Social Artists and Inclusive Cultural Policy

Soziale Künstler und inklusive Kulturpolitik

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Abstract

This case study provides a critical review of SAFEDI, an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded Engagement Fellowship that sought to influence the making of policy relating to access, inclusion and diversity in arts and cultural settings and organisations. During six artist commissions, social artists worked with participants who self-identify as marginalised and with organisations interested in developing more inclusive cultural policies. Central to the SAFEDI fellowship was to see if artistic processes and outputs might become the method and mean by which to translate lived experiences of exclusion, and participants' visions for better access, to cultural partners and researchers. Evidence collected by an independent evaluator found that all short-term projected outcomes, and a number of medium- and long- term impacts were met by the project end, with the social art practice approach enabling cultural partner leaders to reflect anew on their structures, provisions, intentions, practices and formal policies in relation to their workforce and the audiences they seek to reach.

Diese Fallstudie bietet einen kritischen Überblick über SAFEDI, ein vom Arts and Humanities Research Council finanziertes Engagement-Stipendium, das darauf abzielte, die Gestaltung der Politik in Bezug auf Zugang, Integration und Vielfalt in Kunst- und Kultureinrichtungen und -organisationen zu beeinflussen. Im Rahmen von sechs Künstleraufträgen arbeiteten 'Soziale Künstler' mit Teilnehmern, die sich selbst als marginalisiert bezeichnen, und mit Organisationen, die an der Entwicklung einer integrativeren Kulturpolitik interessiert sind. Ein zentrales Anliegen des SAFEDI-Stipendiums war es herauszufinden, ob künstlerische Prozesse und Ergebnisse zu einer Methode und einem Mittel werden können, mit dem gelebte Ausgrenzungserfahrungen und die Visionen der Teilnehmer für einen besseren Zugang zu Kulturpartnern und Forschern vermittelt werden können. Die von einem unabhängigen Gutachter gesammelten Nachweise ergaben, dass alle geplanten kurzfristigen Ergebnisse und eine Reihe mittel- und langfristiger Auswirkungen bis zum Ende des Projekts erreicht wurden, wobei der Ansatz der sozialen Kunstpraxis die Verantwortlichen der Kulturpartner in die Lage versetzte, ihre Strukturen, Bestimmungen, Absichten, Praktiken und formellen Strategien in Bezug auf ihre Mitarbeiter und das Publikum, das sie erreichen wollen, neu zu überdenken.

Keywords

Diversity/Diversität, Cultural Policy/Kulturpolitik, Artists/Künstler, Community Arts/gemeinschaftliche Kunst, Social Change/sozialer Wandel

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Introduction

This case study presents a reflexive account of Social Artists for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (SAFEDI). SAFEDI was one of 10 pilot equality, diversity and inclusion Engagement Fellowships (EDIEF) funded across the UK by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The fellowships were advertised in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, and the increased profile of the Black Lives Matter movement (BLACK-BURN/COUTINHO/SUVISTE 2022: 84).

The SAFEDI fellowship provided for the commissioning of six social artists across six different UK regions, to make artwork with participants who self-identify as marginalised, whether due to socio-economic background, race, disability, sex, gender, or the intersections of these factors (EDIEF 2022). The commissions invited applicant artists to initiate new partnerships (or further develop existing ones) with cultural organisations wanting to reflect on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). EDI is a conceptual framework often applied in the workplace and in public access situations that purports to promote the fair treatment and full participation of all people.

The fellowship project responded to research showing that a) in England, publicly-funded arts do badly in reaching diverse audiences (ACE 2020; BROWN 2020); b) the creative industries are failing to make use of diverse talent in the UK (CAREY 2020); and c) the cultural sector is rethinking its collections, attributions and audiences (ART FUND 2020) in response to Covid-19 and civil rights movements. SAFEDI drew on research by Ravetz and Wright (RAVETZ/WRIGHT 2015; 2020) to hypothesise that artists and participants' lived experiences of access—and obstacles to access—might, through partnerships with arts and cultural organisations, positively influence the latter's EDI-related policy positions. The focus of social artists on social relations and structures (RAVETZ/WRIGHT 2020) arguably help them to understand participants' and cultural workers' self-identifying lived experiences of exclusion. To what extent might social art produced by the commissioned artists and participants, with a focus on EDI, enhance arts and cultural organisations' critical reflections on policies and practices around access and obstacles to access? And how might such understanding influence alternative settlements (NAWARAT/MEDLEY 2018) for artists and participants, increasing equity, diversity and access to publicly funded arts and culture (ACE 2020)? This case study provides an overview of the six commissions, highlights some of the findings from the independent

evaluation report (FORT 2022b), and provides discussion of the outcomes, including the commissioned artists' critical responses to concepts of policy and EDI; the balance of autonomy to clarity of expectation in social art practice research; and the value to arts and cultural policy makers of a multi-sensory approach when reflecting on the impact of EDI policymaking on policy recipients.

Methodology and engagement plan

The AHRC's EDIEF funding call embodied a broadly linear model of how research achieves impact (BLACKBURN/COUTINHO/SUVISTE 2022). This sees research as a discrete activity, carried out by academic experts, that is then converted to impact through a public engagement programme (AHRC 2020). SAFEDI's design proposed a different and non-linear model that sees new insights, impact and engagement intertwining through an iterative, co-produced, knowledge exchange process. To support this non-linear model the project team composition needed to cross-cut academic and arts and cultural expertise, comprising a research fellow (Amanda Ravetz), a project lead artist (R.M. Sánchez-Camus), four mentee artist-researchers (Patrick Campbell, Cesar Cornejo, Anna Macdonald and Kai Syng Tan), a commissions co-ordinator (Daniela Liberati), two industry partners with proven expertise in social art and artists (Axis and Social Art Network) and an independent evaluator (Sally Fort). SAFEDI also adopted a social art practice research (ASHTON/BARRON/POTTINGER 2021) approach to its methodology. This regards art making as knowledge-producing and the role of art as the means "to reawaken our senses, allowing knowledge to grow from the inside of being in the unfolding of life" (INGOLD 2018: 129). The methodology was intended to, a) openly embrace unpredictability and the possibility of failure; b) give adequate time to negotiating across the team's often diverse, and sometimes conflicting, experiential, artistic and academic knowledge practices, and c) centre social artists as knowledge-producers, their insights growing from the midst of their practice with participants and partners, as a way "to shape the real physical world, […] not simply a device to stimulate the beholder's mental world" (GENN 2022: 406).

SAFEDI's engagement plan plotted a conceptual and practical framework for the project, with the tasks, timeline and milestones assigned to accomplish its ambitions and outcomes. The independent evaluator

used this plan to construct a theory of change against which the project's progress was evaluated and reported. Where the plan explained research aims, objectives and questions, and proposed impacts, outcomes and outputs, the theory of change articulated short, medium and long term outcomes and impacts against which the project's progress would be measured. In order to account for the why and the what of the project, the evaluator used an embedded methodology. They attended regular project team meetings, offered critical feedback to the project team, and carried out entry, mid and end point interviews with different representatives of the project: namely the project team, the commissioned social artists, a selection of their collaborating participants, and representatives of the partner arts and cultural organisations.

Overview of the six commissions

The six artists appointed to work on SAFEDI brought with them a rich array of practices, collaborating participants, topics of interest and cultural partners.

In presenting their commissions below we draw from the commissioned artists' websites, the independent evaluator's executive summary report (FORT 2022a) and full evaluation report (FORT 2022b), from presentations by the artists and partners given at different stages of the project, and from the Axis website that disseminated news about the project (AXIS 2020a).

enshrine SAFEDI. Lady Kitt, with co-artists Sarah Li, Sofia Barton and Dan Russell brought together North East based disabled people and staff at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead to investigate ways of making art centres, galleries and arts organisations more accessible (*Lady Kitt* 2022). Their focus was on how creative collaboration can be part of policy change. The artists and their collaborating participants produced an exhibition asking and offering some answers to the question: what stops us from seeing, feeling, hearing, knowing, reaching out?

The work strand "Access Obstacle Course" addressed the barriers disabled people face in accessing galleries and arts organisations, whilst the work strand "Access Recitations"—a series of written, sung, signed, mapped, drawn and danced artworks—offered some solutions and answers. The resulting artworks were digitised and combined to create an interactive online installation, shared publicly, but particularly focused on engaging

staff from cultural institutions and policy makers (ART MATTERS NOW 2022). The artworks revealed the artists' and collaborating participants' experiences of, and ideas about, what it is to be ignored; and presented the challenges of changing structures and behaviours which make reaching out seem hard. The works celebrated hopes for a more care-filled, accessible future, with the artists and collaborators reciting aloud their desire to make things different and better. With many different collaborators involved and informed by a number of in-depth conversations with staff at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, the commission proved to be a useful tool for those thinking about making art centres, galleries and art organisations more open, welcoming, accessible places for lots of different people. The independent evaluation for SAFEDI (FORT 2022b) judged this commission as highly successful in reaching the top layers of management of this national arts centre, something that is likely to result in some significant changes to policy.

JarSquad – Assemblies and Other Adventures. The JarSquad collective (JARSQUAD 2022) partnered with Nudge Community Builders (NUDGE COMMUNITY 2022) in whose building JarSquad have a base. Inspired by Nudge Community's existing good practice of inclusive development, JarSquad flipped the original SAFEDI brief so that rather than attempting to influence Nudge's policies, conversations with Nudge helped JarSquad to investigate and develop their *own* commitments to access, furthering the development of JarSquad as an independently registered organisation. To do this they led a number of assembly events in Plymouth with new community partners, welcoming new participants to JarSquad's solidarity economy by making food preserves with resources that would otherwise go to waste. Together, they set out to co-learn about food preservation as a living social art practice, gathering reflections on welcoming others into participation, and on how to facilitate well-held, co-learning spaces. They wanted to strengthen what they understood as embodied knowledge exchange in making and sharing food, resources and skills as a squad. On the Axis website (AXIS 2022b) they comment that "Our project brings people together through communal food-preservation. We put joy and connection in jars by gathering ingredients, sharing recipes and know-how, and making jams and preserves as a squad". The independent evaluator (FORT 2022b) underlined that the impact and insights for JarSquad included the latter's decision to move away from the term policy towards concepts of commitment, pledge, and explicit intention. Instead of fixing policies through internal-facing written documents, JarSquad determined to operate in a

permanent beta-type dialogue, which means continually gathering feedback from users so that power and ownership are regularly updated and shared through accessible forms of display.

Women's Art Activation System (WAAS) – The Milky Way. WAAS explored what it meant to have a child-raising network experiencing a cultural institution together (WAAS 2022). They wanted to see what institutions could do to move from merely including or accommodating those involved in child-raising to "embracing and celebrating them" (FORT 2022b: 57). WAAS contacted the National Gallery to ask if they would be partners for the SAFEDI commission and were invited to discuss their proposal with the organisation's Learning Team. The team were "keen to explore more about how the collection could support new family audiences" but "struggled to understand what to expect operationally" (FORT 2022b: 58). After discussions between WAAS and the Learning Team about what form the work might take and how it would engage an audience—for example as a live art installation in the gallery or as a research and development activity conducted behind closed doors—WAAS's social art practice eventually took the form of a game in which players were given a type of I-spy game searching out images of breastfeeding mothers in the gallery's collection.

The game was activated during normal National Gallery opening hours and involved collaborators from child rearing communities—including a doula, mothers, grandparents and women of child bearing age. Inspired by practices from institutional critique, museum design, guerrilla action and midwifery, the outcome was a playful, engaging and interactive performance-based exploration of gallery space from the perspective of people engaged in baby and child growth and caring. Engaging in the game brought in visitors new to the gallery, who joined in the conversation and explored the topic together.

The impacts reported by the evaluator included marginalised people feeling more valued and new audiences being reached. WAAS was invited into a new research and engagement network as result of the commission, speaking at an EDI conference at Manchester Art Gallery. The evaluator reported that the National Gallery are continuing their consultation with parents and wider family communities to identify the gallery's forward strategy whilst bringing curatorial and learning teams together more closely for future collaborations (FORT 2022b).

Shama Khanna – Queer Diasporic Futurity (QDF). Shama Khanna partnered with Not Nowhere Art Workers' Collective which supports new media practices, especially for artists who identify as Black or

People of Colour. Not Nowhere already have strong diversity and inclusion policies in place and in a comparable way to Nudge Community Builders' partnership with JarSquad, they understood their role to involve support for the artist in delivering the commission, rather than focusing on their own policy content. The proposal was to commission work from a selection of Queer, Trans, Intersex, Black People and People of Colour (QTIBPOC) artists and artist collectives for a new book publication, Queer Diasporic Futurity (QDF), edited and produced by Flatness, a community-led artistic platform curated and moderated by the commissioned artist Shama Khanna (FLATNESS 2022). Khanna's original proposal was to speculate and weave fiction into the contributors' lives, creating space to dream and plan beyond global crises affecting the collaborators' health, climate and rights to homeland.

QDF contains a collective call to restore loving connections to the body and to nature. The anthology makes visible a vital network of practices focused on sustainability, accessibility and futurity with contributions by: Rasheeqa Ahmad, Decolonising Economics, Adam Farah, Evan Ifekoya, Aditi Jaganathan, Shama Khanna, Nat Lall and Daniella Valz Gen. QDF reflects on the holistic conditions the book's contributors are creating in order to disassociate less from the exhaustion of everyday overstimulation and disappointments, and to begin to identify new, potentially transformative connections to build upon.

Impacts reported by the evaluator included that the partner organisation Not Nowhere Art Workers' Collective better understands its members and the issues they face; and that the issues addressed in the publication will continue to feed back into the partner's ongoing policy conversations with its members over time.

Lily Lavorato — Building Warmth. Artist *Lily Lavorato* (2022) worked with eleven artists and creatives living with disabilities and/or chronic illness, in Leeds. Supported by project assistant Carys Fieldson, and in partnership with East Street Arts, Lavorato used ideas around the human act of fire building to open up honest and safe discussions about what accessible and welcoming spaces look and feel like. Kits with fire making materials, instructions on how to build fire following woodcraft principles, together with four headline questions, were sent to those joining the conversation via three online sessions, with a final face to face event around a live fire. Confidential documentation of reflections and conversations were made by the artists so that an anonymous overview could be shared with the partner organisation and others. Lavorato gathered the ashes from the final fire to create the glaze for a large pot

she made and fired, which can be lent to other organisations as a reposito-
ry for responses to related issues.

The evaluation found that the commission increased partner East
Street Arts' awareness of ways to support artists with long term illnesses
and changed their thinking about commissioning artists. The partner in-
itiated a new contact with one of the other SAFEDI partners with a view
to co-founding a national consortium to explore how artists can inform
policy development.

Yuen Fong Ling – Human Memorial. The artist Yuen Fong Ling en-
gaged approximately 170 participants and collaborators, mostly peo-
ple of colour, and partnered with Sheffield City Council's Decolonising
Working Group. As someone who had already worked with the Decolo-
nising Working Group and made recommendations to Sheffield's Equal-
ity Race Commission in the wake of the events of Black Lives Matter and
the toppling of the Colson statue in Bristol in 2020, the aim of Ling's
SAFEDI proposal was to make these conversations and recommenda-
tions tangible and public. The resulting social artwork, *The Human
Memorial* (AXIS 2022b) centred around three performance workshops,
with invited performers, which explored the empty plinth with several
outcomes in mind: a) a mobile empty plinth structure that prompted
responses through re-enactment, recreation, and play; b) the bodies of
performers replacing the structures of the empty plinth; and c), alter-
native, non-permanent monuments and memorials presented in sites
across Sheffield.

Each workshop was documented, capturing conversations as they
happened during the workshops and accompanying interviews. The re-
cordings expressed the personal accounts of participants' experiences of
racism, the BLM movement, the monument and memorials debate, and
a vision of what might be a more inclusive future society. A resulting
film to be made by the artist with Picture Story Productions will reveal
what happens during the socially-engaged art production process. The
film will focus on construction and making through participation and
collective action. Through the representation of the participants' bodies,
experiences, and relationships to others in authority and in public spaces,
it will provide a counterpoint to conversations about undoing and dis-
mantling myths, colonial histories and ideologies.

The independent evaluation noted that the impact on the partner
organisation included a move away from their use of tried and tested
artists, towards an intention to remove existing bias in how artworks
are commissioned in the future, alongside the inclusion of early career

artists, and giving equal importance to the engagement element of art commissions as is currently given to art production. In terms of improving access to the Race Relations Commission report, the evaluator stated that local authority conversations had been made more accessible and inclusive through the SAFEDI commission and that the artist's work "created alternative ways to reach others and thus include a wider variety of voices" (FORT 2022b: 26).

Discussion

The commissioned artists worked with an array of partners, at different scales, responding to the unique conditions of their collaborating participants, their own practices and ongoing and shifting national pandemic restrictions. The degree of autonomy and flexibility afforded the commissions by the project plan highlighted a reciprocal need on the part of the artists for clarity and precision from the project team. On occasions it was difficult to provide this due to a combination of: the emergent character of the methodology employed; the scope of the project; and its largely virtual delivery due to the pandemic and the untested nature of the EDIEF pilot scheme (BLACKBURN/COUTINHO/SUVISTE 2022). The evaluation highlighted the importance, in future work, to explain— in advance—the administrative tasks required by the artists, provide a clear map of how the different teams and their roles fit together, and explain the degree and kinds of impact being asked for from the artists. Being clear and realistic about expectations was key:

> Impact and change can seem overwhelming asks in a small, short-term commission. However, 'influence', 'contribution towards' or 'part of' make it clear that the goals are achievable. (FORT 2022b: 32)

The project brief did not insist applicants have a partner organisation or participant collaborators already in place, so whilst some artists came with existing partners, others only began building partnerships after securing the commission. This fact was linked by the evaluator to the varying degrees and speeds of influence exerted on the partner organisations' policies across the different commissions:

> Where a relationship between artist and arts partner existed prior to this commission, policy change work could happen more quickly…The commissions that were the most successful were those where arts partners already recognised change was needed and had begun the process. (FORT 2022b: 26)

The report linked this variation in influence to the short timeframe of the Fellowship—one year excluding extensions eventually agreed due to the pandemic—and recommended that in future, funders invest in development grants

> so that new partners can spend time unpicking assumptions, asking questions and listening / learning, and building trust *before* creating plans for delivery. The output from such funding should be an action plan for delivery, rather than measures of delivery itself. (FORT 2022a: 10)

This finding also points to how, at an institutional level, change happens in varying degrees according to how far staff become involved in decision-making processes as well as their eligibility and capacity to be involved in systemic change.

The six commissions comprised a diverse set of social art practices, involving cookery, fire building, performance and filmmaking, installation and sound, digital media and book publication. Underlying this diversity lies a shared onto-epistemology of social art practice however, that privileges the relational holding and sharing of safe enough spaces, enabling conversations and insights through materials, somatic gestures, silences, movements, atmospheres, sensations and songs, and verbal and written speech. There is clear evidence in the evaluator's report that this multisensory and relational approach was successful in bringing the profile of excluded people and their voices to the attention of arts organisations (FORT 2022b). All of the short-term outcomes and some of the medium-, and long- term outcomes and impacts were met by the project's end (with only short-term outcomes expected at this stage), suggesting how the commissioned artists' lateral and sensually-vivid approaches enabled leaders within partner organisations to reflect in new ways on their organisations' structures, promises, provisions, intentions, practices and formal policies in relation to the people and groups they wished to reach.

The EDI concept was core to the scheme through which SAFEDI was funded. Given that the meaning of EDI differs in contexts as structurally and socio-politically different as the Human Relations departments of large institutions, and independent artists seeking to remove obstacles to audience access, it was essential that the SAFEDI project stay open to the contested uses of EDI terminology and concept. Academics have pointed to ways in which EDI has been historically controlled and misused by elite interests. Herring and Henderson for example argue that over the last forty years, the rhetoric of diversity in the U.S. has amounted to a backlash against affirmative action and that:

> neoliberal elites used diversity rhetoric to convey racial inclusion in language that was more politically palatable to Whites and to expand the politics and conversation about inclusion beyond concerns about race and inequality. (HERRING/HENDERSON 2015: 14)

Some SAFEDI-commissioned artists were especially sceptical about the EDI concept, one observing that "if a specific EDI policy is needed, the organisation will never be inclusive" (FORT 2022b: 28).

Policy was not an explicitly defined term at the outset of SAFEDI, but ongoing discussions across the project showed that it must be treated critically. Some of the commissioned artists considered policy an opaque and oppressive concept and this shaped their responses to the brief. JarSquad offered assiduous critique of the policy concept, proffering alternative framings such as commitment, pledge, and explicit intention. Shama Khanna moved attention away from policy content towards ethos, supported by the approach of their partner Not Nowhere, who at one of the SAFEDI events spoke of understanding everything they do as a form of protection for their members, rather than developing discrete policies through which to address EDI. By questioning the policy concept, the commissions, in different ways, each teased apart some of the assumptions embedded in the funder's call, provoking insightful conversations within the project about how arts and cultural policy is received, conceptualised and experienced by those for whom it has inequitable affects, impacts and consequences. The evaluator made a recommendation, as a consequence of these discussions, to:

> Use accessible language. The word policy was found to be synonymous with control or coercion among people who have been marginalised. Would commitment, intention or similar be more inclusive? (FORT 2022a: 11)

The methodology adopted by SAFEDI revealed the salience of social artists' nuanced, experiential, tangential approaches to policy, the gaps between policy ideals and realities and the impact of this on policy recipients, and the ability of social art practice to change this. Supporting the salience of SAFEDI's art-centred approach to policy change, is work carried out by the artist and policymaker, Stephen Bennett who has observed that

> policymaking is informed by evidence, yes, but also the values, emotions, hopes, fears, dreams, experiences, and so on, of policymakers. Most people would agree that art acts on such values, emotions, hopes and dreams. (BENNETT 2021a)

SAFEDI was judged by the evaluator to have influenced a number of the partner policymakers, supporting the argument that recitations, gatherings, installations, publications, fires and pots not only capture

the imaginations of those reflecting on their experiences of exclusion, but do something very similar for those with organisational policy responsibilities and commitments. As a result, three of the commissions were judged by the evaluator to have begun a significant reorientation towards what NAWARAT AND MEDLEY (2018) term new settlements, resulting from the successful mediation of competing discourses of different vested interests. In SAFEDI these vested interests included those of cultural agenda setters, social artists, and groups and communities with previously limited opportunities to debate or shape the cultural offer. Beyond influencing policy makers through affect and emotion, some of the commissions also generated new evidence directly relevant to organisational policy change. In one example, an EDI consultant had been appointed independently of the artist commission, to carry out an evaluation of the organisation's access policies and practices. Their report confirmed many of the same insights developed by the artists and collaborating participants that were enshrined within an artwork, with the more conventionally recognised methodologies of the consultant, in effect, triangulating the social art outputs.

Influencing policy through art is an emergent approach in the field of cultural policy. Stephen Bennett, one of the few persons currently and consistently working across art and policy at a macro level in the UK, has mapped twenty different artworks onto an art and policy matrix which he created from ongoing research (BENNETT 2021b). The matrix has the values Agenda Setting, Policy Formation, Legitimation, Implementation, Evaluation Policy Maintenance, Succession and Termination on its Y (vertical) axis and Cognitive Impact, Emotional Impact, Visions of Alternatives, Multisensory Experience, Dialogical Space and Agency on its X (horizonal) axis. The twenty artworks, together, span most of the nodes of the matrix but Bennett has suggested that it is:

> potentially harder to evidence the *impact* of artworks at the agenda setting stage compared with more practical stages of the cycle such as "policy formulation" and "implementation" (BENNETT 2021b).

At the same time he has noted the potential connection between agenda setting and the labile qualities of policy, quoting one of his interviewees saying that to have a bigger impact, an artwork "would need to land at a moment where policy is labile… there are moments when [policy] is more open or not" (BENNETT 2021b, ellipsis in original). Bennett points to artwork coming out of Black Lives Matter as a possible example of such a fertile moment, given that "much of it appears to evaluate current policy as inappropriate and sets the agenda for a new set of

anti-racist policies" (BENNETT 2021b). SAFEDI provides an example of an approach and methodology arriving at a labile moment, that in some commissions, influenced new policy agenda setting in the face of organisational policy that was increasingly recognised as inappropriate. Future research could fruitfully examine the capacity for the model initiated by SAFEDI to feed into new, inclusive policy agenda setting at regional and national levels.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the case study we hypothesised that social artists and people who self-identify as marginalised are well placed, in partnership with organisations interested in EDI, to influence arts and cultural policy and, as a consequence, to create positive change for those who currently find themselves excluded from fully accessing publicly funded culture and the visual arts. The SAFEDI project points strongly towards this being the case if, and when, certain circumstances and enabling conditions apply. Social artists' ways of feeling and thinking through multiple threads of relating, imagining, making, affecting and evidencing, can create safe enough spaces for artists' and participants' lived experiences of policy concepts, gaps and successes, to coalesce. In dialogue with partner organisations, the resulting outcomes—social artworks—can be persuasive advocates for, and at times embodiments of, policy. When artists and participants respond with honesty and imagination, at times questioning the very premise of policy concepts, researchers and funders can also find their assumptions exposed, leading to adjustments of their conceptual and practice models as a result.

In some cases, SAFEDI led to the promise of alternative settlements for people self-identifying as marginalised. A partner significantly changed their engagement practice; another changed their outlook on internal infrastructure; and yet another changed the prevailing view on accessible policy making. Two partners updated the ways they intend to commission artists in the future (FORT 2022a: 5). As suggested by Bennett (2021a; 2021b), art has the ability to speak to emotions and the imagination; SAFEDI showed that social art can also at times provide new evidence, albeit using a different methodological approach to those most policy makers are familiar with.

Social artists and social art are a good fit when it comes to influencing and shaping arts and cultural policy. Artists in SAFEDI who

self-identified as marginalised are themselves directly impacted by arts and cultural policies and their lived experiences can enhance their ability to collaborate with their participants. Arts and cultural organisations are familiar, too, with the social art practices by which they were being addressed through the work of SAFEDI.

The prior research which underpinned SAFEDI (RAVETZ/WRIGHT 2015; 2020) found that social artists were not being validated sufficiently by the mainstream artworld, and that relational and reciprocal forms of validation make the most sense to them and their practice. This case study offers its own form of validation to social artists and social art, evidencing these artists' especial skill in knowing how and why it is so important to address the lack of diversity in arts and cultural audiences and workforce. Social artists will require ongoing funding, validation and infrastructure support to continue and expand the collaborative work of cultural inclusion. In exchange they will be able to develop increasingly sophisticated ways of acting and thinking with participant collaborators and policy makers, resulting in affecting, well-evidenced interventions at various stages of the policy cycle. Not only would this achieve much needed progressive change for policy recipients, it would also ensure an enlivening and constructively evolving critique of cultural policy as it is currently practised and understood.

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