



Context and culture

The assumption that cultural relations, and arts, culture and heritage practices are valuable is widespread; however, research into what this means in sub-Saharan Africa is limited.

Imagining Impacts is a research study undertaken by the Goethe-Institut (GI) and the University of Cape Town's African Centre for Cities (ACC) to address this research gap.

The ACC seeks to facilitate critical urban research and policy discourses – informed by the African perspective – for the promotion of vibrant, democratic and sustainable urban development in the global South. An important aspect of ACC's research has been to understand the role of arts, culture and heritage projects and processes in southern cities.

This study was commissioned by the Goethe-Institut's Africa Regional Office, which supported the research process by facilitating

the research team's introduction to local GI offices, local networks, stakeholders, and programme participants and, together with the African Centre for Cities, co-produced the research objectives. The project was interested in understanding, using the Goethe-Institut as an entry point, **what the role of foreign cultural institutions is in Southern Africa.**

Through a series of workshops, interviews and reflective processes, seven impact narratives were compiled. These impact narratives are summaries of the research findings, drawing on the research team's collective analysis, which are illustrated by project anecdotes and quotes from Goethe-Institut staff and creative practitioners who have interacted with the Goethe-Institut over the past five years.

**acupuncture | aspiration
| amplification**



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urbanism from an african perspective

PART OF THE GOETHE-INSTITUT IMPACT NARRATIVE SERIES

GI support was recognised to contribute to the vibrance, dynamism and sustainability of Africa’s cultural sector; assuming the role of a creative “acupuncture,” fueling creative aspirations and amplifying productive efforts. GI’s project funding was perceived as akin to a seed, unleashing ideas which if nurtured have the potential to grow into far more ambitious projects than initially envisaged.

Study participants said GI funding is instrumental because it **incubates concepts they can spin out into more ambitious projects over time**. GI funding provides scope for creative license,

“Artists need to creatively incorporate the consideration of sustainability into their project proposals. I work across disciplines, so I try to conceptualise projects that translate into film, theatre, research and writing, exhibits, etc. creative elements that I know are strategically aligned or relevant to different funders and enablers.”

Quotations have been anonymized to ensure the confidentiality of contributors. Please refer to the Impact Narratives Introduction for an enumeration of study participants.

engendering a creative muscle. Because this funding is not so tightly constrained, artists are able to start dreaming, scoping, envisioning, and experimenting with initial creative sparks that feed into larger-scale projects; this also allows them to start thinking about other donors to whom different components of a creative iteration may appeal. GI funding thus lays down the seed which grows into a project capable of being expanded more ambitiously over the longer term.

An example of the **amplification effect of GI funding** is provided by the project **Bushfire**, which started as a firepit at the bottom of a garden; the people, projects, artists, creatives GI brought to the attention of Bushfire’s representatives contributed to the project’s growth into a sub-Saharan festival, defined by meaningful and enduring south-south partnerships.



BUSHFIRE

Globally infused, authentically African and proudly Eswatini, Bushfire is one of Africa’s largest multicultural gatherings, illuminating the transformational power of the arts through our call to action for positive social and environmental change, #BRINGYOURFIRE. A diverse, inclusive and family-friendly music and arts festival set in a fantasy-scape of the imagination, Bushfire takes place in the beautiful farmland and mountains of the peaceful Malkerns Valley. Every year, we welcome Fire Starters from over 60 countries for an energising and uplifting weekend, with an eclectic programme featuring some of the finest musical and artistic talents from across Africa and around the globe.

A conscious celebration of unity in diversity and an inspiring emblem of social inclusion, Bushfire represents the kind of world we would all like to see – a global community of change-makers, thought leaders, and creative problem solvers who unite in a celebration of the arts and in the spirit of taking action against discrimination, environmental degradation and poverty.

Above: ‘Africa tribute’ collaboration, showcased at Bushfire 2018, involving the all star ensemble of Salif Keita, Ladysmith Black Mambazo & Yemi Alade. Photo by Bram Lammers.

“Relationships with NCIs like GI are intrinsic to success, because of the expensive nature of translating ideas into practice. I really appreciate the way that GI’s inquiry into how they can become better participants in local initiatives got us to think bigger: a critical one being how to create better south-south partnerships and dynamics. We realised in Eswatini that cumulative efforts flower and blossom into something far bigger than you can imagine. We started by digging that hole in our garden which became an amphitheatre and eventually grew to bring in work from the rest of the continent and even the rest of the world. Our small efforts have developed into a cultural economy. And we’ve seen great results through the festival circuit, supporting artist’s mobility and cultural exchange.”

Study participants noted that how they strategised, modelled and achieved the amplification of their projects was largely informed by recurrent conversations with GI representatives, who proposed alternative ways in which GI could support their initiative, making the possibility of amplification strategically feasible. “Funders are players in a community of practice in which knowledge is shared. Conceiving of the relationship in this way makes it easy to network and forge enduring connections...through sustained dialogue.”



AfroYoungAdult’s literary programming was, similarly, initially supposed to receive submissions in English, French and Portuguese; however, contributors from Dar Es Salaam motivated for the acceptance of Kiswahili submissions, transforming the project into a far more ambitious enterprise. Importantly, the expansion of the project’s ambition did not increase its original budget. “The story review workshops were convened in 8 cities over one week. Our Swahili and French facilitators were also translators, so we roped them into translating the works and ended up with

AFROYOUNGADULT

AfroYoungAdult is a talent-search for Young Adult fiction from Africa that Zukiswa Wanner ran with the Goethe-Institut. The institute invited aspiring African writers of all ages interested in writing for Young Adults (13 – 19 years) to submit short stories of 3000-5000 words in length in Kiswahili, English, or French. A panel of curators selected the best texts and invited the writers to participate in workshops across the continent that took place in February 2019. The top stories from these workshops were translated and published in three anthologies in Kiswahili, English and French and were launched at Ake Festival 2019.

Left: ‘Raoul Djimeli reading their story ‘Premiere fois pour les nulles’ at the launch of anthology ‘Water Birds on the Lakeshore’ at the Ake Book Festival in 2019 in Lagos. Photo by Francois Venter.

a total of 17 rather than 12 works - far exceeding our expected outputs. Two of the stories from the anthology have been translated into plays that have been performed by children living in an informal settlement.”

GI's walking, talking, thinking, reflecting, strategising, dreaming and **co-creating with project partners** makes it possible for them to become more ambitious in their creative envisioning and planning. The ways in which and where the work lands, as well as how it is taken into society, expands far beyond the scope of what people initially submit as their project ideas.

“I do remember feeling ‘oh, wow... the interview process requires you to really think critically and to dig deep.’ And this intellectual rigour was helpful. GI has always enabled me to sort of test out ideas.”

GI not only **facilitates innovation in the cultural sector**, but endeavours itself to be innovative. Respondents noted that GI is thoughtful and intentional about the manner in which it cultivates and maintains relationships, facilitates

and engages in critical dialogue and intellectual inquiry, and about infusing cultural production with an element that would otherwise be missing if not for this thoughtful orientation. This approach was agreed to have a positive impact on the sector.

In the same way that cultural collaboration gives rise to unexpected pathways, GI's collaboration with other NCIs can amplify and expand the scope of cultural exploration and production in sub-Saharan Africa. Russel Hlongwane spoke about conceptualising longer-term projects, with foreknowledge of the strategic priorities of different funders, which equips cultural producers to solicit support for those aspects of their work most aligned and thus appealing to the different funders.

Hlongwane expressed an appreciation that GI does not seek to retain an exclusive hold on his work; hence he is at liberty to discuss projects freely with the representatives of other national cultural institutions in a bid to identify support to take his work forward. GI's predisposition to collaborate rather than compete with other cultural institutions was acknowledged by cultural producers to make it possible to carve out a more ambitious body of work.



Key lessons and recommendations

Collaboration is key; however, equally important, is how it is accomplished. GI was perceived to endeavour to facilitate collaboration in a respectful, mutually beneficial manner. GI was characterised as ‘walking their talk,’ in other words, not merely collaborating because it is the vogue thing to do, but consistently interrogating and justifying the benefits of collaboration, and prioritising a commitment to do it well. GI is strongly encouraged to continue nurturing this way of working.

Careful and caring collaboration enables amplification of projects beyond the bounds of their proposals, which also includes where projects sit within cultural ecosystems. This includes other NCIs and it is suggested that GI should strive to maintain a collaborative approach to its work and to promote this within the contexts where it is active.

Above: Participants of the 2018 Train Jam, a collaboration with the Amaze Festival of Playful Arts, en route to Cape Town by train. Photo by Xolelwa Nhlabatsi.