

IMPACT

IMAGINING TOGETHER

PLATFORM FOR ARTS, CULTURE AND
CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

The Arts, Culture and Conflict Transformation Field

Summarizing IMPACT research through an emerging story

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THE
ANDREW W.
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IMPACT is an initiative of the Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts at Brandeis University, in collaboration with the Baker Institute of Peace and Conflict at Juniata College and Maseno University in Kisumu, Kenya.

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What is IMPACT?

IMPACT is an initiative that aims to propose the design of an infrastructure for the arts, culture and conflict transformation (ACCT) field that can strengthen the contributions of arts and culture to more vibrant, less violent communities and a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world.

IMPACT recognizes that the ACCT field is an ecosystem in which artists, cultural workers, researchers, policymakers, and funders are interdependent, needing to collaborate with each other to achieve their most effective work.

We see ourselves in relationship with the land where we live and work, and with players in many related fields such as human rights, sustainable development, cultural heritage, indigenous knowledge systems, and education.

Since September 2017, IMPACT has been composing a picture of the field: its assets and needs, its internal differences and points of consensus, the opportunities that are emerging and the limitations on its efficacy. This process has surfaced some preliminary findings about the field, presented here as one starting point for conversation.

Sources for this emerging picture include:

- Results of a 2011 survey and notes from IMPACT meetings
- Interviews and online research with 160 entities from every continent
- Three in-person and virtual learning exchanges involving over 150 people from across our ecosystem
- Conversations with thought leaders from inside and outside the ACCT field

As we had hoped, the IMPACT planning process itself began to strengthen ACCT by raising awareness of the field, actively engaging more people with it, and surfacing potential leaders for future structures and processes.

Why a Design Lab?

The purpose of the Design Lab is to generate creative thinking about the design of an overall infrastructure of the ACCT field and some of its early initiatives. By bringing diverse perspectives (in terms of region, age, art form, peacebuilding challenges, role in the ACCT ecosystem, etc.) into conversation and exchange, we intend to craft concrete ideas for moving forward in the short term. We also intend to form experiments to support the field in untangling some of the more complex challenges that we face. We expect that our conversations will spark new ideas, and refine and add detail to ideas that have emerged in the IMPACT process.

The picture of ACCT sketched out in this document is grounded in stories, opinions and data we have gathered over the last year. It is in no way definitive or complete.

We invite you to think about, challenge, supplement, and adapt this emerging picture during and even after the Design Lab.

What's next?

Based on the understandings that emerge from the Design Lab, from September 2018 through February 2019 we will:

- Articulate a vision and draft a set of recommendations, elicit comments on multiple drafts, and prepare a report for the Mellon Foundation and colleagues in the field
- Seek endorsers from multiple fields to ensure additional buy-in and visibility of the vision and recommendations
- Craft concept notes and seek support for priority aspects of the envisioned infrastructure
- Create conditions to continue the momentum and thoughtful conversations that began during the learning exchanges

IMPACT imagines ACCT as well-suited to address major threats to human dignity

Many major issues confronting communities, humankind and the planet today center around direct and structural violence and its causes and consequences. IMPACT imagines the ACCT field as well suited to address such issues because of its unique combination of capacities, including:

- Valuing hospitality
- Embracing paradox
- Emphasizing human possibilities and needs
- Respecting multiple knowledge systems
- Facing difficult truths
- Valuing an ethics of reciprocity
- Emphasizing creativity and imagination
- Reaching beneath people's defenses through humor, indirectness, beauty, and presence
- Embracing paradoxes like: discipline and freedom, tradition and innovation, memory and imagination
- Considering both aesthetic and socio-political imperatives

The ACCT field has a responsibility to use these capacities and to optimally position itself to face today's major threats to human dignity and survival.

The field also needs a sense of its boundaries. IMPACT's discussions on boundaries have not focused on the issues people are addressing, but instead on centering the field around values, such as those listed to the left.

Arts, culture and conflict transformation is a large, diverse ecosystem

Arts, culture, and conflict transformation is a large, diverse ecosystem with many assets (including people; institutions; print, audio, and visual resources; strong practices; and existing networks) and many needs (including opportunities for education, training, and exchange; sustained conversation around ethics and efficacy; and increased capacity to advocate for itself as a field). The ACCT field embraces artist-based and community-based practices - including literature, music, performance, visual works, digital arts, and architecture - as well as the expressive forms of collectivities.



Roberta Levitow, a founder of Theatre without Borders, offers this picture of her vision of the ACCT ecosystem

The ACCT field enjoys many assets and strengths

“In my view, all socially-concerned artists want and try to influence. Trying to change rigid mindsets, minds poisoned by propaganda and indoctrination, is admirable. But of course it should be done through art where you touch the basic goodness among all human beings, approach sensitive matters through song, dance and humour. Influence to me is to enable people to discover and realise the need for peace and the power of love.”

- Learning Exchange Participant

ACCT will need an on-going, functioning research capacity to fully map the breadth and depth of the field. In the preliminary work IMPACT has conducted during the planning process, we identified hundreds of entities, including:

- Existing networks that serve distinct purposes
- Artists, peacebuilders, scholars, educators, funders, and policy-makers who are crossing boundaries and thinking creatively about strengthening the field
- Excellent practices emerging from all art forms and a variety of other cultural practices
- Emerging leaders who are eager to contribute to the infrastructure
- Examples of initiatives that have already influenced policy-makers and funders
- Documentation in audio, visual, print formats (including books, films, and websites)

Practitioners, researchers, and funders see many shared needs of the field

To strengthen the effectiveness of ACCT, structures and processes could be designed to address the following needs:

- **Funding**, especially long-term funding that honors community & practitioner priorities
- **Affordable professional development**, educational and skill-building opportunities for people and organizations
- **Opportunities for exchange** so people feel more connected while sharing and learning about challenges and what works
- **Documentation and research** to share among practitioners and with academic, policy, and other circles
- **Platforms** for sustained attention to questions of ethics and efficacy
- **Safety and freedom**; protection from harm and punishment; and freedom from censorship
- **Strategic communication and advocacy** to convince funders and policymakers of the field's efficacy, potential, and need for long term support
- **Access to participation** regardless of language, technology, disability, and other potential barriers
- **Recognition of the different meanings of words** in different regional and political contexts and a space to develop shared vocabulary

“Wicked questions”: Questions without clear or easy answers

An important element of this learning has been finding paradoxes and questions that do not have a clear or easy answer. They surface some of the complex, nuanced elements that may be important tensions in the design and creation of a future ACCT infrastructure.

Wicked questions around power:

- a. How can ACCT **work against inequitable power structures** while **needing the resources** that some institutions within those structures can offer?
- b. How can we **build trust across power differences** when the **conditions for trust don't exist**?
- c. How can we **value equity** between and within communities **without imposing values**, especially when some societies do not equally respect the human rights of all their members (e.g., women, LGBT people, and linguistic and religious minorities)?

Disruptive innovation frequently starts in the margins rather than the mainstream.

- [“Learning from the extremes: White Paper”](#)

More wicked questions

Wicked questions around communication:

- d. How can we recognize that **words carry different meanings** and some words are unacceptable in different contexts while at the same time honoring the field's **need for shared vocabulary**?
- e. How can ACCT **benefit from the reach of technology, the English language, and written communication** while **honoring the groups who do NOT have easy access** to technology, who speak other languages, and who live in oral cultures?

Wicked questions around structure:

- f. How can we both **identify boundaries** of the field and **maintain their openness and flexibility**?

- g. How can we be both **integrated** (with shared values/language) and be a group of **independent, context-specific** entities at once?
- h. How do we honor and mobilize the **broad geographic reach** of the arts, culture, & conflict transformation field and also **create spaces for face-to-face relationship building**?
- i. How can we **consolidate sufficient power to advocate effectively** for the whole field while **avoiding ethical perils of centralized power**?

We hope Design Lab participants will think about, rework, and add to these before and during our time together.

The ACCT ecosystem faces limitations to its effectiveness

Considering the current limitations to the ecosystem's effectiveness (including little shared vocabulary, few agreed-upon evaluation criteria, and few forums for sustained conversations about core questions), the team summarizing input focused on two limitations we consider especially significant.

The next two sections of this document explore these limitations. Each limitation is paired with ideas, resources, and opportunities that members of the ecosystem have expressed for mitigating them.

One limitation on the field's effectiveness is that **the ecosystem has insufficient resources**.

The second limitation is that **existing and potential divisions within the field may interfere with equitable collaboration**.

These divisions are often based in differences in power and access to resources. In order to create a healthy field rich in collaboration, these divisions must be taken into account and addressed. By doing this, we can minimize risks of harm and nourish our capacities to build trust across differences.

Potential factors that keep the field under-resourced

Artists, peacebuilders, researchers and scholars, funders and policymakers all indicate that the ACCT field is under-resourced.

Surprisingly, two positive factors of the field - its diversity / global reach and how it challenges powerful institutions and ideas - seemed to be among the factors contributing to this.

Our hypothesis is that the following factors are key to ACCT's insufficient resources:

- ACCT lacks the credibility of a recognized field or movement
- ACCT lacks shared vocabulary that it could use to advocate for the significance of its work
- ACCT Initiatives rarely have the resources to engage communities for the length of time required for societal transformations to be achieved or seen
- ACCT's creative power and its implicit challenging of the status quo alienates some people and agencies who have control over resources needed by the field

There are many other factors that also seem to keep the field under-resourced. One is not having enough substantive and easy-to-understand documentation that can feed into strategic communications. If more documentation and strategic communications existed, they could help those in the ACCT ecosystem become more aware of the field's assets. Strategic communications could also be used to advocate for better-aligned funding and governmental policies. With the combination of these factors that keep the field under-resourced, there are many ways in which the full potential and appreciation of the ACCT field is actively or passively blocked.

Ideas for countering factors that limit the field's resources

Many people have started sharing ideas for how an infrastructure might counter the factors that seem to be limiting the field's resources, such as:

- Suggesting and promoting a clear core concept of the field and its vocabulary
- Setting up regional centers that link with universities to gather research and documentation
- Connecting funders in a consortium that funds field-strengthening communications and advocacy plans
- Building ACCT work into other fields (e.g., development in conflict zones) while valuing artistic integrity
- Cultivating ACCT ambassadors who educate on funding reform, including longer funding cycles
- Framing the field as one that shifts paradigms around power
- Connecting with other global movements that embody new ideas about power
- Developing special resources and safety monitoring systems to support those in conflict zones
- Advocating publicly and globally when rights of artists and cultural workers are threatened anywhere
- Conducting longitudinal research on the effects of ACCT efforts
- Creating structures associated with an established field (e.g., formal recognition of exemplary practitioners and community members, journals, regular gatherings, codes of ethics)

Differences within the field that may interfere with equitable engagement

Another set of limitations revolves around the many rifts or fault lines in the ACCT field which are often related to differences in power and access. Only some of these differences are listed to the right. Exploring these differences and others while designing the infrastructure can help it support more effective and equitable collaborations.

Resourced institutions (esp. higher education, governments, big NGOs)	-----	Institutions, orgs, and people at the grassroots
Global North	-----	Global South
Western Europe	-----	Eastern Europe
English speakers	-----	Speakers of other languages
Funders	-----	Fund-seekers
Government entities	-----	Non-governmental entities
High access to technology	-----	Low access to technology
Outsiders	-----	Insiders
More connections or experience with the ecosystem	-----	Less connections or experience with the ecosystem
Written or virtual centered cultures	-----	Oral or in-person centered cultures
Able-bodied people	-----	Differently abled people
Artist-based practices	-----	Community-based practices

Comments on differences in the field

Funds go to universities or big NGOs, choking resources from flowing “downhill” to grassroots organizations.

- learning exchange participant

Unequal resource distribution can lead to a destructive helper / helped (or White Saviour) complex that minimizes what Global South has to offer.

- 1-on-1 conversation

The balance between valuing the aesthetic and valuing the socio-political is key. Focusing too much on either one is a threat.

- learning exchange participant

Universities often claim ownership over and credit for work of communities and artists.

- 1-on-1 conversation

Power and time constraints of donors limit freedom, creativity, and genuine reciprocity.

- field assessment research

The elders in my community have so much knowledge to share with the field but they don't communicate in writing or in English.

- learning exchange participant

Limiting the negative effects of divisions in the field

Considering the divisions in the ACCT field and the ways they do or could limit the effectiveness of our work, how can we transform these rifts and the power dynamics that fuel them? Several ideas have emerged:

- Build accountability systems from the start
- Incorporate equity concerns into foundations of governance
- Plan for multiple centers of initiating energy
- Engage artists and grassroots entities in designing and evaluating foundations' calls for proposals
- Engage community partners in establishing criteria for assessing university/community partnerships
- Expect all partners or affiliates to embody IMPACT's values in practical ways
- Acknowledge, celebrate and build upon different kinds of strengths and resources (including those of entities with few material resources)
- Facilitate and nourish relationships across differences in power
- Encourage collaborations based in reciprocity to avoid pitfalls of the helper/helped dynamic
- Learn from successful organizations and networks

Act locally, connect regionally, learn globally. We focus on discovering pioneering efforts and **naming** them as such. We then **connect** these efforts to other similar work globally. We **nourish** this network in many ways, but most essentially through creating opportunities for learning and sharing of experiences and shifting into communities of practice. We also **illuminate** the work of these pioneering efforts so that many more people will learn from them. We are attempting to work intentionally with emergence so that small, local efforts can become a global force for change.

Meg Wheatley

The Berkana Institute

thank
you

Thank you for engaging with this material.

We look forward to hearing your responses and to seeing these ideas evolve during our time together at the Design Lab.

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