

Introduction

Benny Lim

Community Arts is the result of a collective artistic process (Trivic 2020). By collective, I do not mean a group of artists who collaborate to express their views. Rather, Community Arts is a collaborative effort between individuals from within a community, alongside artists who often are facilitators, to present the voice of the community (Skippington 2016; Goldbard 2006). Several scholars have pointed out that “community” has both spatial and social connotations. Communities could refer to groups of people from a specific geographical place, or who share common beliefs, traditions, social demographics, and values (Ardalan 2019; Rouf 2018; Glover 2016; Glisson et al 2012).

There is no clear consensus on what the “voice” of the communities represents. According to one school of thought, the voice should represent the underrepresented or marginalized, and Community Arts, as a form of creative activism, provides avenues for this voice to be heard (Prosserman 2020; Martusewicz et al 2014). To some, Community Arts is simply about a common group of people, regardless of their background, sharing an engaged and meaningful moment while creating art. Whichever school of thought one subscribes to, there is no denying that Community Arts is about community development and regeneration, education, communication, and cultural citizenship, among other things. Members of the communities develop both social and cultural capital through this collaborative and participatory artmaking process (Trivic 2020).

Community Arts has always been a key focus of the Master of Arts in Cultural Management (MACM) programme of the Division of Cultural Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. A core value of the MACM programme is its recognition of cultural management as more than just technical studies in management. It is a form of cultural mediation in which issues such as professional ethics, cultural rights, cultural identity, and the social dynamics of cultural representation are addressed. Cultural mediators act as gatekeepers, professionally defining, selecting, and presenting the arts, thereby exposing the general public and (specific) communities to the benefits of the arts.

I am particularly interested in how cultural mediators position themselves in relation to the various stakeholders in the arts and cultural sector. Traditional stakeholder theory focuses on the organization's efforts to create win-win situations for internal and external stakeholders. On the other hand, cultural mediators sometimes detach themselves from the organization and mediate between stakeholders. They make decisions and take actions in recognition of the fact that some stakeholders have a greater degree of dominance over others. Moreover, each new decision/action generates new issues, necessitating that cultural mediators constantly adjust their positions in their state of betweenness in response to the evolving power relationships between stakeholders.

As an academic programme, our main role is in knowledge transfer. To achieve this, Oscar (co-editor of this book) and I have developed a series of projects looking into the impacts of the arts on communities since 2014. These initiatives have laid a solid foundation for the future direction of our programme. Between 2014 and 2020, I organized an annual community-based arts festival that addressed a variety of Hong Kong's sociopolitical and cultural issues. Over the course of seven years, the festival has attracted over 100 local and international artists and academics, as well as numerous individuals from diverse communities. The festival has since been established as a non-profit arts organization in Hong Kong in January 2021 and is now managed by an alumna of our programme. I am heartened to learn that the festival will continue to explore community-based issues. I would also like to express my gratitude to our participants and partners, particularly the Centre for Cultural Community Development, which has been a partner of ours since the beginning.

Between 2014 and 2020, Oscar organized six editions of *Forum on Community Arts*, each of which offered a critical examination of the philosophical and ethical issues, key terms, and operational models of Community Arts in Hong Kong and beyond.

The six themes are as follows:

- For the Sake of the People (2014)
- Community Arts & Heritage Preservation (2016)
- Arts of the Capital Age (2017)
- Community Arts Keywords (2018)
- The Arts of Healing: Individuals, Communities & Society (2019)
- Art at a Difficult Time (2020)

Oscar retired from the university in August 2020 and has since continued to support the programme as an adjunct faculty. I felt it was time to bring the concept of knowledge transfer to the next level. Beginning 2021, the programme has embarked on a new project, *Art and Social Change*, with the goal of developing a framework for evaluating the social impact of the arts and documenting how this framework shapes emerging community art practices. Additionally, the annual *Forum on Community Arts* has also been renamed as the *Forum on Art and Social Change*. An Art and Social Change Network (ASCN) comprising local and international practitioners and scholars has also been established.

As the programme gears up for the new challenge, this book serves as a documentation of the main takeaways from the six editions of the *Forum of Community Arts*. It was also opportune to include papers with current topics that address one or more themes from the forum. This book includes 13 papers from scholars and practitioners.

Clara Cheung begins Chapter 1 with an overview of Hong Kong district councils' funding of community involvement projects and discusses the various engagement methods used by contemporary artists in three district councils. In Chapter 2, Isabella S. W. Yun employs cultural studies approaches to evaluate heritage revitalization projects in Hong Kong's Central District and examines the role and impact of community arts in heritage sites.

Samantha Tham and Samuel Wong offer recommendations in Chapter 3 to Chinese instrumental music practitioners and companies on how to engage Generation Z as new audiences through a mixed-methods study. In Chapter 4, Joseph Gonzales and Imran Syafiq Mohd. Affandi introduce ASK Company, a private dance company based in Kuala Lumpur, and discuss the company's current efforts, challenges, and future plans to promote Malaysian traditional dances.

ShawHong Ser and Kraisorn Juntanoy demonstrate in Chapter 5 through a case study of the Suan-Oy Community Center in Bangkok that Thai dance can play a critical role in elderly empowerment and can be used as a tool within Thailand's broader elderly care management system. In Chapter 6, Ka Chun Lin examines the difficulties inherent in promoting senior arts in Hong Kong through the lens of Men of Wind, a community wind band composed entirely of seniors.

In Chapter 7, Rui Oliveira Lopes introduces the Urban Sketchers movement and reflects how social media platforms have expanded the movement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Caleb Lee provides a comprehensive review of current practices, challenges, and opportunities in the development of Theatre for Young Audiences in Singapore in Chapter 8 through a case study of The Artground, a children's art centre in Singapore.

In Chapter 9, Matt Jennings and his co-authors provide an in-depth examination of the struggles nurses face in Northern Ireland, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic. They then examine how the company, Health Action Training, uses applied drama to help nurses and other healthcare workers improve their communication skills and resilience. In Chapter 10, Poulina Chai Lin Koh and Sook Khuan Wong argue that design plays a crucial role in ensuring a healthy nation through close examinations of nutritional labels' design.

In Chapter 11, Adelina Ong discusses the rationale for writing chalk graffiti poems to reflect the circumstances of migrants (in particular, Chinese, East and Southeast Asian migrants) in the United Kingdom, as well as the role of more-than-human co-performers in this work of community art.

In Chapter 12, Ian Alden Russell discusses collective fatigue in today's world and how technology and social media have added to the pressure. He then considers the steps necessary for recovery. In the final chapter, Dan Baron Cohen uses a performance narrative in the face of the pandemic to share key insights gained during his community-based transformative collaboration with the Pataxó people in 2001.

Following the 13 papers, the documentation section contains an overview of each edition of the forum, as well as summaries of the keynote presentations. Finally, in the afterword, Oscar shares his realizations about the functions of the arts as a result of his personal experience with cancer 30 years ago.

References

- Ardalan, Kavous. *Equity home bias in international finance: A place-attachment perspective*. Oxon: Routledge, 2019.
- Glisson, Charles A., Catherine N. Dulmus, and Karen M. Sowers. *Social work practice with groups, communities, and organizations: Evidence-based assessments and interventions*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2012.
- Glover, Leigh. *Community-owned transport*. Oxon: Routledge, 2016.
- Goldbard, Arlene. *New creative community: The art of cultural development*. Oakland: New Village Press, 2006.
- Martusewicz, Rebecca A., Jeff Edmundson, and John Lupinacci. *Ecojustice education: Toward diverse, democratic, and sustainable communities*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Prosserman, Michael. *Building unity: leading a non-profit from spark to succession*. Toronto: ECW Press, 2020.
- Rouf, Kazi Abdur. *Social Thoughts and Their Implications: Critically Analyse*. Bloomington: iUniverse, 2018.
- Skippington, Peter. *Harnessing the bohemian: artists as innovation partners in rural and remote communities*. Acton: ANU Press, 2016.
- Trivic, Zdravko. *Community Arts and Culture Initiatives in Singapore: Understanding the Nodal Approach*. Oxon: Routledge, 2020.