Studies at the University of Malta. He teaches postgraduate and undergraduate courses in sociology and research methods in education. He is involved in studies of early school leaving, lifelong learning, wellbeing and quality of work, and the outcomes of students' involvement in paid work and unpaid work including voluntary work and extracurricular community service-learning.

Melanie Sarantou is a senior researcher at the University of Lapland, Finland, investigating how arts and narrative practices impact on marginalised women in communities in Namibia, Lapland, Russia and Australia. Her current research focuses on the role of arts in societies that exist on the margin of Europe in the European Commission-funded Horizon 2020 project titled 'Acting on the Margins: Arts as Social Sculpture'.

Tang Tang is an Associate Professor at the School of Design, University of Leeds, UK. Tang has a BEng and an MSc in Industrial Design and a PhD in Design at Loughborough University. Her recent research focuses on design for behaviour change, understanding how design can be used to create healthy, sustainable user behaviour and effective cross-cultural communication and collaboration.

Raphael Vella is an Associate Professor in Art Education at the Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education, Faculty of Education, University of Malta, where he coordinates postgraduate degrees in art education and social practice arts and critical education. He has published widely on art education and contemporary art, and is also a practising visual artist and curator. In 2017, he co-curated the Malta Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

Paul Wilson is a Lecturer in Graphic Design at the School of Design, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures, University of Leeds. Much of his work orbits ideas and ideals of utopianism found in manifestations of the utopian action in both community and place, and made concrete via language and typography.

Karsten Xuereb researches and teaches cultural policy and relations in Europe and the Mediterranean. He is a member of the scientific committees of Brokering Intercultural Exchange (https://managingculture.net) and The Phoenicians' Cultural Route of the Council of Europe (http://fenici.net/en), the latter on behalf of the Maltese cultural association Inizjamed (https://www.inizjamed.org). His writing and videos are accessible at https://culturalpolicy.blog.