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ASC summer intensive workshop, Vancouver, photo by Kim Gilker



Rencontres/Encounters project, Montreal, photo by David Ward

STATE of the ART: A Report on Art for Social Change (ASC) in Canada

Introduction

Across Canada and around the world, artists are working with diverse communities to create positive social change through processes of participatory art making. Since 2013, the **ASC! Project**, a five-year, national research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), has been working to better understand how these practices are evolving in Canada, particularly in the areas of evaluation, teaching and learning, and partnerships. This interim update is designed for public, non-academic audiences and is intended to provide a snapshot of some of our findings gleaned from the first two and a half years of our research.

Art for Social Change: Definition and Context

A variety of terms are used to describe this diverse field, each with its own nuanced goals and practices. These names include: art for social change, socially-engaged art, community arts, animation culturelle, community cultural development, cultural mediation, social arts, and participatory arts. In addition, the practices of arts education, creative arts therapies, Popular Education, and creative leadership processes can be closely related to these forms.

In the context of the ASC! Project and this report, **we define art for social change (ASC) as art that is created collectively by groups of people (who may not self-identify as artists) about what matters to them, with this process facilitated by an artist or group of artists.** Designed to engage heads, hearts, and hands to create dialogue and positive change, ASC is rooted in furthering social, environmental, and political justice and is a form of cultural democracy.

Despite rapid growth in this field in recent decades, there has been little research focused specifically on community-engaged practices, as opposed to the broader arts and culture sector. Data presented in this interim report emerges from multiple sources. Seven ASC! Project field studies, including in visual arts, dance, theatre, video and social circus, have explored a range of topics: with seniors and the general public in Vancouver; with street-involved youth in Montreal and in four other Quebec locations; immigrants in Montreal; people living with Parkinson's in Calgary; senior ASC artists across Canada; and youth who have cognitive disabilities in Lethbridge. We have reviewed reports on the broader arts and culture sector, and conducted more than 100 interviews on a wide range of ASC-related issues with representatives from ASC organizations and major funding bodies, as well as artists who have made major contributions to this field of practice over the course of the last thirty years. We have conducted arts-infused dialogue sessions across the country (called Chataquas), each involving 15-30 participants. Our scans, interviews, and other activities have led us to identify 173 organizations that are working specifically within ASC in Canada, and we continue to find additional organizations and emerging initiatives. Data, stories and perspectives from these and other ASC! Project activities are currently being collated and analyzed and will be available in text and video forms in a new e-book, in academic and non-academic publications, and on a new website at icasc.ca (launching in late spring 2016).

Art for Social Change in Canada Today: A Diverse Practice with a Long History

ASC is not a new field in Canada. Of the 173 organizations we identified, 46 have been active for more than 20 years. At the other end of the spectrum, we identified more than 20 organizations that have been created since 2010, which highlights how rapidly interest in ASC practices is growing. In addition, we are anecdotally aware of many ASC artists and organizations that have yet to formalize their operations or establish an online presence.

ASC organizations serve people of all ages in a wide variety of settings. Research undertaken by ArtBridges found that, across Canada, there has been particular growth in work with youth, seniors, LGBTQ communities, people living with disabilities, intercultural groups and immigrant populations, and within First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) communities (See Figure 1).

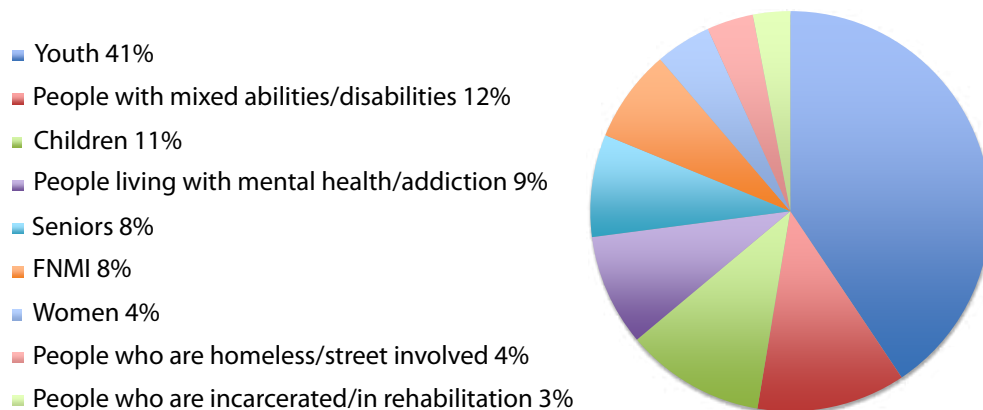


Figure 1. Populations that ASC organizations work with based on interviews and the mission statements of 173 Canadian ASC organizations

Organizations are using arts-based processes to address complex issues, working for positive change at micro (personal/intra-psychic), meso (group/community) and macro (policy/systems change) levels.

In recent years, relatively newer art forms, such as urban arts (e.g., hip hop and graffiti), media/digital arts, and social circus have joined more traditional art forms, such as performance arts (dance, theatre, music, puppetry), visual arts, film/video, and storytelling. We also see more work that reflects the cultural diversity of Canadians. In addition, as the work increasingly takes place at the intersections between communities, the field has seen new innovations. For instance, krip hop brings together hip hop and critical perspectives on ableism, and Indigenous communities have explored hip hop as a form of empowerment, cultural expression and the re-imagining of traditional arts. ASC artist practitioners are increasingly working with multidisciplinary approaches, thus nurturing expression and dialogue through the integration of different “languages” and ways of knowing. Because of the nature of the field, ethical considerations permeate all aspects of the work. Care for the well-being of all who are involved – artists, program participants, students, researchers, ASC organizations, partner organizations, etc. – is of central concern. Well-being includes considerations of safety, respect, reciprocity, and much more. As the field of ASC grows, and as ASC work increasingly

becomes a subject of formal research (both of which are good things!), it is essential that all involved approach their ASC activities with ethical considerations in mind. (Read our recent publication, *Ethics in Community-University-Artist Partnered Research: Tensions, Contradictions and Gaps Identified in an 'Arts for Social Change' Project*, in the *Journal of Academic Ethics*.)



Unlimited project, Lethbridge, photo by Jaime Vedres

As ASC practices gain increasing attention, appropriation of language and practice is inevitable. We believe it is critical to advocate for artists and art creation to remain at the centre of the work, and for the use of these methodologies to further social and environmental justice.

Geographic Scan

ASC work is growing in communities across Canada. A scan of active and established organizations shows that the work is particularly thriving in Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia.

The Prairie Provinces have long and rich histories of ASC practices, particularly in Indigenous and immigrant communities and in labour rights agendas. We see rapid growth and development of existing and new programs across the North. Similarly, the Atlantic Provinces, which have a strong history of community-devised theatre practices such as the Mummers, are seeing new activity, particularly within youth and LGBTQ communities.

In rural and remote communities, distance can increase project costs and reduce access to resources and mentorship for the development of ASC work. Nonetheless, a 2009 report commissioned by the Creative City Network of Canada argues that “the extent of cultural and creative work in rural communities tends to be under-counted, under-recognized, and often under-valued.” Indeed, a report by Hill Strategies Research found that, in 2001, 17% of Canadian artists lived in municipalities with fewer than 50,000 residents and that there are “significant concentrations of artists in small and rural municipalities across Canada.” In Canada’s “most artistic community,” Cape Dorset, Nunavut, for example, almost a quarter of its labour force works in the arts. A growing network of rural ASC organizations and new connections between rural and urban organizations is helping to increase knowledge exchange and reduce costs through partnerships.

Partnerships Scan

Partnerships between ASC organizations and change organizations in other areas are often key to the success of ASC work. They provide connections with community members or specific groups of participants, access to resources such as space and funding, and leverage to increase the social change impact of the work. We have found that ASC organizations partner with a wide range of

other types of organizations (see Figure 2), from those whose primary focus is a local community (community centres, libraries, not-for-profit social services organizations, etc.) to large mainstream arts organizations (museums, ballet companies, etc.). In addition, ASC organizations often partner with other ASC organizations to achieve shared goals. As the field expands, non-arts organizations are increasingly interested in the benefits participatory art forms can bring to their work. The arts are

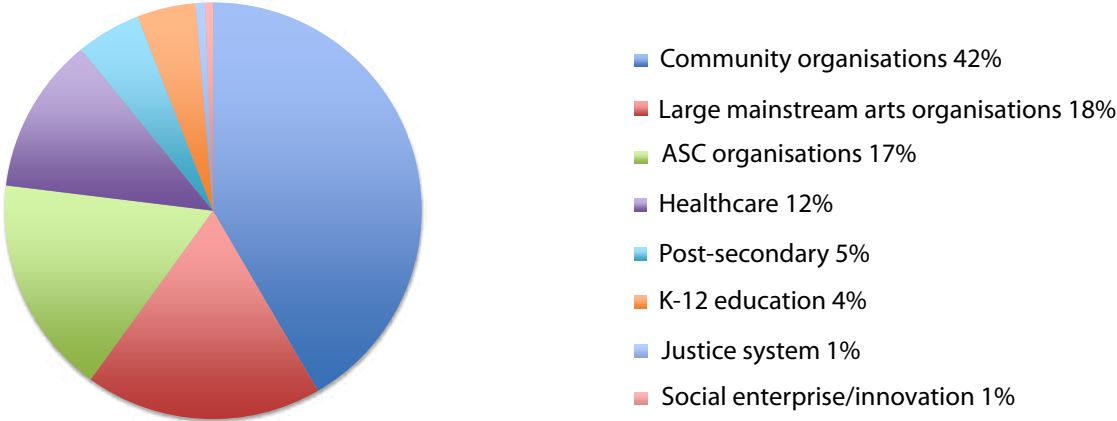


Figure 2. Percentage of Canadian ASC organizations with at least one partner in the listed category

integrated into justice systems (e.g., with incarcerated individuals and in conflict mediation); many forms of work in health (e.g., to address addiction and mental health concerns); in medical training and for public health education; in social justice agendas, including in prisons; in a range of social innovation projects; and in community and economic development processes. For those unfamiliar with the breadth of these activities, [Blueprint for Life](#), [Workman Arts](#), the [Narrative Medicine Program at Columbia University](#), as well as the community-based research studies of our [ASC! Project team members](#), provide a view into the diversity of the work. Also, developers and business improvement associations are increasingly supporting art-making, such as murals and festivals, as a form of place-making and community building. Further, art for social change work contributes to the development of policy in areas such as youth aging out of care, seniors’ well-being and food justice. These examples are just a few of the many doorways into this exciting work.

Across the field, ASC practitioners emphasize the value of long-term partnerships and projects both as crucial to deepening impact and as an ethical imperative in community-engaged work. There is a growing body of research on the impacts of arts-based methods in diverse contexts, but without a central place to look, it is easy to miss new findings. As part of the ASC! Project, we are creating a website that will serve as a central location to help ASC practitioners and others interested in this work find relevant information.

Our own research into partnerships in ASC work – including interviews with artists, organizations and funders from across the country – has identified multiple approaches, strategies, and values that practitioners see as important to the development and sustainability of diverse forms of partnerships with peer organizations and across sectors. A majority of participants identified the development of relationships and trust as key to effective partnerships and advocated for in-depth planning time

to clarify issues such as power differentials, shared goals, agreement on processes, schedules and budget control, and models for analysis and evaluation. Key issues include often unpredictable and rapid policy change, frequent staff turnover in both arts organizations and partner organizations, burnout of administrators, and inconsistency and volatility of resources. For example, new staff is often not familiar with – and may not even value – ASC projects developed by their predecessors, leading to delays and even cancellation of projects. Although ASC organizations often use a range of formal and informal agreements with partners, written agreements and frequent check-ins can help to smooth such transitions and help to sustain projects.

Many ASC organizations tell us that they cannot depend on having affordable, ongoing and adequate studio and administrative space in which to do their work, especially in urban centres that are experiencing rising property costs. Artists and administrators describe how, especially recently, space issues are holding back their growth, limiting their ability to meet rising community interest in their work. Co-location models, such as those developed by [Artscape](#), can offer ASC organizations studio and office spaces, as well as opportunities for networking and the creation of new relationships and partnerships. In addition, institutions such as libraries and parks boards are integrating ASC activities into their own programs and facilities.

Funding Scan

Not surprisingly, securing ongoing and predictable financial resources is a primary challenge for ASC organizations. We have found that there has been significant growth in the field without commensurate increases in funding levels. Although interest and demand for ASC work is steadily increasing, in some parts of the country there have been decreases in stable, core funding. This corresponds with an increased emphasis on collaborative projects, and, especially, on private sector funding and sponsorships. For many organizations, especially those that are small-scale, this can be very challenging.

Many ASC organizations become adept at “creating something out of nothing” through share economies, crowd funding, and the work of volunteers. However, adaptation to the effects of fluctuating funding and financial constraints can prevent many organizations from hiring sufficient staff to respond to public interest in their offerings. Artists and administrative staff often work in contract positions without access to benefits; burnout and high staff turnover are serious concerns. We have repeatedly heard that there is increased competition for funding, yet many organizations have also spoken to us about the difficulty of finding and retaining expert fundraisers. The increased competition has encouraged the creation of collaborative models in some situations, but it can also lead to reduced knowledge exchange as organizations are forced to compete with one another for limited resources.

Although some organizations have multi-year funding that provides dedicated resources for ongoing core operations, most ASC organizations rely on unpredictable project-based or other short-term



Dance and Parkinson's project, Calgary, photo by Lisa Campkin

funding to support both their project work and their ongoing administrative needs. According to our sample of Canadian ASC organizations, the top three categories of funders for ASC organizations are private sector sponsors/partners (34.6%), private foundations (19.2%), and provincial government funders (15.2%). (See Figure 3)

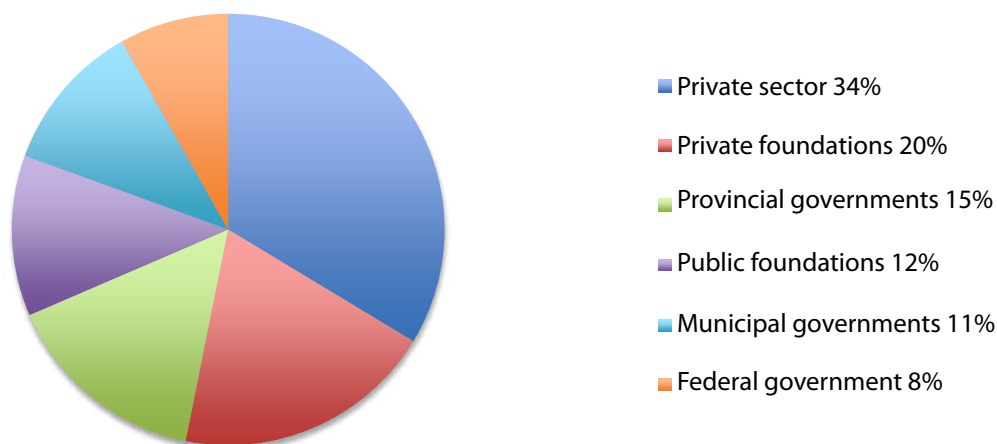


Figure 3. Percentage of ASC funding by funder type

According to a [2009/10 report by Hill Strategies](#), government per capita cultural spending varies significantly across the provinces. In 2009-2010, the national average for all levels of government was \$301. Quebec (\$389), PEI (\$351), Saskatchewan (\$315), and Newfoundland and Labrador (\$308) all received amounts above the national average. British Columbia received the lowest per capita spending (\$206).

Across Canada, at all levels of government and private sector support, we see increasing recognition of community-engaged arts, but the availability and development of targeted granting programs is presently inconsistent and limited. We see the development and delivery of new funding policies, particularly from municipal public and private sector sources, but the actual level of allocations for work in ASC remains critically low. Non-arts funders, such as in education, health and social enterprise, are beginning to understand the relevance of ASC to their agendas, an encouraging development. Looking beyond direct government funding, the [Canada Council for the Arts](#) has done pioneering work in subsidizing community-based arts and, between 2010 and 2015, provided more than \$4 million in funding to individuals and organizations for community collaborations.

We see a fundamental need for dialogue involving ASC practitioners and all levels of relevant departments of government (arts and culture, health, education, justice, environment, etc.), as well as with private foundations, NGOs, and the corporate sector, about the development of funding policies and models that specifically address the needs of ASC and the communities that ASC organization serve. (We also advocate for the development of a national arts policy!)

Volunteers & Short Term Employment

Staffing is inherently connected to funding and deserves explicit consideration. Many ASC



Social Circus project, Montreal, photo by Jen Spiegel

organizations do not have resources to support sufficient paid, continuing staff to meet the demands for their programs. Across the field, organizations rely heavily on volunteers, interns, trainees, and short-term employees. Volunteers serve on planning committees and help with promotion, tech support, administration, and project facilitation, often keeping organizations afloat during gaps in funding. The diverse talents, experiences, and professional expertise of volunteers can certainly help to create deeper community connections, resulting in broader participation in and ownership of projects; however, too much reliance on volunteers and short-term employees can put an organization at risk.

Recruiting, training and managing volunteers and a perpetual stream of new short-term employees takes time and other resources that could otherwise be spent on program delivery.

A 2015 report by Hill Strategies found that, “among the 326,300 visual and performing arts graduates who were in the labour force in May of 2011, 11% worked as artists. Another 20% worked in other occupations within the broad category of arts, culture, recreation, or sports.” Of those arts graduates not working in an arts-related field, 36% worked in fields such as business/finance, management, education, law and social services, and community services. This suggests that there are many people already in the workforce who are qualified, by virtue of their arts education and their management/community services experience, to fill long-term staff roles in ASC organizations, but without adequate secure funding, ASC organizations are unlikely to be able to capitalize on this.

Building Dialogue within the Field

We are finding that there is a profound need for, and interest in, increased opportunities for dialogue within the ASC field itself. Throughout our research and from virtually every corner of Canada, there have been calls for more direct opportunities for knowledge exchange, for building awareness of the work, and for the development of networks. The ASC! Chataquas and other dialogue sessions that we convened across Canada have served as early steps in a much larger agenda for increased connectivity. Recent initiatives, such as Jumblies Theatre’s “Train of Thought” (connected Indigenous and settler artists with communities across Canada) and the three annual Power of the Arts Forums convened in 2013 to 2015 (focused on youth-engaged activities), also provide models for connection and information sharing.



Chataqua dialogue, Vancouver, photo by Kim Gilker

We have found strong support for dialogue between large mainstream and smaller grassroots organizations. Such dialogue may serve to encourage the inclusion of multiple perspectives about the work itself, while informing the creation of funding policies that help to support everyone in the field.



Chataqua dialogue, Vancouver, photo by Kim Gilker

Exchange among scholars is increasing, fueled in part by more open acceptance of the legitimacy of research in the field of ASC and support for it by research funding bodies such as SSHRC and CIHR (and, on a larger scale, organizations such as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund). However, as is true for most emerging fields, in academic settings, research in ASC often does not have the status accorded more established fields. Even within arts departments, the types of art done in ASC work can be considered of lower status than more traditional approaches to art. Encouragingly, the body of literature documenting the various activities, impacts, and challenges faced, on one hand,

by large mainstream organizations and networks (e.g., Cirque du Soleil's Cirque du Monde social circus network) and, on the other hand, by community-based organizations and networks (e.g., the Arts Health Network and the Arts Network for Children and Youth) is growing and helping to link academic scholarship with community knowledge and expertise.

We have noted a lack of communication between the many vibrant ASC organizations in Quebec and those in the rest of the country. Preliminary research indicates a relatively high degree of exchange across ASC organizations within Quebec, but much less contact between Quebec and the rest of Canada. Quebec ASC organizations benefit from municipal and provincial arts policies that focus on engagement with the arts, such as the action philosophy of "cultural mediation" (developed and implemented in the early 2000s), as well as historically higher per capita levels of support for the arts, compared to other provinces. These differences in working context, along with the challenges of language (e.g., finding funding to ensure materials are available in both official languages), mean that there is work to do to increase communication between Quebec ASC organizations and those in the rest of Canada.

In the fall of 2017, the ASC! Project will host a gathering of artists, scholars, ASC organizations, policy makers and others that work in related change agendas, such as the British Council, Social Innovation Generation and Ashoka Canada. A key goal of this gathering is to help build the relationships that will lead to further linkages across the academic and community perspectives in ASC.

Increasing Public Awareness of the Field

Public awareness of ASC work is growing; however, a tendency toward an inward focus, the lack of resources for promotion and outreach, and the relative isolation of ASC organizations from each other have limited the field's ability to raise public awareness. The internet and social media provide

effective platforms for knowledge exchange and promotion of the field, inspiring more Canadians to get involved by participating in, partnering with, or developing new projects. In a 2013 study by [Asking Canadians](#), Canadians with an interest in arts and culture reported that social media has:

- Exposed them to new artists or arts or cultural organizations (55%);
- Increased their interest in attending an event, through posts by the public (48%);
- Led them to attend an arts or cultural event (39%); and
- Increased their interest in an artist or arts or cultural organization (32%).

These figures suggest that effective branding and communication through promotional materials, websites, and communication strategies that use a variety of social media, increasingly impact how organizations are viewed by potential partners, funders, and their communities. Our sector can learn much from communications strategies developed by others in social change, social innovation and other activist sectors. For this reason, the ASC!

Project has ensured that websites and social media are central to our public communication strategies (visit our sites at [art-for-social-change.ca](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)).

Teaching and Learning Scan

As the field grows, there is an increasing need for the development of skills and knowledge in facilitation, ethics and safety, project development, intercultural sensitivity, evaluation and impact assessment, relevant theories (such as theories of change), and administrative tasks such as grant writing, budgeting, marketing, and communications. Professional development and academic certification opportunities in ASC, including community-based training programs and post-secondary certificate, diploma, and degree programs, have increased over the past decade. These programs, however, can require face-to-face participation and are usually based in urban centres, making them challenging for practitioners in rural settings to access.



Creative Publics project, Vancouver, photo by Kim Gilker

Our team undertook an online environmental scan in 2014 to map training opportunities for ASC practitioners and facilitators. Specifically, we sought programs that are located in Canada and currently operational, that are course-based and include some “practical” components (e.g., on-the-job training), that integrate arts methods with change or community development curricula, and that are distinct from arts-based therapy/arts education models. This preliminary scan provides a snapshot of ASC-related training and certification programs in Canada. It was surprisingly challenging to locate this information (we are continuing to add to our lists), and this highlights the need for better documentation and distribution of information on existing and emerging programs.

So far, we have identified 12 full-time, post-secondary programs and 13 community-based training programs. These programs are scattered across the country, meaning that many ASC practitioners, often even those who live in urban centres, are unable to access them without travelling far from home. Undergraduate programs and courses include Concordia’s Theatre and Development program

and the Community Arts certificate program at York University's Faculty of the Environment, as well as related courses in social practice arts offered by the Ontario College of Art and Design University and Emily Carr University. We also note the development of graduate programs at the University of Victoria (MA & PhD in Applied Theatre) and Simon Fraser University (Master of Education in Arts for Social Change), an exciting step for the field. In the community context, four programs stand out as examples of well-established offerings that have provided training for ASC practitioners over many years: [Vancouver's Theatre for Living's Summer Intensive programs](#), [ACI Manitoba's comprehensive Artists in Community program](#), and the program offerings of [Jumblies Theatre](#) and [Vancouver Moving Theatre](#).



*Chataqua dialogue, Winnipeg, hosted by ACI Manitoba
photo by Carol Finlay*

Our Teaching and Learning team is researching the potential for grassroots, mobile ASC Institutes that connect to existing networks that would train and potentially provide certification in regions and communities where access is currently limited. Development of online pedagogical resources, such as videos and interactive mentorship platforms, will also address the increasing need for access to learning opportunities in ASC in Canada.

Mentorship and experiential learning have been overwhelmingly identified as effective models for teaching and learning in the field, which is not surprising given that ASC work

is deeply relational and contextual. Several ASC organizations and programs have built mentorship programs into their work. Mentorship, however, can be time- and HR-intensive, and many smaller grassroots organizations lack the capacity to offer paid or even unpaid internships without stretching their limited resources. Dedicated granting programs to support internships would allow for more emerging artists to learn from senior practitioners in the field. In post-secondary programs that seek to integrate experiential learning, semester-based schedules and variable policies regarding community engagement can create challenges for learners.

Beyond mapping existing training opportunities and developing educational resources, we are also seeking to better understand the underlying approaches to development and delivery of ASC programs, including the diversity of teaching methods and program structures. We have conducted interviews with leading pedagogues from community and academic contexts, and are engaged in an in-depth examination of the teaching and learning that is being used across the various studies in the overall ASC! Project. This analysis will integrate sometimes-unexamined pedagogical and change theories and goals, allowing consideration of the dynamic tensions and emerging opportunities for training in this field. Rigorous examination of pedagogical theory will contribute to the development of the high quality, academically sound programming that is necessary to nurture the next generation of facilitators and researchers. Our findings will become part of an e-book that will provide a variety of educational resources for artists, scholars and organizations including short educational videos that focus on specific areas of our research.

Evaluation in ASC Work

Although the word *evaluation* often brings to mind the need to report to external funders and partners to meet their requirements, most ASC practitioners already explicitly embrace some form of evaluation in their work. For example, reflective practice, informal and dialogic check-in and debriefing processes, as well as processes of arts-creation (i.e., artistic expression of experience and impact) are all used as forms of evaluation. Evaluation also takes the form of formal qualitative and/or quantitative evaluation processes, such as structured or semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys that can provide valuable information and understandings. Most ASC organizations use a combination of methods. ASC organizations may also collect other forms of data, such as program attendance records, statistics on staff and volunteer hours, participant testimonies and stories, and photos and video, all of which can inform evaluations of program effectiveness and community impact.

Funding infrastructure in both the public and private sectors is undergoing change – sometimes radical change. This can have a profound impact as organizations are compelled to re-tool how they represent their work. In particular, there is increasing pressure for evidence-based approaches and an emphasis on return on investment (ROI), both of which may not be applicable to or even useful for analysis of the highly iterative, place-based nature of ASC work. While capacity-building may support ASC organizations to develop language that represents their work within new frameworks, we advocate for the acceptance of frameworks that include multifaceted approaches for analysis, understanding, and evaluation of this work.

To this end, the ASC! Project is currently developing an interactive, web-based evaluation tool designed to assist artists, participants, ASC organizations, their partners and funders to define and implement forms of evaluation for internal and external use, based on their real practices and analysis needs. The tool provides scenarios that draw on a range of fundamental theories of change which are key to guiding the evaluative methodologies and techniques employed. The tool also provides ready access to a myriad of existing evaluative surveys, guidance on how to collect and analyze data, tips on disseminating results to various audiences, and links to numerous published articles that utilize various techniques. The beta version of this tool has already been shared with many ASC practitioners in Canada and abroad and will continue to be informed by our own fieldwork as we include further scenarios and examples. This interactive tool will be available in our e-book and on our website at icasc.ca.

Research in ASC

In recent years, the various facets of ASC have increasingly become recognized, not only as effective and often transformative practices, but also as worthy of and in need of serious study. As ASC matures as a field, it becomes critical to develop more theoretically-motivated research on both the principles and practices that underpin the work. A small body of Canadian research currently hails from a diverse range of fields, including art criticism, social work, education, cultural studies, and epidemiology, to name only a few. Indeed, the nature of ASC work is such that even when research is firmly grounded in a particular discipline, it must necessarily be in dialogue with the literature and insights from other sectors and disciplines in order to understand the complex interplay between art

practices and psycho-social and/or socio-cultural transformation. More often than not, we are finding that a transdisciplinary approach is needed.

We are currently in the midst of surveying the range of theoretical underpinnings present in the ASC practices themselves, the epistemological approaches dominant amongst those on our research team and broader partnership network, as well as in the field as a whole. Our aim is to clearly articulate the dominant social, political, cultural and epistemological tensions present within the field, present amongst practitioners, researchers, and practitioner-researchers, as well as points of convergence, in the hope that this may facilitate smoother knowledge translation and collaboration in the future.

Internationally, the field of ASC is increasingly becoming recognized as worthy of, and indeed in need of, serious study. In the US and UK, several



Rencontres/Encounters project, Montreal, photo by David Ward

new books on ASC have been published within the last five years (e.g., *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*, by Jackson, 2011; *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, by Kester, 2011; and *Anthropology, Theatre, and Development: The Transformative Potential of Performance*, Flynn & Tinius, Eds., 2015). A new journal, *Field: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism*, was launched in 2015.

Despite the advancement of ASC work in multiple research settings, there is still considerable work to do to ensure research institutions come to value the

wide variety of aesthetic modalities that can be used to create and share new knowledge and for these modalities to be valued as legitimate forms of knowledge creation. The academy also needs to understand and value the time and resources required to create socially-engaged art as research (e.g., when using approaches such as performative inquiry). ASC work delivers a high degree of value by working in very diverse environments that are dynamic, unpredictable and, as a consequence, require interdisciplinary responses. Yet, the creative outcomes (the art!) born from these environments often remain largely unexamined and un-interrogated as legitimate subjects of research, thus limiting the scope and depth of inquiry and analysis when examined only through conventional research methods.

With our interdisciplinary team of scholars and practitioners, we are well aware of the complexities in navigating this challenging terrain and are striving to raise awareness of the different ways of knowing, as well as of the ethical concerns raised by ASC practices. In addition to providing clarity on the breadth of methods used in creating and sharing ASC research, our work has brought to light important gaps that extend well beyond our present scope and capacity. These include a critical need for longitudinal studies on impact and for research on policy creation expressly designed with/for community-engaged arts.

Next Steps

Our priorities include completion of the ASC! research project. This two-year process includes: consolidation, reflection and analysis of completed field studies and other research initiatives; new writing for multiple audiences; and the creation of educational and professional resources.

We plan to share the fruits of our work in dialogue with others, including young artists and scholars, at a national gathering Nov. 4 and 5, 2017. This event will also allow us to engage in dialogue with some of the other fields that differ from ASC, yet draw on ASC language and methods. Increasing communication and understanding across the many different perspectives within our field, and with others in related change sectors, will be important to the future health of all.

We see that art for social change in Canada has a bright future and look forward to contributing to the creativity, sustainability and depth of the ASC field across the country.

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