Over the past few years, the Nordic arts and health field has expanded, both in terms of cross-border collaborations and network development: there has been an increase in projects and health-related interventions. This expansion has necessitated questions and considerations about evaluation and documentation of the undertakings.

Various arts and health evaluation guides have previously been produced in the Anglo-Saxon countries, the best known of these perhaps being *Arts for health and wellbeing*. An evaluation framework developed by Norma Daykin and Tim Joss in collaboration with Public Health England (2016). However, having access to guides in English may not always be useful due to the language barrier; in addition, the content will have been derived from a different cultural context.

To meet the needs of the arts and health practitioners in the Nordic region and to ensure robust evaluation and documentation of projects, Region Nordjylland and Aalborg University in Denmark, together with Region Skåne in Sweden, financed the development of an Arts and Health Evaluation Guide.

The background research was conducted in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden in order to understand the needs of the practitioners and to inform the content of the Evaluation Guide.

**Method**

A questionnaire survey was sent out in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden in Danish, English and Swedish, respectively. The questions were designed to gain a better understanding and insight into the experience and needs of arts and health practitioners in terms of conducting evaluation in the field. The data collection took place between December 2019 and February 2020. The survey was distributed via social media, emails and networks in collaboration with the Norwegian Resource Centre for Arts and Health and the Arts & Health Coordination Centre (Taikusydän) in Finland. By completing the survey, the respondents consented to their data being used for research purposes after being anonymised.

Workshops were also held, and in these the participants were invited to explore their experience of evaluating arts and health projects. These workshops were dialogue-based and gave the participants an opportunity to meet other practitioners and to discuss challenges and share good practice. The data collected through the survey and in the workshops was analysed using a thematic approach.
Results

The 123 survey respondents plus the additional workshop participants were a mix of arts and health practitioners, and job titles included: research manager, music therapist, librarian, teacher, arts consultant, theatre educator, choreographer, associate professor, anthropologist, nurse, culture and leisure director, dance therapist, museum director, festival director, psychotherapist, professor, arts coordinator, artist, senior adviser, dancer, rehabilitation coordinator, doctor etc.

The results from the data analyses are presented in the themes: Area of evaluation; Similarities and differences; Evaluation methods; Recipients; Challenges; and Good Evaluation.

Area of evaluation

The three main areas evaluated were: mental health and wellbeing, life quality and community. Other areas for evaluation were identified as: physical wellbeing and relaxation; joy/focus; coping; cultural events, new working methods, economic benefits of using arts-cultural activities.

Similarities and differences

Some similarities and differences between the countries were also identified:

• In Finland, the evaluation is most often used to report to funders and partners.
  In Denmark, Norway and Sweden, the evaluation is most often used internally and for partners.
• A larger percentage of respondents in Finland and Sweden evaluated creative/artistic processes than those of the respondents in Denmark and Norway.
• The majority of respondents answered that evaluation is a learning process and can be challenging.
• In Denmark, Norway and Sweden, a large proportion of the respondents considered evaluation to be exciting.

Evaluation methods

The most prevalent method for evaluation was mixed methods, closely followed by qualitative methods.

Recipients

When asked what the evaluation was typically used for, the three most frequent answers were: internally, collaborators and funders.

Challenges

The data collected highlighted many challenges and frustrations around evaluation. The most frequent were identified as time and resources. Other challenges were described as:

• No collaboration with researchers to formulate better questions.
• Much of what is experienced by the patient is not measurable.
• The need to consider both aesthetic and health aspects.
• Documentation of the value ratios that cannot be immediately measured in sufficiently credible ways.
• The measuring tools all have weaknesses.
• Request for data that can describe a measurement.
• Difficulties in ‘proving’ the connection between arts experiences and health effects.
• The necessity of parental involvement when working with groups of young people; challenges when working with participants who have dementia; understanding non-verbal communication when participants cannot express themselves verbally.
• Length of projects (too short).
• Evaluating the financial impact of a project.

Other reflections on evaluation were stated as: only the positive findings are included, and it can be difficult to get recognition for art interventions in a biomedical culture.

In the examples of evaluations that did not go well, it was mentioned, among other things, that some evaluations took place after the end of the projects, that there was not enough time available, there were too few answers, questions were poorly formulated, the course had not been sufficiently thought through from the beginning, and participants who dropped out all had an impact on the quality of the evaluation.

**Good evaluation**

Good evaluation processes and methods were identified as: collaboration with researchers, making a film where the participants could describe their own process, using focus groups and use of happy/not happy tools for patients who do not have verbal language.

Arts and health activities can be complex initiatives that are difficult to measure. In addition, the field of arts and health is an interdisciplinary field, with practitioners often coming from different scientific paradigms. The research results also highlighted that the respondents were often unclear about what to focus on in the evaluation, and it was a challenge to know how to proceed in terms of conducting an evaluation. Many of the respondents expressed that a guide would support them in the evaluation work. Furthermore, it is a useful step towards documenting future outcomes of arts and health projects and interventions in the Nordic context, making dissemination of outcomes more straightforward.

**Content of the Evaluation Guide**

On the basis of the results from the survey and the workshops, an Evaluation Guide was developed. The Guide is divided into eight sections:

1. Introduction.
2. Overview of the entire evaluation process.
3. Evaluation of arts and health initiatives and activities, highlighting the difference between evaluation and research.
4. Examples of methods, highlighting advantages and disadvantages.
5. Evaluation tools. This section lists measuring tools that are uncomplicated to use and are free of charge. These measuring tools have been validated in the different Nordic contexts.
6. Focus on important ethical considerations in the evaluation process.
7. Discussion of how the results are presented.
8. Checklist and a step-by-step overview of the evaluation process.

The purpose of the Evaluation Guide is to bring more focus on the need for evaluation of arts and health projects, to disseminate useful advice and principles for good evaluation in the arts and health field, and to provide of effective evaluation tools.
The Evaluation Guide is available in Danish, Finnish and Swedish and it is anticipated that a Norwegian version will be available soon.

Links to the free Evaluation Guides are found here:
- Denmark: https://www.musikterapi.aau.dk/nocks/videnscenter/evalueringsguide/
- Finland: https://taikusydan.turkuamk.fi/uploads/2020/09/100485fb-opas_-kulttuurihyvin_vointitoiminnan_arviointiin_taikusydan_saavutettava.pdf
- Sweden: https://vardgivare.skane.se/siteassets/3.-kompetens-och-utveckling/sakkunniggrupper/primarvardens-utbildningsenhet/rapportserier/utvarderingsguide-kultur-och-halsa.pdf

References

Daykin, N. & Joss, T. (2016). Arts for health and wellbeing. An evaluation framework. UK: Public Health England. Retrieved from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/arts-for-health-and-wellbeing-an-evaluation-framework