2022 PROCESS AND FINDINGS REPORT

Social Artists For Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (SAFEDI): improving access to visual arts through artist-led policy transformation

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2022 AHRC Equality, Diversity, and Engagement Fellowship (EDIEF) pilot

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"SAFEDI was an exciting, challenging and, at times, messy experiment. We knew that social artists were already making a large and often unseen contribution to 'equality, diversity and inclusion' (EDI); but we wanted to understand this contribution better and provide evidence of it to others, such as funders and policymakers. Could we support self-identifying marginalised social artists and their participants, in partnership with cultural organisations, to investigate, evidence and influence EDI policies, through their arts practice?

In a relatively short project, hampered by covid-19, we went a good way to achieving this. By putting social artists at the centre of things and trusting the richness of their knowledge and know-how, we came to see that the policy changes the artists and their collaborators are advocating might at times be best made not from the top down or the bottom up, but from the messy middle of things - which is where life itself is continually happening."

Dr. Amanda Ravetz (Lead Fellow)
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Foreword

The case for improving equality, diversity and inclusion in the arts has already been made; the next frontier is how to make this change a reality. In this context the SAFEDI project has materialised a thunderbolt of germane policy change, first co-created with cultural organisations, social artists and self-identified marginalised audiences, and then, most importantly, co-delivered. As a result there has been real life change on the ground to accompany the more reflective and evaluative elements of this timely practice-based-research project.

A key vector for action has been six blazing social artist commissions set forth by the SAFEDI project. The SAFEDI project, and the social artists they have charged, have demonstrated how art can have many effects relevant for policy - from helping to manifest evidence relevant to policy change, to creating a space for dialogue, to stirring the emotions to create the urge for action.

It has been commendable to see a research project first support artists as a catalyst of policy change, and then consider that artistic activity as a critical locus for research. Seeing artists as policymakers and seeing art as research are two brave, necessary acts that we as a society should embrace more frequently. Perhaps as a result, an impressive feat of the project has been how it has transversed the notoriously sticky policy cycle. It has encompassed, but also shortcut, traditionally linear stages of policymaking, from onboarding policymakers and artists, developing policy proposals, delivering new policies in cultural organisations, reflecting on the change and then considering the legacy. The result has been to open up the mysterious 'black box' of policy to those involved and affected by it. And lo and behold, doing so creates the conditions for radically new ideas and action which is more likely to land. The project team, the evaluators, the artists, the policymakers and self-identified marginalised peoples who have contributed to the SAFEDI project should take pride in talking the talk - but most critically walking the walk of innovative, people-centred policy change in the cultural sector.

SRG Bennett
Visual artist, researcher, policymaker

Report Overview

This document provides a report on the artist-led processes and procedures developed during the conception, design and delivery of a recently completed action-research project SAFEDI - social artists for equality, diversity and inclusion. It includes summaries of the Evaluation Report by Sally Fort (2022), and artist contributions before unpacking a number of specifically art-professional and practice-led learnings not reported in existing published accounts of the project, thereby providing an important resource for future work in this area.

The aim is to demonstrate how this creative research collaboration between academia, artists, and policy makers responded to social movements in the UK to address and redress ongoing issues around cultural access and equity. The report showcases the professional practice outcomes and details of the delivery process in an effort to make the learning from the project widely accessible. It concludes with a summary of next steps in the mission to provide equitable access to the arts, alongside recommendations and ongoing developments.

The core of the learning is detailed in this report's contextual background and how this influenced and supported the research design before unpacking a number of specifically art-professional and practice-led learnings not reported in existing published accounts of the project. The project worked with six social artists/artist collectives commissioned as part of SAFEDI to develop collaborations with participants who self-identify as marginalised, in ways that went on to influence policy making in several of the participating partner organisations and which introduced methodological diversity into arts and cultural policy making processes through new forms of social art practice-as-research (PaR).

Background

SAFEDI, based in the UK, was part of a pilot Equality, Diversity, and Engagement Fellowship (EDIEF) announced by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK) in the wake of the death of George Floyd and the international Black Lives Matter movement and subsequent civil unrest in the UK highlighted by the toppling of the Coulston statue.[1] The call spoke of "[enabling] researchers to engage a variety of relevant stakeholders with their research, to embed their work into policy and practice, and to work with relevant communities to realise the full potential benefits of their research".[2] Researchers from UKRI-recognised research organisations who applied for funding were expected to work with external non-research partners to develop increased impact from existing high quality EDI-focused research they had already carried out. In the case of SAFEDI, the application for the Fellowship cited research already carried out over a period of several years by Amanda Ravetz of MMU, and Rebecca Senior, Lucy Wright and Mark Smith, all of Axis, a UK-based charity that represents artists. The research proposal that went on to be one of the ten funded fellowships, was developed between Amanda Ravetz and social art sector lead R.M. Sánchez-Camus. Ravetz is currently Professor Emerita in the department of Art and Performance at Manchester School of Art. Sánchez-Camus is Development Associate for Axisweb (Axis) and Co-founder and Co-Caretaker of Social Art Network UK (SAN), both artist support organisations; he is also director of Applied Live Art Studio, social practice art studio. Ravetz is referred to in the report as Lead Fellow and Sánchez-Camus as Lead Artist.

Alongside Ravetz & Sánchez-Camus, four artist-scholars from Manchester Metropolitan University worked alongside the artists to support their praxis via their respective creative research into neurodiversity (Dr K.S. Tan), anti-racist arts networks (Dr P. Campbell), art and social housing (Dr C. Cornejo), and disability arts (Dr A. Macdonald). Each contributed theoretical and practice-based experience to specific parts of the project delivery plan, benefitting from cross-disciplinary working, involvement with process-based methodologies around policy production, integration of HE research and pedagogies with marginalised communities, and translating academic language to citizen spaces.

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1 One of 10 AHRC EDI pilot Fellowships awarded by AHRC in 2020
www.ukri.org/news/ahrc-announces-edi-engagement-fellowships/
2 www.ukri.org/opportunity/equality-diversity-inclusion-engagement-fellowships-pilot/

Daniela Liberati supported the commissions as Coordinator and Sally Fort wrote the independent Evaluation Report. This level of commission support was developed to foster an inclusive and equitable experience for commissioned artists and project participants.

Ravetz & Sánchez-Camus developed the rationale for the project which shaped the outcomes with supporting evidence from the following 3 research strands: the arts failing to reaching diverse audiences (ACE, 2020b); creative industries not including diverse talent (Carey, 2020); and the cultural sector reconsidering their collections, how they attribute and who are their audiences (Art Fund 2020) in response to Covid-19 and the current civil rights movement. Responding to this the fellowship aimed to deliver a model of creative collective policymaking with social practice artists, marginalised audiences and the policymakers / institutions that aim to better include them. It wanted to bring the knowledge and experience of those currently being excluded into the heart of policy making practice, furthering the longer-term aim: to reposition social practice as the leading champion of EDI in the visual arts. The research programme aimed to deliver innovative policy change through a social art programme in which six social artists/collectives worked with six audience-communities affected by exclusion, together with the lead fellow, lead artist, artist scholars, partners, policymakers and visual arts organisations.
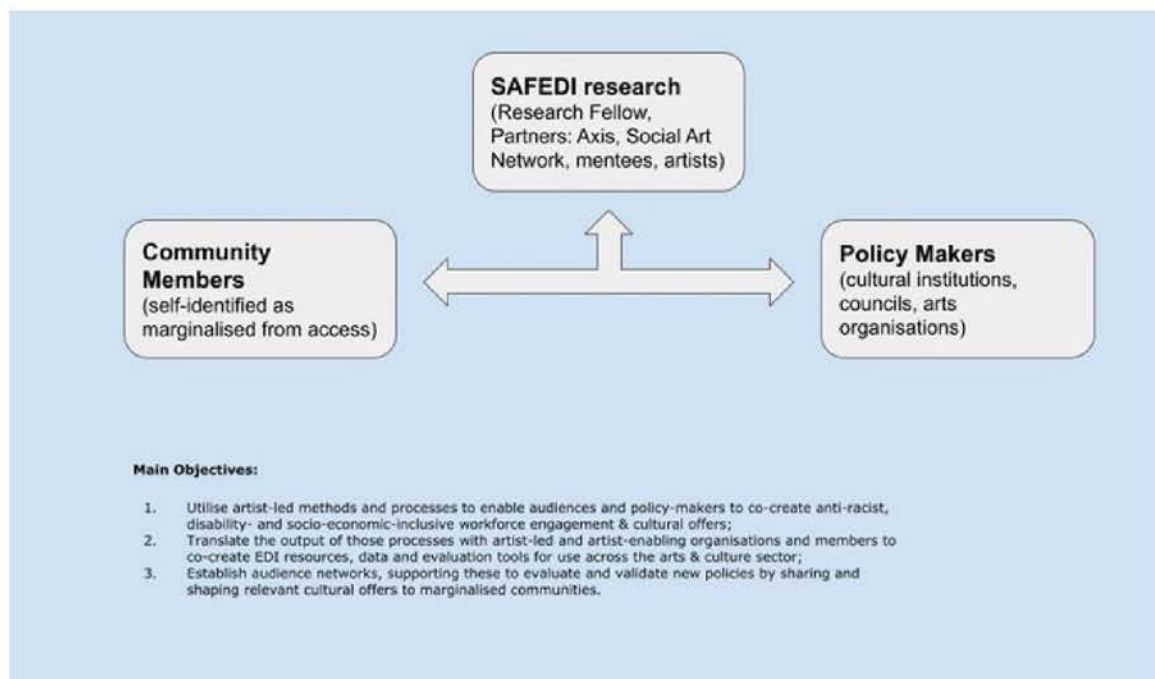

Figure 1: Workflow outline showing working groups and objectives

Contextual Background

SAFEDI was designed to respond to the concern that many arts organisations and non-art organisations do not have adequate organisational policies governing access, inclusion, and diversity, either for their workforce or for their audiences. Through a mixed methods approach setting out to centre action research by commissioned artists, it was informed by findings that visual artists focused on social practice are under supported and under validated; that these artists want an alternative and more relational validation system than that which currently dominates the mainstream gallery-centric art world, and that they do a lot of invisible work with marginalised communities.[3]

Testimonies gathered by research partner Social Art Network (SAN) in the research and development phase of the application process, indicated that delivery strategies do not presently support EDI practices in social art hiring or community involvement. The larger organisations (in e.g. health and social care, local authorities) that commission social artists are ill-equipped to support social art production, whilst the smaller arts organisations specialising in social practice lack the necessary resources to do so (Consilium Research and Consultancy 2014:5). In the case of audience-communities, the UK's first national review of social art held by SAN in 2018 (Social Art Summit) showed that social art is a force for positive change amongst communities, but conversely, that communities lose out badly when commissioning organisations' inadequate delivery strategies make them peripheral to the delivery process.

Statistics from the annual population survey (APS) show that those from the global majority and/or who are disabled are more likely (in the UK) to live in socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods. Analysis of datasets on arts engagement shows that educational attainment and socio-economic background are the biggest influences on whether individuals attend or participate in arts and cultural activities. The reasons are practical, institutional, psychological and identity-related, with physical and mental health and well-being, work and family commitments and level of disposable income each impacting participation (Consilium Research and Consultancy, 2014). Compounding this "The arts and cultural sector is characterised by small and medium sized organisations that, despite their commitment, often don't have the expertise or resources needed to design and implement effective approaches to ensure that they are able to meet obligations outlined in the Equality Act 2010" (ibid p5).

3   Ravetz, A. and Wright, L. Validation Beyond the Gallery: How do artists working outside of the gallery system receive validation of their practice? Report commissioned by Axisweb, 2015. www.socialartlibrary.org/library/validation-beyond-the-gallery Ravetz, A. and Wright, L., From network to meshwork: validation for social practice art and artists, April 2020. www.axisweb.org/models-of-validation/content/from-network-to-meshwork

The action research project set out to create positive change for beneficiaries – artists and audiences who self-identify as global majority, disabled and/or from lower socio-economic backgrounds – by producing mechanisms for sustained coordination between cultural agenda setters, social artists and communities with limited opportunities to debate or shape the cultural offer (ACE, 2020b). The engagement plan took account of the complex barriers faced by audience-communities accessing and shaping cultural offers, by working directly with social artists and organisations with proven expertise and/or lived experience of marginalisation and local networks, and by putting significant support mechanisms in place to give the proposed engagement the best chance of success. This included a care package around the work that ring fenced specific funding for accessibility needs, and ongoing wellbeing sessions for the commissioned artists, many of whom were working in topics of their own lived experience of exclusion. The Lead Artist delivered one-to-one critical feedback sessions around practice development and community engagement as well as leading on artist wellbeing sessions to solely unpack the emotional impact of the work.

The research team aimed to support social art work in this area that was anecdotally known about but under-documented while simultaneously helping arts organisations achieve real change towards better access and inclusion. This seemed especially urgent given the civil rights movement which had prompted UK cultural organisations to review their collections and policies to determine how these reflect historical issues around colonisation and racism. This is especially highlighted in arts institutions given their representational and symbolic power around definitions of civil society. At the same time, due to the covid-19 emergency, large arts organisations were seeking to recover audiences through participatory practice but without a set of guidance and criteria on ethics and safeguarding (Art Fund, 2020). The action-research aimed to respond to the urgency of these issues, bridging between innovative social art EDI practices that are currently unacknowledged, and mainstream visual art organisations requiring guidance, benefitting both sectors, while amplifying the community voice the cultural sector is required to serve. Understanding co-authorship as central to this process was fundamental to ensure equity and respond inclusively to the cultural context (Sánchez-Camus 2013).

Research Design

SAFEDI's design proposed a nonlinear model that fostered the development of new insights, impact and engagement through an iterative, co-produced, knowledge exchange process. In order to bridge an academic research project into a community of self-identifying marginalised people the project the project team needed to integrate academic and arts and cultural expertise, developing a methodology that:
   a) welcomed the unpredictable and the remits of failure
   b) offered space and time to balance the team's diverse experiences, knowledge, and professional practices, backgrounds and styles
   c) offered social art as knowledge-producing through its relational nature, led by artists as expert field workers balancing practice, participants and partners.

The programme proposed 6 strands through which policymakers, social practice artists and the communities they work with would generate practice as research:

Strand 1, Onboard Policy Makers – the core team (EDI Fellow, lead artist, social producer) would work with selected artists from SAN's network to develop collaborations with policymakers who have responsibility for EDI– e.g. as part of museums, larger arts and non-arts sector funders.

Strand 2, Artist Commissions – the partner organisations, lead artist, social producer, EDI fellow and more junior researchers would support selected artists to develop and deliver social art commissions. Appointed artists would use live art to engage communities in exploring what prevents them from accessing the arts.

Strand3, Developing Policy – the creative outcomes from the artist commissions would be reviewed against the policymakers' EDI policies, and the fellowship team and partners would work together to bridge the gaps between what the artists discover with community members and current policy and practice in the given organisation. EDI policies would be redrafted and returned to be enacted and tested.

Strand 4, Deliver Policy to Public Realm – resources would be created and disseminated beyond the participating organisations & actors, based on the learning gained in stages 1-3.

Strand 5, Evaluation –independent evaluator Sally Fort would develop a Theory (before) and Story (after) of Change, identifying resources, assumptions, activities, outputs and outcomes and impact (intended and unanticipated) of the work; create a toolkit for quantitative monitoring of participation, events and key KPIs and immediate outcomes; qualitative evaluation; advise commissioned artists/delivery partners on data collection; act as critical friend; write an evaluation report.

Strand 6, Legacy –the EDI policies would be embedded into the partners and participating organisations and the commissioned projects incorporated into the Social Art Library. Built into the policies will be the independent renewal process through participatory social practice.

<u>Strengthening the sector, partners and relevant communities</u>

The fellowship aimed to generate evidence for positive change affecting partners, communities and the discipline, measured against individual KPIs, consolidated in the initial stages of the evaluation process.

Through the committed involvement of 12–15 policy makers the fellowship aimed to raise the profile of social art practice in a gallery-centric art world, whilst simultaneously demonstrating the need for social art and artist-specific mentoring and development, beginning with proactive anti-colonial, anti-disablist art school pedagogies.

Through innovative artist-led methodologies the fellowship aimed to model innovative forms of engagement and impact to the wider arts and humanities subjects that seek solutions by using arts-led methodologies.

Through the Social Works ? EDI journal issue 3, the fellowship aimed to shape the new language arising around art appreciation and definitions of aesthetics that change how we consider and view art, how museums collect, archive and represent art, and what its function is in society, showing how it is centrally aligned with EDI and restorative justice.

Through the focus on EDI and social practice the partners Axis and SAN would revise and embed EDI policies in their organisational structures.

Through involvement in research led policy making Axis and SAN would grow and influence other partner arts organisations. A previous example is the Safer Spaces Agreement authored by R.M. Sánchez-Camus for SAN and now widely used across arts organisations in the UK. Creating new parameters of thinking around practice would help SAN explain their EDI processes and models, building resiliency for future grant capture and assisting an artist-led organisation to stay afloat through the recovery phase of Covid.

Through new community-driven guidelines on EDI partner organisations could incorporate these into their current policies and, as importantly, offer these up for review into the future.

Through increasing visibility of EDI practices in the cultural sector the research would aid in post-pandemic recovery by attracting new audiences and encouraging safe integration into spaces of marginalisation.

Through highlighting the 'lived experience' of community members into a national networked strategy for cultural change through collaborative EDI policy-making, individuals who are often most marginalised would be offered a role in self-determination and cultural democracy.

Intended long term impact of the work

With ACE deliberating at the time of this research's development how the organisations they fund will be asked to deliver against their investment strategy which has at its core audience diversity and participation, the proposed fellowship aimed to respond to and inform this major governmental arts initiative. Working with social art practice to determine and develop new EDI policies that can be applicable across the arts and culture sector aimed to help position social art as a leader in the integration of community voices and ethics of participation. Developing new EDI policy through community consensus would, it was hoped, allow arts and cultural organisations to put in place new ways of working that would include, but not be limited to:

- diverse programming and exhibitions
- considered language around public text and copy, that takes into consideration intersectional identities and histories
- diversifying staff recruitment, interview, and hiring procedures to ensure equitable workplace access
- reviewing gaps in collections and missing histories
- exploring new ways of working and leading on sharing successes and failures across the EDI network
- an evergreen framework modelling new ways to re-evaluate/re-write EDI policies by prioritising community voice, need and impact throughout the life of a policy
- The incorporation of social art practice and practitioners into organisational frameworks to make artwork more accessible to audiences and policy makers alike
- Giving social practice artists access to support networks to reimagine new audiences in a proactively anti-racist post-pandemic culture scene, that attracts new audiences and has taken positive action in decolonising engagement criteria and curricula

- Highlighting core examples of best practice to meet the challenges of onboarding policy making partners
- The establishment of a national network of social practice supporters and allies, more fully representative of the geographies and communities in which cultural production happens

The independent evaluation report which assessed the extent to which short, medium and long term goals were met, measured against the project's original aims, objectives and KPIs can be referred to here [link] This report focuses instead on the learning developed as part of the professional practice and practice as research elements of SAFEDI which were not explicitly addressed in the evaluation process. We begin with an overview of the commissions, to give a flavour of the project as a whole, before moving on to the main focus for this report, the findings from the professional practice element of the project.
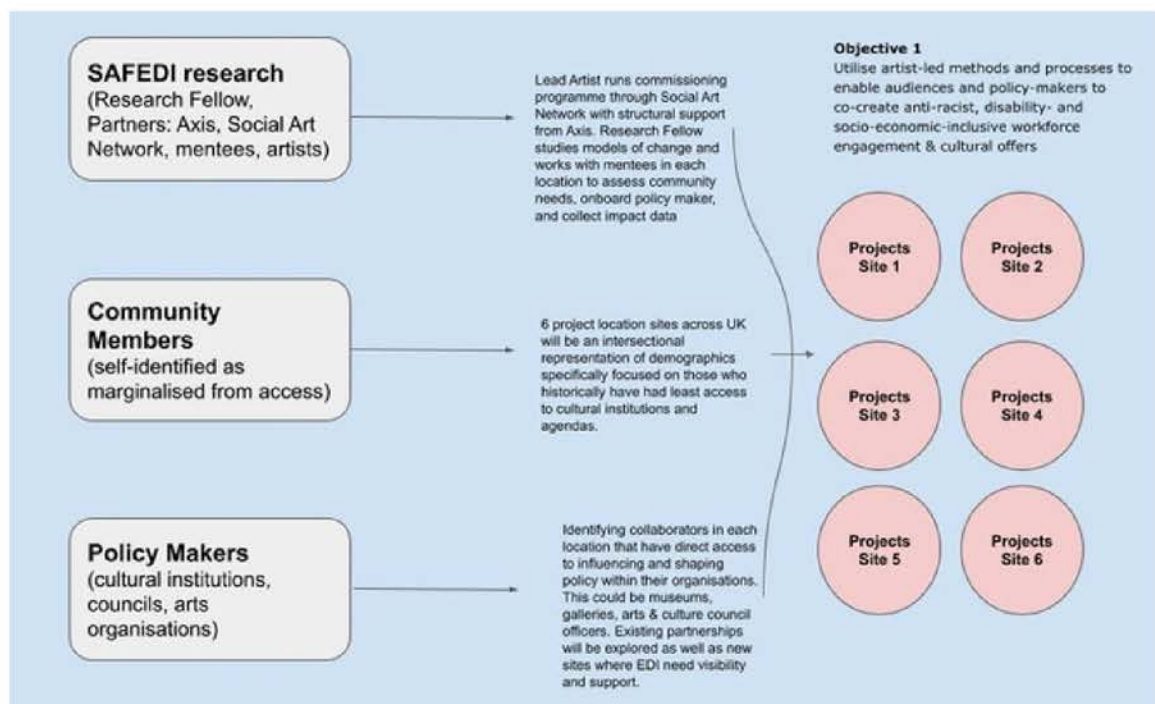

Figure 2: Workflow outline showing how working groups deliver into projects to objective 1.

Overview of commissions

en(shrine)
The group created an interactive online installation developed with people with access needs exploring "Access Recitations" as a form of creative policy making through song, art, and movement. The work was shared publicly but particularly focused on engaging staff from cultural institutions and policy makers.
The collective stated "We aim to use collaborative making as a way to discover, grow and share nuanced understandings about how to embed accessibility into cultural spaces, systems and structures."

JarSquad
ThisJS, a group of three artists, delivered JarSquad Assembly events in Plymouth welcoming new community members to JarSquad's self-declared solidarity economy by making preserves with resources that would otherwise go to waste. Their intention was to co-learn about food preservation as a living social art practice, and share thoughts about how squad members had experienced other art projects that requested their participation in cultural development. They focused on consent as both an important entry into participatory work but also sometimes a barrier.

Women's Art Activation System (WAAS)
WAAS explored creating and supporting a child-raising network of experiencing a cultural institution together. The aim was to explore what institutions can do to move from 'accommodating' to 'embracing, centering, honouring and celebrating' female reproductive experience. This 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. Inspired by practices from institutional critique, museum design, guerilla action and midwifery it took the form of a game.

Shama Khanna
At this fractious time of culture wars and cuts in arts education funding, Khanna proposed, it has never been so important to ensure access to the arts for an audience truly reflective of society as a whole. The Flatness publication produced through SAFEDI invited a selection of QTIBPOC artists and collectives to speculate and weave fiction into their lives creating space to dream and plan beyond the biting reality of global crises affecting our health, climate and rights to homeland. As well as artists, the publication invited readers to feed into the process aiming to engage a wider group of participants through readership.

Lily Lavorato

Building Warmth used ideas around the very human act of fire building to open up honest discussions about what accessible and welcoming arts spaces look and feel like from those who feel marginalised from them. Working alongside disabled people in Leeds, the project invited participants to write experiences down on paper that were burned. The resulting ash was developed into a glaze for an urn that would travel to arts organisations with the intentions to invite others to add their own needs for better access. Lily said "using the idea of 'burning' to think about barriers, we'll look to the ashes and build towards warmth for the future".

Yuen Fong Ling

The Human Memorial (2020-ongoing) is a socially-engaged artwork that explores the symbol of the empty plinth, as a response to the Black Lives Matter and Rhodes Must Fall movement, after the Colston statue in Bristol was removed by activists, and prompts the question what do you stand for, and when and where? Fong Ling wrote:

"I will use the process of making and constructing a series of alternative empty plinths and test them in public space, to prompt discussion about the dismantling and decolonising of Sheffield's colonial history. The artwork aims to create the conditions to generate more creative questions and solutions to the public debate, and posits how we shape and represent our past and future selves, and ultimately promote equity and inclusion in the process."
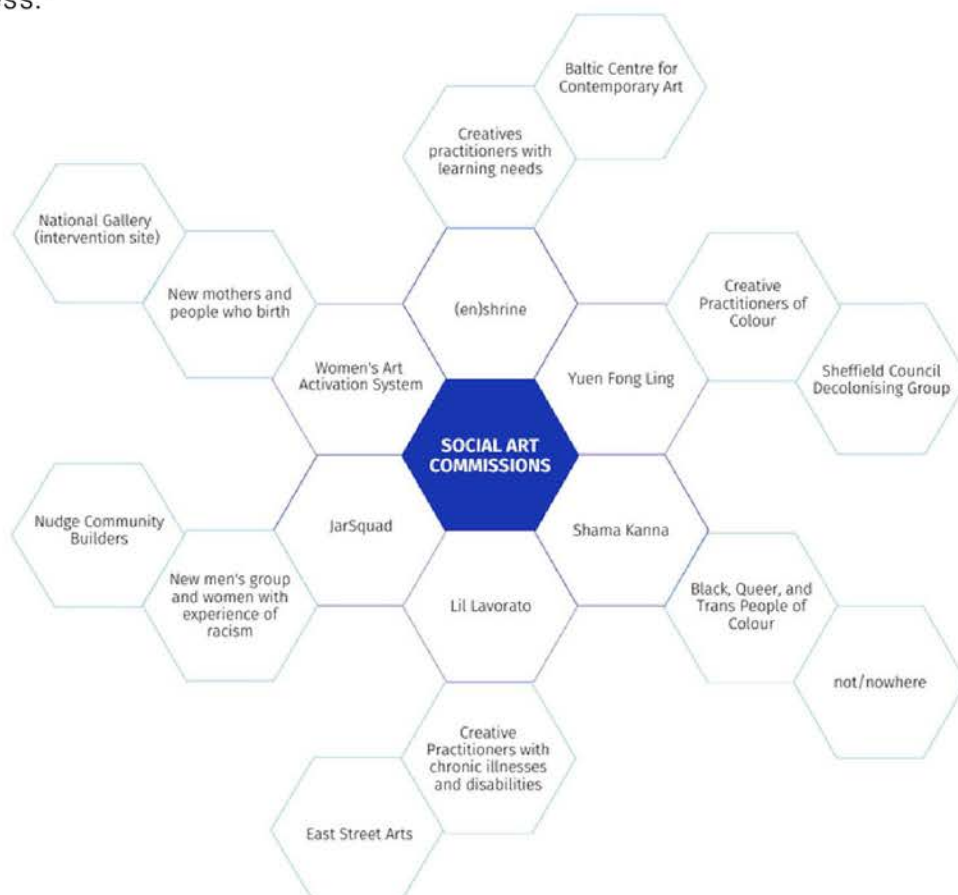

Figure 3: Mind map of commissions, participants and partners

Two Case Studies of the 6 commissions

Two of the commissions have been selected to further explore the learnings and outcomes and better showcase how the research affected policy change. These two have been selected to highlight the embedded partner links that encouraged and promoted a systems shift.

en(shrine)

Lady Kitt produced a collaborative exhibition asking and offering some answers to the question: what stops us from-Seeing, Feeling, Hearing, Knowing, Reaching Out? The project worked with various groups of disabled people to investigate ways of making art centres, galleries and arts organisations more accessible. The barriers they faced were used to create an "Access Obstacle Course" and solutions through this were offered through "Access Recitations". The work showed explicitly what it means and feels to be ignored. The work also challenged the participants to consider what structural solutions needed to be in place to remedy this. The project focus was on creative collaboration as a method of policy change.

 A public showing was done in an exhibition space in a shopping centre representing "Access Obstacles" (barriers). In the window and throughout the gallery a large paper installation showed miniature sculptures broken equipment (the smashed glasses), distance (the paper boat) and a lack of time (the clock). Inside the shop unit paintings, photographs and texts offered "Access Recitations" (ideas for removing barriers). With many different participants and informed by a number of in-depth conversations with staff at the organisation, some using walking methodologies, this proved to be a useful tool for people who wanted to think about making art centres, galleries and art organisations more open, welcoming, accessible places for lots of different people. The work was acquired by the partner organisation and the resulting findings utilised to author a new inclusive policy for disabled access.

Yuen Fong Ling

In the summer of 2020, the artist describes watching, on repeat, the footage of BLM protesters tearing down the Colston Statue in Bristol. Amongst the chaotic scenes, the group were defined by what they did and where they positioned themselves. Some pulled the rope noosed around the statue, some chanted and encouraged the act, the majority recorded the event through their phones. However, when the statue fell, some seized onto the fallen monument, and one activist jubilantly jumped onto the empty plinth.

The aftermath of the statue's removal led to artist Marc Quinn to temporarily occupy the space of the empty plinth with a statue created of the activist Jen Reid; potentially replicating power dynamics by offering a body co-opted by an established white male artist in a gesture that can be seen to demonstrate his privilege. The subsequent protection and boarding up of statues and monuments linked to Britain's colonial past created new temporary monoliths surrounded by protesters with their own placards in protest. The empty plinth has become a potent symbol of what has been, where we are now, and what could be. It poses many questions: what we do with these statues and monuments, remove them, re-plaque them, replace them?

'The Human Memorial' centres around three performance/workshops, with invited performers exploring the empty plinth with three objectives in mind:

1. A mobile empty plinth structure prompts responses through re-enactment, recreation, and play.
2. The bodies of performers replace the structures of the empty plinth.
3. As a result of the workshops, alternative, non-permanent monuments and memorials were presented in sites across Sheffield.

Each day was documented, with accompanying interviews and conversations captured during the workshops. The data collected is an archive of personal witness to racism, the BLM movement, the monument and memorials debate, and perspectives of how a more inclusive society could form.

The research resulted in a 3-channel film made by Picture Story Productions (working title "The Empty Plinth"), that reveals what happens during the socially-engaged art production process. The films found new associations in the act of 'construction' and 'making' through participation and collective action. They acted as a counterpoint to conversations about 'undoing' and 'dismantling' myths, colonial histories and ideologies, through the representation of our own bodies and experiences, and their relationship to others in authority, in public spaces.

Professional Practice Outcomes

The SAFEDI fellowship aimed to encourage solutions across the cultural sector by supporting social artists, social practice art, and the participants in accessing these cultural activities. Developing inclusive practice was to go beyond the commissioned artists and participating groups, and willing partner organisations, to become an example of practice for a sector in need to address EDI systems. The research aimed to deeply reflect and respond to the moment that we are living in. In order to provide a

complete overview and open source distillation of procedures developed over the course of the work that can help artists and organisations thrive, the following is made available for use to help frame other initiatives seeking guidance.

To undertake a research project of this kind it was essential to embed EDI into both the team work flow and the commissioning process. The team make-up was shaped by the aspiration that EDI be core to all our research processes – not just the object of study, but the reflexive practice we wanted to adopt. The bid was built around the central proposition of appointing six artists/artist groups with proven experience of social art practice and EDI who would be commissioned to work with groups of participants self-identifying as marginalised from the arts, and with a partner organisation interested in developing their understanding of policy around access, inclusion.

The commissioning process was a learning process – e.g. whether artists should come with existing partnerships and with participants and organisations already in place - or not. The application asked those applying to talk about groups they would work with and why, the organisation if they had already identified one, what they proposed to do, and how this might impact the policy of the organisation they were hoping to work with. It did not insist they should have the organisation and/or participants already in hand. This made for some important later insights about kinds of policy-related outcomes possible in these varied circumstances and time frames. An external evaluator was essential to avoid researcher bias in assessing outcomes.

One of the unexpected professional practice outcomes was the new Recruitment and Commissioning Guidelines developed by the Lead Artist with contributions from the research team and commissioned artists. These guidelines are offered as a set of working principles to the wider sector as a framework for understanding best practices in commissioning.

Read the Commissioning Guidelines [4]

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4   https://tinyurl.com/commissioningguidelines

Findings and Insights

This report compiles learning from across the critical support of the commissions and the evaluation research combining the two to provide a well-rounded and holistic overview of the process and learning in an effort to provide guidelines and milestones for organisational change around EDI practices. Rather than providing a fixed toolkit or specific ways of working, the intention is to outline one specific example of a process and the successful ways in which it sought to generate the much sought after structural change needed in the cultural sector. The ambition to increase participation in cultural production, engage new audiences, retain existing audiences, develop new forms of co-created art forms, and restructure funding to support these initiatives must align with a reconsideration of relationships between audiences, artists and the organisations that fund the work, be they public or private. This realigning of relationships is presented here in an effort to influence and better understand policy development from a creative and person-centred perspective. Specifically those people for whom the policy is written or who may be most affected by it.

Redefining the ways in which we create new policies means redefining what we intend and what we expect to result from policy. Presenting policy as a respect and care package rather than a barrier or institutional insurance became a central point of conversation throughout the development period and the commissioned works cited above aimed to do just that: present policy as protection to those marginalised.

Selection Criteria

A commission call out was circulated amongst SAN members with a target call to those with social art expertise. The research team developed and made available the following selection criteria against which the applications could be evaluated and offered these upon developing the call out in an effort to be transparent and equitable as well as facilitate the commissioning process.

The 5 criteria were:

1. Feasibility - How much does ambition match practicalities? Are there partnerships in place to support this? What communities do they want to work with and is there support? Is the budget breakdown sound?
2. Innovation - How strong is the project idea? Is the art-making central to the work and unique?
3. EDI Focus - Does the proposal incorporate EDI at its core? Does the applicant have knowledge of EDI?
4. Social Making - Does the proposal have a high level of participation? Will the proposal develop dialogue needed for policy making?
5. Track Record - Does the artist have the experience to hold both the conversations, the research and the making?

This criteria was made public alongside general FAQs around the commissioning process. In response to questions that arrived from artists via email, the FAQ's were updated in real time so that all artists could access answers given to all questions and avoid one person being at an advantage. Applications were welcomed in text, audio and visual formats. An independent cultural EDI specialist was part of the selection panel; all applicants received feedback.

Read the [SAFEDI FAQ's](#)[5]

Support for Commissions

The impact of the Covid-19 emergency is essential to note in attempting to work inclusively as this meant a number of uncertainties and delays to the scheduled research. Working on a fixed period of delivery against the many needs of both the artists, the participants and organisations fosters a delivery push that has the potential to create tension with the power structure of funding and commissioning. Addressing this was essential as many of the commissioned artists were themselves from the same groups they were working with and as such brought in their own findings and insights.

Project Organisation and Structure

There were various groupings of relationships within the action research delivery:

- Research Delivery Team: Lead Fellow, Lead Artist, Coordinator, Researchers and Evaluator

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5 https://tinyurl.com/safediFAQ

- Commissioned artists
- Organisational / Policy partners
- Participants on commissioned artwork
- Delivery Partners
- Funders & Academic host

Specific support in SAFEDI around this multifaceted design and delivery included:

- Freedom of delivery: artists created without restrictions to their generative process
- Artist critical forums: monthly meetings to support the generative practice
- Artist wellbeing sessions: 3 sessions dedicated to understanding emotional impact of the work
- Accessibility budget and other supplementary costs covered, both for artist and participants
- Diverse support team: timeline coordination, critical feedback, monitoring and evaluating
- Aim for long-term change: avoiding quick wins and short term ambitions but rather beginnings of structural change
- Under-researched topic:
- Creating new ways of considering policy
- Output legacies: Social Works ? journal EDI issue, SAFEDI Report, Project film
- The work did highlight the lived experience of participants

Challenges in SAFEDI around design and delivery included:

- Relationship between participants' needs and academic needs around safeguarding consent: use of language and purpose of consent needed extra time and clarification
- Ambition to create a new embedded evaluation model needed clearer structure and integration to the delivery team: moving from reflective evaluation meant bringing the evaluator closer into the delivery process and better understanding of how their critical role would differentiate from coordination and research outcome development
- Reporting and monitoring plan for the creative projects was developed in tandem with rather than before commissioning. This was due to time constraints but placed an added pressure of extra labour on the artists
- Creating a clearer outline of the delivery process while creating space to be responsive and flexible. A balance between the two was essential,

a research project of this scale would have benefitted from twice the time to respond without haste
- Practice-led research focussed on research outcomes and did not include deeper practice impact
- Closer relationship support and managing between artists and partners needed
- Stronger integration of researchers' role for some artists needed
- Deeper understanding of policy forms, function and language from a research perspective needed
- Role titles being porous and not necessarily reflecting the labour, e.g. Lead Artist is borrowed from ACE and is undefined when working alongside Lead Fellow to design and deliver the research but not as a commissioned artist
- Beginning work during the final government issued lockdown due to Covid-19 emergency and delivering commissions immediately after easing of restrictions and rush of openings and new projects created bottlenecks

Significant changes witnessed in the action-learning process:

- A deeper understanding of what policy is and means to researchers, artists, participants and organisations writing and holding the research
- Spotlighting the need for better accessibility by participants who are participating an academic research based project
- Shifting artists to work in a research-based methods way
- Supporting artists who may be both facilitators for marginalised people while also identifying as marginalised
- Increasing visibility around policy change
- Need for small arts organisations to have assistance with policy development
- The fellowship did not focus on producing and writing new policy based on the research findings. Rather the research was able to better spotlight participants' responses to what policy may mean to them in terms of arts access
- The work supported social artists in their creative development, this was not the original research intention but happened through supported commissioning
- The work did highlight social art to organisations as a way to reach people through a creative process to help their organisational development

Recommendations

The delivery and learnings of the work were tied to the format of the funding body and how expectations and requirements around working in academia were positioned with regards to community based initiatives around integration and development. This meant that the learnings proposed in the research around organisational change through policy were also reflected by the artists and their social art practice to feedback to the host institution (MMU) and to the AHRC EDIEF pilot programme. The experience of the research commission was woven into the feedback of the commission itself. This provided an opportunity offer feedback that would create organisational changes, offer more inclusive policy development that would increase access and a positive experience of engaging in cultural production, and realign the experiences of those who may experience marginalisation from larger institutions the experience of the research commission The learnings that have come from this period of research are presented here in recommendations partially selected from the SAFEDI Lead Artist, the EDIEF review, and from the Evaluator. Together these provide a fuller picture of the process from beginning to end.
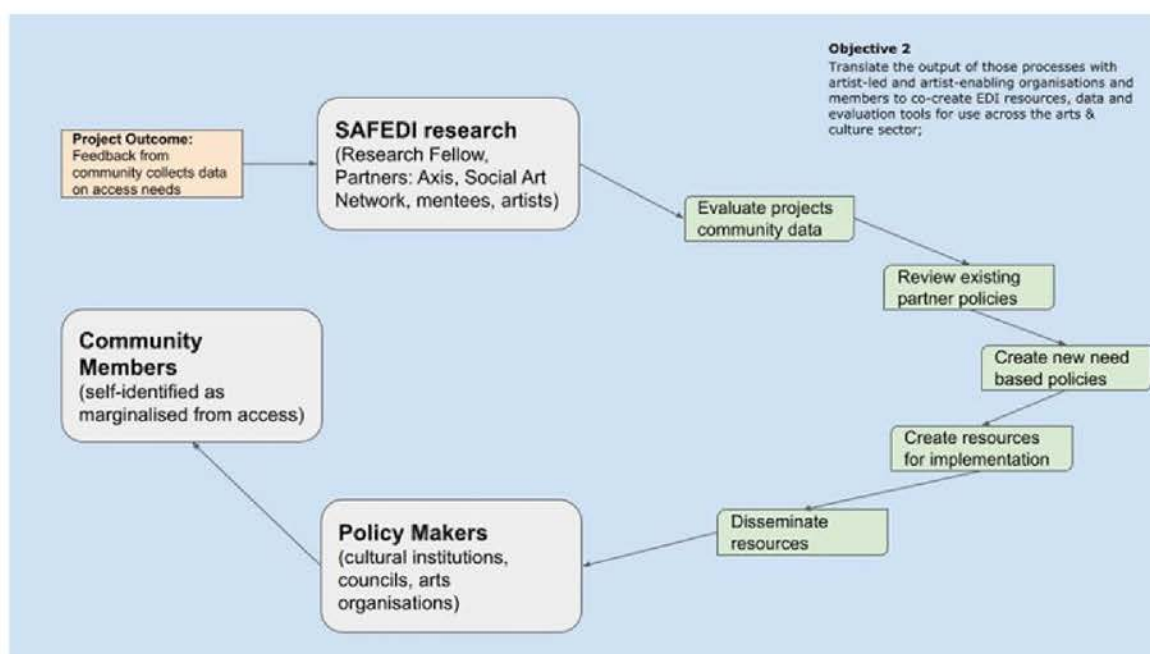

Figure 4: Workflow outline showing how project outcomes deliver objective 2.

<u>Selected recommendation from AHRC for future EDI fellowships:</u>

- Include Lead Fellows' relevant recommendations based on their experiences of the pilot in future EDI Engagement Fellowship calls.
- Ensure the lived experiences of minoritised and intersectionally minoritised people are included in the conceptualisation, development and marketing of the call so that research and the researcher community can draw on the broadest range of perspectives and thereby reflect the communities more fully.
- Introduce an Expression of Interest (EoI) model for applications to reduce application hesitancy around Je-S submissions.
- Include salary and costs for the Principal Investigator (PI) in future EDIEF calls.
- Include research assistant (RA) mentoring time as an eligible cost for PIs within future calls.
- Provide sufficient time for project partner input at the application stage.
- State and define how reasonable adjustments and special circumstances are considered and handled for PIs and RAs carrying out the funding award.
- Establish accessibility requirements regarding the creation of outputs from award holders to ensure that all outputs are fully accessible from the start and encourage accessibility to be given appropriate consideration in the application process.

<u>Select recommendations for improving the EDIEF award holder experience:</u>

- Define the term 'fellowship' and provide clarity about what a fellowship call is offering to its respondents. Fellowship has different meanings in the academy and there was confusion about what was included in the EDIEF. Consider offering a definition for fellowships where conditions and provision are offered uniformly across the AHRC's portfolio of funding to ensure equality across awards (see Fellowship, page 138).

- Provide and appoint a programme director for the EDIEF. The EDIEF operated without a programme director (previously referred to as 'theme leader') in place, which resulted in a lack of fellowship and networking opportunities for award holders… A programme director position for the EDIEF (and in other AHRC fellowship schemes) would negate the 'fund and forget' perception where awardees work in relative isolation once the funding is devolved to the institution (see Fellowship, page 138).

- Provide a dedicated support service for EDIEF activity. This may include resources, toolkits, support services and/or remain entirely within the remit of the programme director for the EDIEF. Given the range of projects and project-related issues, expert EDI support could catalyse the effectiveness of the EDIEF and mitigate against the risks of undertaking EDI-related activity. This support would safeguard the researchers against potential negative impact and provide intelligence to the AHRC when they arise rather than in post-award evaluation. Clarity in responsibility will demonstrate AHRC leadership and commitment to the researchers working in potentially contested areas (see Fellowship, page 138).

- Appoint a Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion within the AHRC to replace the role that was lost part way through the EDIEF pilot year. While the mission to make EDI everyone's responsibility across the AHRC as an organisation is admirable, the journey to reach this goal is incomplete and not yet fully established. To effectively meet the targets of the AHRC EDI action plan, and to scaffold support for a funding scheme focused on EDI work, a dedicated role in this area remains essential. Mainstreaming EDI work enables an organisation to make EDI the responsibility of all staff… It will also enable better recording and recommendations for internal EDI policy and practice management for the AHRC (see Support gaps, page 136).

- Aspire to achieve mainstream funding schemes that reflect and capture the diversity within the applicant pool…
To realise this, there needs to be a conscious and intentional focus on capturing, translating and mainstreaming learnings from the EDIEF into all AHRC funding calls, with clear multi-year diversity targets for awardees, the peer review college, engaging EDI expertise and building EDI consideration into the design, promotion and selection of recipients (see Increasing diversity within the applicant pool, page 150).

- Establish equity procedures within the review stage to value, embrace and engage with applicants who have unconventional, atypical routes, career trajectories and track records in entering research.

- Review and mitigate the need and impact of budget restrictions imposed by short deadlines (spend pressure) that particularly affect thematic calls (including the EDIEF). These factors may adversely affect both the ability to make an application or perceptions of prospective applicants' ability or capability to participate due to their circumstances (see Timing of the call, page 83).

- Signpost applicants and award holders to existing resources on inclusive and ethical recruitment of artists in commission work. Commissioned artists featured within at least 50% of the funded EDIEF projects. Guiding the labour of commissioning via existing resources such as Axis' **'Commissioning guidelines' (developed through the Social Art For Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (SAFEDI)** AHRC EDI Engagement Fellowship between Social Art Network, Axis, Manchester Metropolitan University School of Art). This resource documents ethical artist recruitment, promoting good practice in the recruitment of artists in future funded project work (see Engagement activities and impact, page 132).

Selected Recommendations From Evaluation:

- Make no assumptions. Take time to build trust, really ask questions, listen and be open to mistakes and keep shared goals in mind. What might seem obvious to one person, might be revelatory to another.
- Invisible conditions are overlooked. Barriers experienced by people with neurodiversity, struggling mental health, chronic illness, disabilities and experience of trauma affected every aspect of SAFEDI perhaps more than any other. Mental health and anxiety are protected within the disabilities section of the 2010 Equalities Act, yet the pressure to be competitive and work quickly amplifies anxiety, cutting out opportunities to think clearly, recharge, process effectively, and do the best work possible. More needs to be done across all sectors to champion wellbeing and change the way work is delivered so it supports the mental and physical health of those working in it, as well as the people we want to see more represented in our arts communities.
- Ask people you work with how they prefer to communicate and if there is anything you can do to help them be at their best. This improves access for everyone, regardless of what they do or don't disclose about themselves.
- Do ask if people have access needs and invite them to revisit the conversation at any time. It's hard to disclose personal information before trust has been built but they need help further down the line.
- Don't ask people to revisit trauma. Commissions clearly showed that what excluded people want is to make things better, look to the future, experience joy and feel valued. Focus on what can change, rather than what's gone wrong in the past, which only adds to or reactivates difficulties already experienced.

For Universities from Evaluation:

- Look to innovate your internal safeguarding and ethical protocol. Make sure anything required for community engagement and public engagement or impact is accessible for anyone who might be part of the work. Involve those people in the redesign of your systems. Look to existing good practice with specialist charities who have already done the work.
- Create systems that support non-hierarchical collaboration. Be aware that engagement outside of academia is flattening in structure with less and less leader-recipient relationships; and more and more facilitator-collaborator relationships. Protocol needs to be able to flex to different styles of engagement to support equality, diversity and inclusion.

See further recommendations for funders, arts organisations & artists in the evaluative report on the SAFEDI site: www.safedi.org.uk

Selected Recommendations From Lead Artist/ Creative Producer:

- Future work around policy to collaborate deeply with community partners to understand their policies and change them together.
- Investment of funds to buy organisational time, resources and people skills in reviewing and rewriting policy within a collaborative person-centred format
- Creating an evergreen model where existing policies are readdressed every 24 months through a creative process and ratified for another 24 month period. This cycle would align with movements in social evolution to ensure that ways of working are up to date and inclusive.

Summary

The SAFEDI research project has successfully shown the research aim that people who self-identify as marginalised working within a creative project with a social artist in partnership with organisations interested in EDI, can co-create and inform access policies. The result of this can be positive changes for those facing exclusion from publicly funded cultural arts venues and organisations. The research was able to successfully deliver the 6 stages while redefining an essential stage which was developing and delivering policy to the public realm.
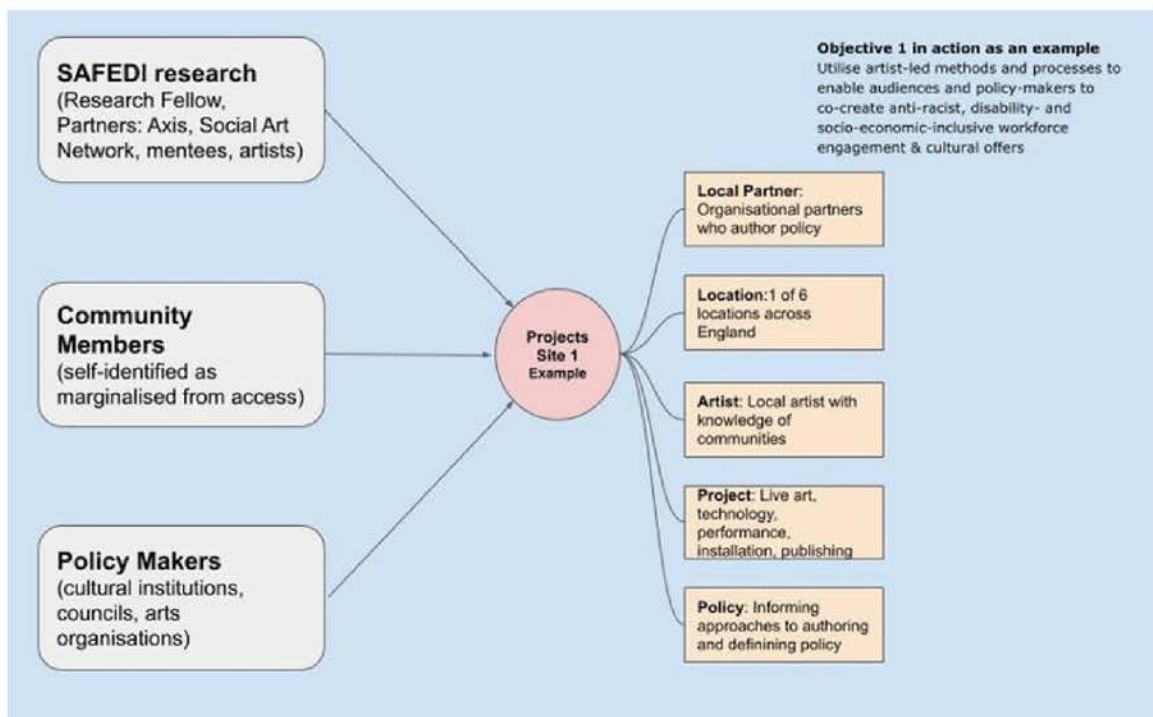
Figure 5: Workflow outline showing team feed into research project then back out to achieve objective 1.

<u>Selected outcomes from the evaluation further the successes:</u>

Marginalised people feel more valued. This was the most strongly achieved outcome with all commissions showing that the communities involved with the practice felt valued by the artists throughout the process. For this to occur, commissions needed to bring the profile of excluded people and their voice to the attention of arts organisations.

Increased resilience of artist led organisations in covid times. Three commissions directly affected artist led organisations, and in each case, the work brought something extra to the business compared to what would have happened otherwise.

Improved understanding of the support social artists need. Understanding the access needs of the artists is crucial to the success of this outcome. It was also achieved through the researcher-artist relationships and the research meetings, where researchers were able to reflect in detail about the commissions. More details were revealed through artist wellbeing meetings and evaluation interviews, which though confidential, should filter through in general to influence the sector.

New understanding of EDI in arts and cultural organisations. This was successful in three commissions where the relationships between the artists and the organisations were the strongest and had prior history together.

Stronger existing research and engagement networks. What SAFEDI was uniquely able to provide was the opportunity to turn theory into practice. The researchers developed new areas of shared interest, and improved their understanding of funding, policy and community engagement in the higher education environment.

New research and engagement networks reached. Achieved in 4 commissions and the research group. Plugging into wider networks of artists, practitioners, programmers and curators, as well as connecting partners to explore the possibility of a new national consortia for the visual arts sector. The research group has secured seed funding to grow a new research network (SAIL – Social Art Inclusion Lab) which widens the learning, brings in new members and seeks crossover with other relevant networks.

Raised profile of social art practice. Arts partners already on the pathway to more inclusive policy were most open to what social art could bring to their organisation. One significantly changed their engagement practice; one their outlook on internal infrastructure; and one on more accessible policy making. Two have also updated how they commission artists in the future because SAFEDI.

Artists perspectives on policy. Artists feel their way/practice through multiple threads of relating, imagining, making, affecting - creating spaces of participation with all the interbeing threads of the world, rather than in a hylomorphic approach that designs and then implements something.

Policy looks different from an artist perspective than those currently accepted as policymakers. Developing a debate that includes and/or is led by artists around what policy is, its value or not.

Non-linearity of impact. Policy-related change is negotiated moment by moment, practice by practice. Funder research councils' conception of impact engagement is critically questioned by SAFEDI project proposes that change requires ongoing dialogue rather than one off linear pathway.

Instead of replicating power dynamics in creating unaccessible or incomprehensible surveys to those most affected by access, the research output delivered new ways of defining what policies mean, are and how they can be creatively understood. Art making is language and communication that can function as a tool to write policy and guide principles of organisations. New ways of working and modelling that push the boundaries of established or conventional systems are essential when considering an shift in culture production and its relationship to people.

SAFEDI Credits

EDI Fellow: Prof Amanda Ravetz, Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University

Lead Artist / Creative Producer: Dr R.M. Sánchez-Camus, Development Associate Axis, Co-founder & Co-Caretaker Social Art Network

Commissions Coordinator: Daniela Liberati

Research Team Members: Dr Patrick Campbell, Dr Cesar Cornejo; Dr Anna MacDonald; Dr Kai Syng Tan (MMU artist scholars and mentee researchers). Sally Fort (Evaluator)

Commissioned Artists and Projects:

Building Warmth: Artist, Lily Lavorato with Project Assistant, Carys Fieldson. Partner Organisation: East Street Arts.

Queer Diasporic Futurity by Flatness: Artist Shama Khanna, Contributors, Rasheeqa Ahmad, Daniella Valz Gen, not/nowhere, Decolonising Economics (with Evan Ifekoya, Amardeep Singh Dhillon and June Bellebono), Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, Adam Farah and Aditi Jaganathan. Book design by Design Print Bind. Partner organisation: Not Nowhere Art Workers' Collective.

The Human Memorial: Artist Yuen Fong Ling. Collaborators, Nathan Geering; participants: Samara Casewell, Marcus Smith, Rebecca Solomon, Darwin Taylor, and Sam Underwood Doherty. Partner organisation: Sheffield City Council.

SAFEDI enSHRINE: Artist Lady Kitt. Collaborators, Cath Walsh, Deborah Nash, Kev Howard, Steph Robson, Cathy Garner, Colly Metcalfe, Andy, Nicki, Paula, Sofia Barton, Sarah Li, Lady Kitt and Dan Russell. Partner organisation: Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art.

Assemblies and Other Adventures: Artist JarSquad
Partner organisation, JarSquad and Nudge Community Builders.

The Milky Way: Artist The Women's Art Activation System (WAAS). Sharon Bennet and Sarah Dixon. Project location: National Gallery.

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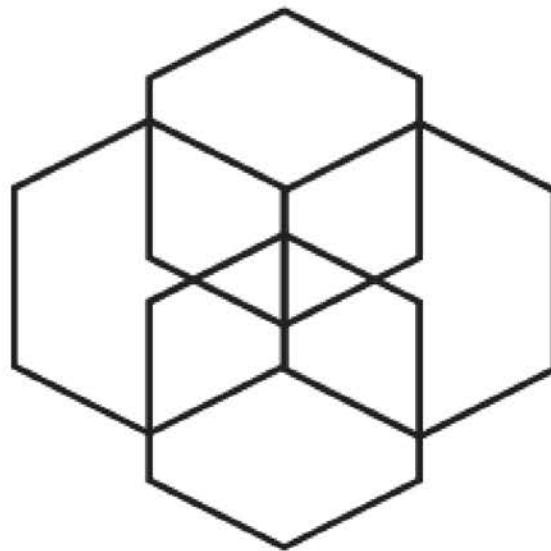
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