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Arts-based and creative approaches for inclusive participation: A Scoping Review

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Task Lead: King's College (Susana Higuera Carrillo and Marta Wojciechowska);
Lancaster University (Temidayo Eseonu)

Participants: University of Birmingham (Sonia Bussu and Dena Arya) and
University of Lisbon (João Amorim, Mariana Rosa, Roberto Falanga)



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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AT	Applied Theatre
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, plus
LT	Legislative Theatre
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PDD	Participatory Deliberative Democracy
PhotoPAR	Participatory Action Research using Photography
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

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1

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

This report explores the use of arts-based and creative approaches in participatory processes to promote inclusive policymaking and intersectional equity. The review highlights the effectiveness of methods such as Photovoice, participatory filmmaking, theatre, and storytelling in fostering inclusive participation, particularly among marginalised groups.

We reviewed the literature based on three dimensions: rationale, practice and impact of arts-based and creative methods.

Rationale: Arts-based methods enhance self-expression, critical reflection, and knowledge co-creation, promoting inclusion, social justice and potentially fostering democratisation. These methods are particularly effective in engaging marginalised communities, providing alternative ways for participants to express themselves and share their lived experiences. For instance, Photovoice allows participants to document their experiences visually, which can transcend language barriers and educational differences.

Practice: Successful strategies include adapting methods to participants' needs, ensuring safe environments, and addressing visible and hidden power dynamics. Inclusivity strategies involve creating safe spaces, responding to cultural norms, and providing comprehensive training for facilitators to handle sensitive topics, going beyond technical skills to include awareness of systemic social issues. For example, in projects involving young people discussing sexual health, matching facilitators and participants by gender and age helped create a safe space for open discussion.

Impact: We operationalised impact on three levels

- **On Individuals:** Participants experienced personal growth, self-efficacy and increased confidence, as well improved communication skills. Arts-based methods facilitated empathy and emotional expression but also enabled the development of new skills. For example, digital storytelling projects have allowed participants to gain skills in digital literacy, technology, film, and photography, as well as story development and communication.
- **On Communities:** These methods foster collective action, enhance community identity and sense of belonging. They help create new networks, promote intergenerational and intercultural understanding, and contribute to community resilience and healing. For instance, Photovoice projects have helped establish relationships among newly arrived immigrant women, strengthening their social cohesion and creating informal support networks.
- **On Policy change:** While direct policy changes are limited, these methods increase the visibility of marginalised voices and influence public discourse. Successful examples include projects that led to increased awareness and changes in local policies and practices. For instance, projects based on visual methods have led to concrete policy changes like the demolition of abandoned buildings in response to community safety concerns.

The scoping review identified arts-based and creative methods' unique advantages in fostering inclusive spaces:

Embodied and Sensory Engagement: Arts-based methods, such as theatre and performance, engage participants through physical expression and emotional resonance, rather than relying solely on verbal

communication. This can be particularly valuable for exploring complex social issues such as youth mental health or sexual violence, while fostering dialogue and solidarity across diverse groups.

Visual and Narrative Techniques: Methods like Photovoice and digital storytelling allow participants to document and share their experiences visually and narratively. These techniques can capture complex experiences that might be difficult to articulate verbally.

Creative Expression: Arts-based methods provide alternative ways for participants to express themselves, communicate their ideas, and share their lived experiences. This can challenge dominant narratives and expertise, promoting epistemic justice.

Playfulness and Joy: The use of play and creative practices can foster a sense of enjoyment and engagement among participants while addressing serious issues. This can contribute to sustained participation, the development of new skills and confidence that can help participants recognise and challenge power hierarchies through joyfully disruptive practices.

Cultural Resonance: Arts-based methods can be tailored to resonate with participants' cultural backgrounds and experiences. For example, storytelling has historically played a central role in some countries' cultural and political discourse, making it an effective method for addressing sensitive and traumatic topics.

Collaborative Knowledge Creation: These methods emphasise the co-creation of knowledge, involving participants in generating social meanings and collectively making sense of lived experiences. This can lead to more nuanced and relevant understandings of complex social issues and address epistemic injustices in dominant structures of knowledge production.

The literature also recognises several important challenges.

Ownership and Control: Transferring ownership of the process and outcomes to participants can be challenging. Institutional control can limit the dissemination of participants' work, and some participants may feel overwhelmed by the open-ended nature of these methods.

Vulnerability and Ethical Considerations: Arts-based methods can create feelings of unease, especially when dealing with sensitive material. Visual methods like photography and film can expose participants to vulnerability, raising complex ethical issues around representation.

Barriers to Participation: Participants may experience self-censorship and discomfort with artistic methods, creating barriers to full engagement. The technical and emotional demands of these methods can, if not recognised and addressed through skilful facilitation, amplify existing power imbalances.

Methodological Limitations: Interpreting artistic outputs can be challenging due to ambiguous elements and potential researcher bias. This can lead to misinterpretations, especially across different cultural contexts.

Emotional Labour: Arts-based methods can place a significant emotional burden on participants, particularly those from marginalised communities and who might experience vulnerabilities. The pressure to share personal stories can lead to burnout and emotional exhaustion.

Overall, arts-based and creative methods show significant promise for enhancing inclusive participation and promoting social justice and democratisation. Their successful implementation requires careful

consideration of power dynamics and ethical issues to contribute to more democratic and equitable policymaking. These methods can amplify marginalised voices, foster critical community engagement, and promote social change through inclusive practices and disruptive creativity and playfulness.

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About this report

About this report

The report presents the findings of a scoping review conducted between May and August 2024 as part of Work Package 3 of the INSPIRE (Intersectional Spaces of Participation: Inclusive, Resilient, Embedded) project, on *Co-Designing Inclusive Participation*. The primary objective of this review is to document and analyse arts-based and creative approaches in participatory processes, with a particular focus on their impact in promoting inclusive participatory policymaking and intersectional equity.

This scoping review has three main aims:

1. To assess the effectiveness of arts-based and creative approaches in fostering more inclusive, intersectional participation in policymaking processes;
2. To critically reflect on the opportunities and limitations of these approaches through an intersectional lens; and
3. To develop practical learning that will inform the design and implementation of participatory processes involving marginalised groups, as part of the INSPIRE project.

The review includes academic and grey literature published until August 2024. We focused on participatory processes that involve groups historically marginalised within policymaking and wider society (e.g., young people; people with disabilities; immigrant and ethnically minoritised communities; older women) through methods such as storytelling, Photovoice, theatre, poetry, and other arts-based and creative approaches. Our review was prompted by the assumption that these approaches can strengthen inclusion and self-expression. Further, we were interested in whether arts-based and creative approaches can address inequalities present in traditional participatory models, where entrenched differences in terms of socio-economic and cultural capital often affect equal participation through assembly formats.

To guide the review process and address whether arts-based and creative approaches facilitate more inclusive participation, we ask three overarching questions, looking at rationale, practice and impact:

1. What is the rationale for employing arts-based and creative approaches?
2. How are arts-based and creative approaches employed in participatory processes?
3. What is the impact of arts-based and creative approaches in participatory spaces on individuals, communities and policies; and how can arts-based and creative approaches facilitate participants' influence on policymaking?

The results of the scoping review show how arts-based methods are largely used within participatory research, as opposed to other participatory processes, to co-create knowledge, particularly within social policy, with the aim to challenge power structures and strengthen epistemic justice.

Structure of the report

This report is structured to address our research questions while building toward an understanding of how arts-based and creative approaches can facilitate citizens' influence on public policymaking. Following this introduction, we provide a conceptual framework that helps us distinguish between different participatory processes and clarify our intersectional approach to the analysis. We then detail our methodological approach and situate the reviewed literature within its geographical, sectoral, and

institutional context. Next, we present an overview of the main arts-based methods employed across the reviewed literature, which we grouped into three families: visual, performance-based, and narrative approaches.

The findings are organised into three main sections that mirror our research questions: we begin by examining the rationale for employing arts-based methods, then explore how these methods are implemented in practice, and finally analyse their impact on individuals, communities, and policy processes. The discussion section synthesises these findings to specifically address how arts-based and creative approaches can strengthen citizens' influence on policymaking, while also critically reflecting on the challenges and limitations identified through our review. We conclude by drawing out key implications for future practice and research in participatory and deliberative democracy.

3

Conceptual framework

Conceptual framework

Before presenting the methodology, it is important to clarify definitions of concepts that in some cases remain contested, to help the reader navigate our analysis. To begin with, we define what we mean by intersectionality, as this lens guides our analysis. We then differentiate between diverse participatory processes, clarifying distinctions between democratic innovations, coproduction and participatory research, to provide the reader with a roadmap to understand the breadth of the participatory engagement covered in the review.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is rooted in Black feminism, Indigenous feminism, queer and postcolonial theory. It emphasises that human lives cannot be reduced to single characteristics and that social categories are socially constructed and dynamic. It focuses on the inseparability of social locations, the mutual constitution of social processes and structures, and the promotion of social justice and equity. Intersectionality illuminates the complexity of the world and allows us to visualise better how oppression and social transformation operate. As such, the use of intersectionality enables a more complex understanding of people's subjective experiences of inequality and the impact on social justice in the context of deliberative and participatory practices.

To date, there has been limited engagement with intersectionality in the field of democratic scholarship, and research now points to the need for more intersectionality focused democratic innovations to contribute towards more just and equitable societies (Wojciechowska, 2019). Here we understand intersectionality as a methodological and analytical approach which deepens knowledge of how inequalities shape the ways marginalised communities engage in participatory practices.

We understand intersectionality as a tool for social transformation, which is at its core about power relations and these determine how particular identities are positioned in society, and how power is used to maintain those positions (Collins, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2016). Therefore, intersectional equity is a normative concept that is future-focused and concerned with achieving justice and fairness by considering and addressing the compounded effects of multiple forms of discrimination. It is, therefore, transformational in orientation. In this scoping review, we use intersectional equity to explore ways in which arts-based methods can or cannot strengthen inclusivity within participatory processes to help realise epistemic and social justice.

Participatory Processes

In this work, we distinguish between three main families of participatory processes: participatory deliberative democracy, coproduction, and participatory research. There are also other approaches grounded in the tradition of community development (Ledwith, 2020), activism (della Porta, 2015), and the commons (Bollier & Helfrich, 2019). Although we did not engage specifically with these literatures, boundaries can at times feel spurious and the scoping review also identified cases of grassroots and activist-led processes.

While arts-based methods are well-established within participatory research traditions, particularly in social policy contexts, their application within participatory deliberative democracy (PDD) remains relatively unexplored. Most of the literature we reviewed focuses on arts-based participatory research processes, where these methods have been successfully employed for co-creating knowledge, challenging power structures, and fostering collective processes for social change. This in itself is an important finding that illuminates some of the gaps within current practices of PDD, which to date has mostly (although not always) relied on more formal forums and talk-centric participation. By providing

definitions grounded in the recent literature, this section also attempts to highlight differences and overlaps between these different approaches to citizen participation.

Participatory Deliberative Democracy

PDD refers to processes that facilitate the participation of citizens in political decision-making, to improve the quality of democracy. Smith (2009) and Elstub and Escobar (2019) call these processes '**Democratic Innovations**' to refer to invited spaces, mostly opened by the state to increase legitimacy and strengthen lay citizens' role in policymaking, beyond voting. Democratic innovations include a broad family of processes, ranging from citizen assemblies and other so-called minipublics based on selection of participants by sortition to participatory budgeting, digital democracy and collaborative governance. Ansell and Torfing (2021) use the term co-creation, differentiating it from collaborative governance as "less state-centric and more inclusive when it comes to participation and more focused on collaborative innovation [...] a strategy for bringing public and private sectors together to engage in innovation to achieve public value." Furthermore, there is a rich literature on **participatory governance** (Heinelt, 2018), which focuses on similar state-sanctioned processes, but often (although not always) with a focus on the local level. Thus, there is certainly much overlap between these terms, which tend overall to describe similar processes.

Coproduction

Coproduction refers to the provision of public services through the active involvement of professionals, service users and other members of the community (Bovaird, 2007; Durose & Richardson, 2015; Bussu & Galanti, 2018). Definitions as well as empirical applications of coproduction vary greatly, but the focus tends to be on public service co-delivery. The term has progressively been broadened to include a variety of collaborative practices involving service users, lay citizens and professionals, from participatory research (*coproduction of knowledge*) to policy co-design and planning.

Participatory Research

At its core, participatory research recognises participants' legitimate expertise, alternative to that of academic researchers; it is concerned with co-creating new knowledge to inform action and further epistemic justice. Participatory research is necessarily a democratic process (Greenwood and Levin 1998) as research is done with rather than on participants (Herr & Anderson 2005: 5). Paulo Freire (1970) used the concept of praxis to mean reflection and action on the world to transform it, emphasising the emancipatory focus underpinning the more political approaches to participatory research, such as Participatory Action Research (PAR).

4

Methodology

Methodology

This scoping review was guided by the methodological framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), following their five-stage approach: (i) identifying the research question, (ii) identifying relevant studies, (iii) study selection, (iv) charting the data, and (v) summarising and reporting the results. We also incorporated their optional sixth stage - consultation with stakeholders - by engaging with members of our larger project consortium who provided feedback and suggested additional literature.

Search Strategy and Development

We used the three research questions mentioned in the introduction to guide the development of our systematic search strategy. The decision to choose Web of Science as our primary database was due to its capacity to yield high-quality, peer-reviewed results. The search development process was iterative and collaborative, with team members meeting regularly to discuss and refine the search strategy based on preliminary results. Through multiple iterations of searching, reviewing titles and abstracts, and analysing keywords, we gradually refined our approach to better capture relevant literature while excluding irrelevant results.

After an exhaustive review of results, we determined the search stream presented below, which reflects our intention to identify literature at the intersection of three main topics: (i) participation and deliberation, (ii) creative/arts-based methods, and (iii) inclusion of marginalised groups. The operator 'AND' was used to ensure that retrieved literature addressed all three concepts simultaneously, while 'OR' operators within each concept allowed for capturing various relevant terms and expressions within the same topic. We selectively employed truncation symbols (*) for terms where multiple variations stemming from the same root word were relevant (e.g., we used "Methodolog*" for "Methodologies and Methodology"):

("Deliberative democracy" OR "Participatory democracy" OR "Collaborative Governance" OR "Participatory Governance" OR "Participatory Budget*" OR "Participatory Process*" OR "Deliberative Process*" OR "Citizen* Assembl*") **AND** ("Arts" OR "Creative Approach*" OR "Creative Methodolog*" OR "Arts-Participation" OR "Visual method*" OR "Storytelling" OR "Legislative Theat*" OR "Forum Theat*" OR "Dance" OR "Photograph*" OR "Creative game*" OR "Participatory Performance" OR "Photovoice" OR "Music*" OR "Civic creativity" OR "Poetry" OR "Theatre" OR "street-art" OR "Participatory art") **AND** ("Diver*" OR "Equ*" OR "Inclusi*" OR "Marginali*" OR "Elder*" OR "Gender*" OR "Social justice" OR "Youth" OR "Young" OR "Women" OR "Immigrant*" OR "Refugee*" OR "Disabilities" OR "Indigenous" OR "Ethn*")

The first concept cluster captures a broad understanding of participation. We prioritised publications that employed the concepts of participatory and/or deliberative practice, ensuring relevance to public participation in broadly understood policy processes. The second cluster reflects our intention to capture arts in a broader sense while also including specific forms of creative expression. We included general terms like "Arts" and "Creative Approach*" to ensure we did not miss any overarching discussions of arts-based methods. At the same time, we incorporated specific art forms such as theatre, music, dance, and poetry to capture literature focusing on specific artistic practices of relevance to the design of the INSPIRE pilots. By including terms like "Photovoice" and "Forum Theat*," we ensured we captured innovative participatory art practices that have been developed specifically for community engagement and social change. The inclusion of "Civic Creativity" also helped us identify literature that might discuss creative approaches to civic participation more broadly.

The third cluster was designed to capture literature discussing the inclusion of a wide range of marginalised groups in participatory processes. We used broad terms like "Diver*," "Equ*," and "Inclusi*" to ensure we captured discussions of diversity, equality, and inclusion in general. We also included specific terms referring to particular marginalised groups, such as the elderly, youth, women, immigrants, refugees, people with disabilities, and indigenous populations.

After iterative refinement of search terms and review of hundreds of results, we arrived at a final search that produced 177 results aligned with our research questions. These were compiled in a shared EndNote Library for further review. We established three primary exclusion criteria:

1. Studies not involving creative/arts-based methods
2. Studies not involving or focusing on participatory processes
3. Studies that did not address the inclusion of marginalised groups in these processes

After applying these criteria, our final selection comprised 35 papers.

To address potential gaps in our literature search and ensure comprehensive coverage of the field, we implemented additional strategies, including the optional sixth stage proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) - consultation with stakeholders. We consulted with participants in Work Package 3 of the Inspire project and distributed a survey to colleagues and practitioners in the field. This process led to the identification of 23 additional sources, including academic articles, policy reports, and non-English publications. Of these, 9 sources met our full inclusion criteria and were included in our main analysis.

While insights from additional readings have informed our discussion, these were not included in the final corpus of the scoping review that underwent thematic analysis. Bibliographical details of this general literature are reported in the references at the end of this report. Annex 1 presents the complete list and description of the papers included in the scoping review.

The final corpus of 44 texts (35 from the initial Web of Science search and 9 from stakeholder consultation) underwent a collaborative coding process using NVivo software (Jackson and Bazeley, 2019). Our team-based coding approach involved multiple researchers working in parallel, followed by regular meetings to discuss and align our coding strategies. We employed an abductive process, beginning with pre-established codes derived from our research questions and existing theories, while remaining open to emerging themes and patterns in the literature (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). The regular meetings to discuss the coding process and results helped us organise the information and identify key themes and gaps in the literature, which was crucial in the writing of this report (see Annex 2, for the diagram of the codes). Figure 1 summarises the selection process.

Figure 4.1 Methodology of the scoping review



5

Arts-Based and Creative Approaches

**An Overview of the Methods and
Applications**

Arts-Based and Creative Approaches: An Overview of the Methods and Applications

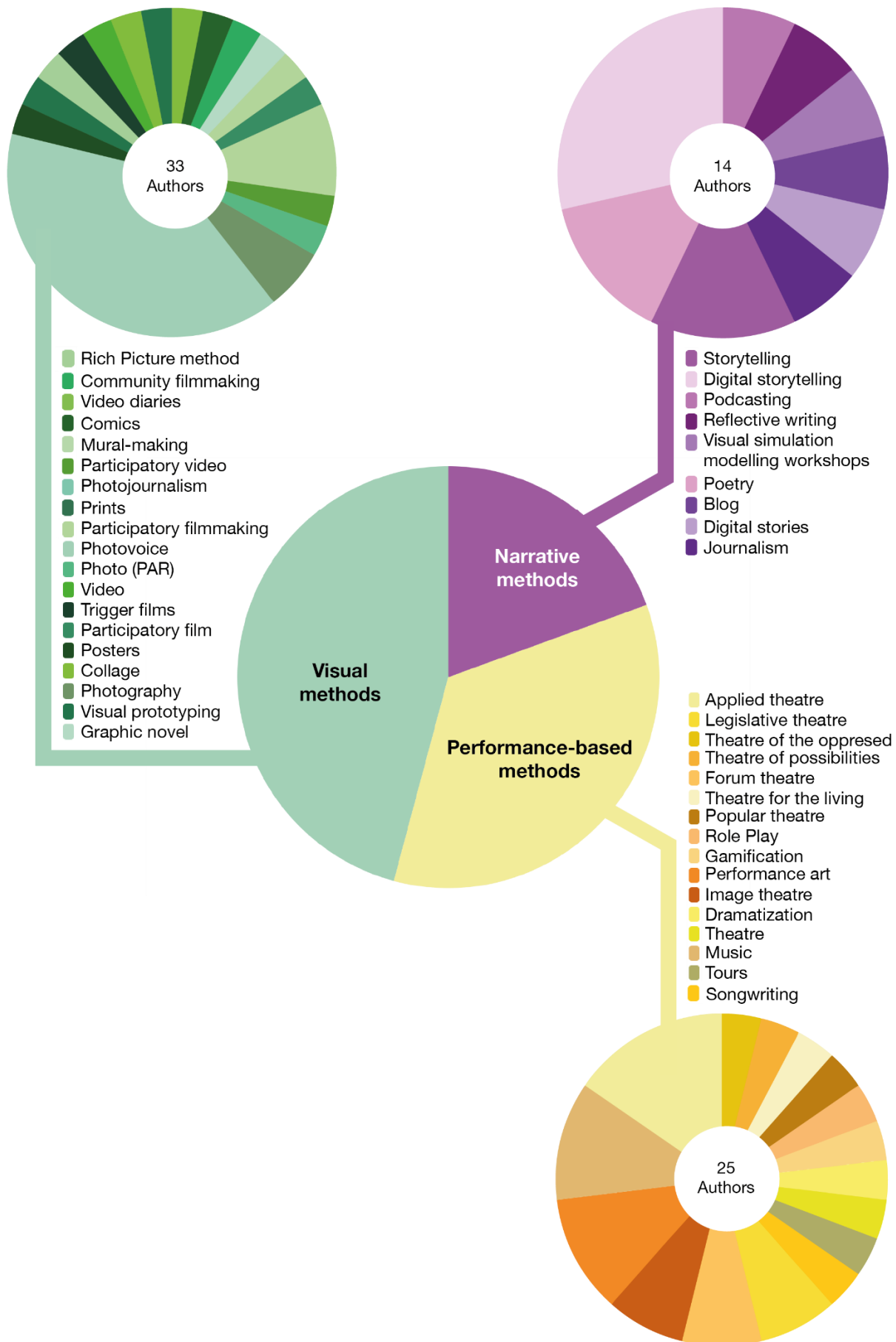
Before addressing our research questions, we present some of the main methods that we identified. It should be emphasised that, while most papers concerned processes in the Global North(s) (particularly the UK, USA, and Canada, also due to our searches being carried out in English), the review also included significant contributions from the Global South(s) (including South Africa, Brazil, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste). The studies cover both major urban centres and smaller communities.

Furthermore, the reviewed literature includes a wide range of policy areas and social issues (see Annex 1). Health-related interventions were prominent, particularly focusing on mental health, HIV education, and healthcare access. Educational initiatives were also well-represented, ranging from school-based programs to university-level projects. Urban planning and development emerged as another significant sector, with projects addressing public housing, community development, and urban sustainability. Other areas included environmental policy (particularly climate change and fisheries management), migration, peacebuilding, and youth services.

The implementation of arts-based methods across these contexts revealed various collaborative arrangements. Projects originated from different sources: some emerged from academic institutions or government organisations, while others from community activism and grassroots initiatives. Regardless of their origin, most projects evolved through collaborative processes that incorporated community input and institutional leadership.

Eisner (2008, as cited in Pereira, 2019) identifies different forms of arts-based research such as literary forms (e.g., storytelling), visual arts (e.g., photography) and new media (e.g., video). While each method has unique characteristics and applications, for systematic analysis we have thus grouped them into three main families (see Figure 2), while acknowledging that there are overlaps in these classifications: visual methods (including photography, drawing, mapping, and arts), performance-based methods (such as theatre, dance, and music), narrative methods (encompassing storytelling, poetry, and creative writing). These methods often share common characteristics or are used in combination.

Figure 5.1 Three families of arts-based and creative methods



Visual Methods

Visual methods, particularly Photovoice and participatory filmmaking, emerged as the most frequently mentioned approaches in our review. Among these, Photovoice was particularly prominent, due to its accessibility and proven effectiveness in engaging marginalised communities. Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris (Wang & Burris, 1994; Wang et al., 1996) initially adopted the concept of *photo novella* for their practice alongside women in rural China, which they later developed as the Photovoice method to differentiate it from processes of using pictures to tell a story or to teach literacy (Wang et al., 1997). Photovoice (see example in Box 1) is a Participatory Action Research (PAR) method that puts cameras in the hands of community members to document their lived experiences aiming: (1) to allow people to reflect and express their community's strengths and concerns; (2) to provide, through photography, space to develop critical dialogue and knowledge about important community issues; and (3) to generate concrete changes by reaching policymakers (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, 1999). The authors argue that the popularity of these methods may be attributed to their accessibility and ability to capture complex experiences visually, allowing participants to express ideas that might be difficult to articulate verbally, as they transcend language barriers and educational differences.

PhotoPAR is a visual method informed by Photovoice and participatory action research developed by M. Brinton Lykes (2001). This iterative approach integrates cultural practices, photography, and storytelling through cycles of action and reflection, as demonstrated in work with Mayan women examining power relations and resource access (Lykes, 2010, p. 249). The PhotoPAR process entails a mixed-method approach combining individual *Photovoices*, group analyses, interviews, field notes and other intermediary steps (Lykes, 2010).

Performance-based methods

Our review identified various forms of **performance-based methods**, with theatre being the most prominent, though music and movement-based activities also feature. These approaches are particularly valuable for their emphasis on embodied and sensory experiences, allowing participants to engage through physical expression and emotional resonance, rather than relying solely on verbal communication. Theatre in particular offers a powerful medium for exploring complex social issues and fostering dialogue. There exist several distinct approaches to theatre in participatory practices.

Applied Theatre refers to the use of theatrical techniques and processes to address social, educational, or community issues. It is a useful umbrella-term “for finding links and connections for all of us committed to the power of theatre in making a difference in the human lifespan” (Taylor, 2006, p. 93, as cited in Prendergast & Saxton, 2016). It often falls outside mainstream theatre performance and takes place “in non-traditional settings and/or with marginalised communities” (Thompson & Jackson, 2006, p.92, as cited in Prendergast & Saxton, 2016), being used as a tool for engagement, personal development or social change.

With an emphasis on utilising the arts for a social purpose such as education or community building, it can include techniques like workshops or interactive shows that invite audience participation involving “both the generation and the interpretation of a theatre piece that in performance may or may not be scripted in the traditional manner” (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016, p.7).

Developed by Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal (1979) and echoing the work of educator Paolo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) that aims to empower learners as active agents in their own education, the **Theatre of the Oppressed** is a specific form of Applied Theatre that focuses particularly on social and political issues of oppression, seeking to encourage dialogue and inspire social change

through the involvement of oppressed groups in the creation and representation of participatory theatre, enabling dialogue and exploring solutions to conflicts between different groups.

Different approaches include Forum Theatre (Boal, 1995), in which the audience (who Boal calls ‘spect-actors’) can suggest changes to a performance, “figuratively and literally leaving their seats to make ‘interventions’ to end the oppressions” (Sloane & Wallin, 2013, p. 457) and Image Theatre, which uses physical and visual representations known as freeze-frames to express both abstract feelings and realistic situations related to internal or external oppression (Boal, 1995).

The practical derivations of the Theatre of the Oppressed include, among others: Legislative Theatre (see Box 3), coined by Boal himself – a creative process to identify and propose support for new legislation (Boal, 1998); the Theatre for Living (Diamond, 2007), a practice rooted in the Theatre of the Oppressed that rejects the binary oppositions of oppressor and oppressed, aiming for inclusivity by “honouring the array of complex actors who live in a given ecosystem” (Sloane & Wallin, 2013, p. 457).

While all these methods aim to utilise theatre for social purposes, Applied Theatre has a broader scope, while the Theatre of the Oppressed as well as its derivations specifically address themes of power and resistance, focusing on the experiences of marginalised groups.

Narrative methods

Narrative methods include traditional storytelling and digital storytelling. Storytelling (see Box 3) emerges as a common method supporting various different approaches, in combination with visual, performance-based, or narrative methods. This reflects a fundamental shift towards centring personal narratives and lived experiences in participatory practices and amplifying marginalised voices (Davis et al., 2019). Personal stories serve as powerful tools for fostering empathy and understanding across diverse communities (Luchs & Miller, 2014).

While storytelling is generally understood as orally telling a story to an audience, it is rarely defined precisely and agreed upon in academic discussions (Krauss et al., 2022). However, it is understood to be essential to cognition, the building of histories and narratives, and to promoting social progress (Harris, 2019). Storytelling is a collaborative activity where a narrator recounts a sequence of events in answer to a specific task, and where the audience reacts to or guides the conversation: “The activity of storytelling can be analytically distinguished from stories or narratives which are cultural products created, transmitted, and transformed, through the storytelling activity” (Bietti et al., 2018, p. 711). By valuing the storytellers’ experience and allowing for the expression of the complexities of personal stories, storytelling has “the potential to challenge dominant knowledge systems and epistemological frameworks” (de St Croix, 2020, p. 707), “levelling playing fields and surfacing power dynamics” (Pereira et al., 2019, p. 6).

Digital storytelling is used to refer to a story told using digital media, usually in a short audio-visual clip combining photographs, voice-over narration, and other audio (Lambert, 2009, as cited in de Jager et al., 2017). It is often conducted through participatory workshops, where a comfortable space is created for participants to learn and share their stories and experiences. Digital storytelling processes – often more important than the media product itself – follow the identification of a topic (an experience or incident), the development of a storyline, and the use of digital media to create audiovisual stories about the participants’ lives or experiences (Davey & Benjaminsen, 2021).

6

**What is the
rationale for
Employing Arts-
based and
Creative
Methods?**

6.1 What is the rationale for Employing Arts-based and Creative Methods?

Our analysis of the literature revealed that arts-based and creative approaches have been employed for three main reasons: to enhance **inclusion**, realise **social justice**, and promote **democratisation**. We understand social justice, inclusion and democracy as interrelated concepts, whereby inclusion and social justice underpin substantive democracy. Social justice is key to people's capacity to participate in decisions that affect their everyday lives. In this way, social justice is entangled with and is central to conceptualisations of democracy (Valentini, 2014).

6.1.1 Inclusion

The scoping review highlighted how practitioners and researchers turn to arts-based and creative approaches to address various barriers to participation affecting marginalised groups. The aim is often to foster inclusive dialogue, either among members of these groups or between different social groups or stakeholders, while simultaneously promoting individual and collective wellbeing through meaningful engagement and self-expression.

Participatory research emphasises that knowledge co-creation, and arts-based methods are particularly effective in reframing problems and solutions from the perspective of groups whose voices are often excluded or silenced in traditional research and policymaking. These methods provide alternative ways for participants to express themselves, communicate their ideas, and share their lived experiences, thereby challenging dominant narratives and expertise. For instance, in a South African university context, Treffry-Goatley et al. (2018) used collage-making and storytelling with fifteen students to explore experiences of sexual violence on campus, specifically choosing these methods to help articulate sensitive information that might be difficult to share through conventional channels (see Box 1). Similarly, Sloane and Wallin (2013) employed Theatre of the Commons techniques with refugee youth, guardians and community members to address language barriers and social isolation in school settings, helping participants develop strategies to overcome communication challenges.

Box 1: Storytelling on sexual violence

Storytelling: Sexual Violence in South African Universities

The study by Treffry-Goatley et al. (2018) demonstrates how storytelling, combined with collage-making, can create safe spaces for addressing sensitive and traumatic topics like sexual violence. Through two participatory workshops with 15 university students across two South African universities, researchers used storytelling to help participants break the silence around sexual violence and stimulate critical dialogue for change.

In this case study, the researchers demonstrate how storytelling enables deep reflection and meaning-making by allowing participants to process difficult experiences through a culturally resonant medium. This resonance was particularly significant as storytelling has historically played a central role in South African cultural and political discourse. The researchers found that the method's effectiveness was enhanced when combined with visual methods like collage, as this combination created multiple pathways for expression and reduced the pressure of direct verbal communication about trauma. The approach offered participants different ways to articulate their experiences, thoughts, and feelings, making the process more accessible and less intimidating when discussing sensitive topics like sexual violence.

This study also revealed important limitations of arts-based methods when addressing sensitive and potentially traumatic experiences. The intimate nature of storytelling required careful ethical considerations to avoid re-traumatizing participants, and participation was necessarily limited to small groups who already knew each other to maintain psychological safety.

Photovoice (see Box 2) can effectively capture aspects of life that might be overlooked in more talk-centric forums. In Quebec, Loignon et al. (2020) used this method with people living in poverty to reflect on healthcare inequalities. House et al. (2024) employed it with women aged 20-35 involved in fisheries monitoring programs in Timor-Leste. A similar approach was used in Hong Kong, where Kwok and Ku (2008) developed visual simulation modelling workshops with newly arrived immigrant women from mainland China, who often faced environmental stress and socio-economic limitations. Through these workshops, participants could construct their ideal home and community, offering a way to communicate complex ideas about urban planning without relying solely on verbal expression. The authors specifically chose Photovoice to "encourage the participants to become aware of, and then to comment freely upon, their living environment" (p. 270). This choice came from a recognition of how environmental stress and socio-economic limitations had hindered these women's ability to communicate expectations about their living space.

Box 2: Photovoice to capture Black women's perspectives on neighbourhood safety

The Women of Northeast Oklahoma City Photovoice Project

The article "Black women's perspectives on neighbourhood safety: Reflections from The Women of Northeast Oklahoma City Photovoice Project" written by Davis et al. (2019) presents findings from the Women of Northeast Oklahoma City Photovoice Project, a participatory action research initiative involving 26 African American women co-researchers. Using the photovoice method, the co-researchers photographed their neighbourhoods to understand and expose unmet safety needs in their community.

A key strength of the photovoice approach was its ability to centre Black women's everyday experiences and perspectives, which are often marginalised in traditional urban safety research and policy. By having the co-researchers control the data generation and interpretation process, the project was able to produce an intersectional understanding of Black women's complex relationships to neighbourhood safety.

In terms of impact, the photovoice project had significant community-level effects. It provided a platform for the co-researchers to elevate their voices and experiences, leading to concrete policy changes like the demolition of abandoned buildings. Further, the co-researchers' collective analysis pointed to the need for Black women to gain political and economic control over urban development processes, in order to achieve meaningful improvements in neighbourhood safety and wellbeing.

Arts-based and creative approaches are also employed to encourage deeper reflection and critical thinking among participants. In Liverpool, UK, Ronzi et al. (2016) employed Photovoice with 26 older adults across different socioeconomic areas to encourage critical reflection on how cities could better support ageing populations. In South Africa, Francis (2013) worked with 16–18-year-old learners using Forum Theatre to enable students to critically reflect on and challenge heterosexism and heteronormativity in their school.

Mecca & Ballesté-Isern (2024) point out that Applied Theatre (AT) creates conditions for non-paternalistic and non-stigmatising experiences by using body-based and affective approaches. In their project with young unaccompanied immigrants from North Africa, they used this technique to provide a space for marginalised youth to voice their life situations on their own terms, thus ensuring diverse voices were heard and respected.

6.1.2 Social Justice

There is an underlying expectation that meaningful engagement through arts-based methods can promote both individual and collective wellbeing through enhanced self-expression, personal growth, and stronger community bonds. The connection between inclusion and social justice is powerfully demonstrated in participatory democracy processes like Legislative Theatre (LT). Bussu et al. (forthcoming) studied how LT was used to explore youth mental health in Greater Manchester. Through a process "grounded in their communities and pre-existing grassroots work to foster embeddedness and increase opportunities for impact" young people co-designed their own spaces of participation to reframe the way youth mental health is understood and addressed (ibid, p.1).

Box 3: Legislative Theatre on Mental Health

Legislative Theatre for Youth Mental Health

In their paper "Redefining Youth Mental Health through a youth-led Mindset Revolution," Bussu et al. (forthcoming) describe how the Mindset Revolution project employed Legislative Theatre with young people to influence policy change on youth mental health. A group of diverse young people were trained as LT facilitators to work with peers to create a play on their experience of navigating youth mental health support. Their play "Mask to Break" depicts a Global Majority young person's struggles navigating a mental health system entrenched in racist and ableist practices. Working with an audience of community members and a team of policymakers that became "spect-actors" during the performance, the young people co-created policy ideas to address the problems they identified.

The strength of LT lies in its ability to transform traditional policy engagement into an accessible and embodied experience. Through games, improvisation, and performance, young people could explore complex policy issues, moving from understanding mental health as individual weakness to building a collective voice to challenge structural oppressions.

The implementation of this method also presented challenges. It required significant time investment to build trust and confidence among participants, particularly as they stepped into facilitation roles that pushed them beyond their comfort zones. The process also faced institutional barriers, and young people had to navigate moments of deflation as policymakers' responses did not always meet their expectations.

In terms of impact and inclusivity, LT proved effective in creating spaces where young people could build a collective voice to make sense of complex intersectional experiences. The method's playful and embodied approach helped overcome traditional barriers to participation in policy processes.

Arts-based methods can help catalyse collective action for social justice. Trott (2019) designed a Photovoice project with children aged 10-12 to promote climate change action (see Box 4). The project sought to empower children to become agents of sustainable change by creating opportunities for them to design and implement their own community action projects - from policy advocacy and tree-planting campaigns to creating public photo galleries and community gardens. As Trott explains, these youth-led initiatives were intended to help children "feel a general sense of self-efficacy to accomplish goals in life, beyond environmental protection" (p.54).

Box 4: Interactive Games for participatory democracy and research

Participatory plays and games

The scoping review identified two examples that show this and gives us interesting insights. A participatory action research project described by Trott (2019), "Science, Camera, Action!" engaged 55 children (ages 10-12) in after-school climate change education and action through interactive games, arts-based activities, and youth-led community projects across three Boys and Girls Clubs in Northern Colorado. The second example is a participatory deliberative democracy initiative presented by Gouache (2022) in Marcoussis, France, where over 500 citizens participated in a two-year process to co-create their town's future vision for 2038 through multiple creative and playful approaches.

Both cases demonstrate how playful approaches can transform what might otherwise be overwhelming or abstract topics into accessible, engaging experiences. In Trott's program, children engaged with complex climate concepts through games like "energy bingo" and "greenhouse gas tag," making learning both enjoyable and memorable. Similarly, in Marcoussis, the "Market for the Future" turned policy planning into an engaging game where citizens used fictional local currency called "Marcoussous" to "invest" in future initiatives, creating meaningful dialogue about priorities and trade-offs.

Griffiths et al. (2006) shows how arts-based education in schools could advance social justice by helping marginalised students learn to participate in public spaces. Their action research across three schools serving disadvantaged communities showed that creative work with artists (dancers, sculptors, painters, and musicians) created conditions for what they term "deep democracy", where children who were typically excluded or silent gained the experience and confidence to exercise voice and agency. Similarly, Moletsane et al. (2009) used Photovoice with Grade 8 and 9 school learners to address HIV stigma in rural South Africa. Beyond simply documenting experiences, the process enabled "spaces to make voices heard and to share ideas" while "contributing to developing a sense of personal (individual) and collective agency for taking action on one's own behalf as well as on behalf of others" (Moletsane et al., 2009, p. 26).

6.1.3 Democratisation

The scoping review revealed limited explicit reference to the use of arts-based and creative participatory methods as a tool of democratisation. Rather authors reflected more broadly on how advancing a sense of inclusion, equality and social justice can strengthen feelings of belonging to a democratic community. We follow John Dewey's (1927) concept of democratisation which emphasises the idea that democracy does not equate with institutional arrangements and extends beyond a mere political system to encompass everyday life, as characterised by active participation, communication, and shared experiences. Similarly to Freire and the PAR tradition, Dewey advocated for education as an emancipatory tool to foster critical thinking, collaboration, and a sense of community that can support people as they engage in democratic life. Deepening democracy might thus mean democratising new spaces in society: the workplace, the school, even the family. In this respect, arts-based participatory processes are concerned with the creation of critical communities that can strengthen the embeddedness of democracy in everyday life (Koczanowicz, 2016).

In educational settings, researchers have employed arts-based methods to address complex institutional challenges. Sloan and Wallin (2013) employed Theatre of the Commons techniques with refugee youth in Canada, guardians and community members in school settings to address language barriers and social isolation. The aim of their research was to help participants to develop strategies to overcome communication challenges through theatrical exercises, as a method for expanding democratic communities.

The democratic potential of arts-based and creative methods has also been demonstrated in evaluation processes of community services, challenging traditional top-down assessment approaches. In England for example, de St Croix (2020) worked with youth workers and young people to develop storytelling workshops as an alternative to conventional impact measurement in youth services. This approach aimed to communicate the impact and importance of youth work through collective reflection rather than managerial metrics. These approaches to using participatory arts-based research for evaluation align with broader efforts to democratise institutional accountability.

In contexts of social and political marginalisation, researchers and activists have employed arts-based methods to amplify voices often excluded from public discourse. Lykes et al. (2022) for instance, engaged with Maya Ixil and K'iche' women in Guatemala through feminist participatory action research using photography (photoPAR), enabling participants to document their experiences of recovering from genocidal violence and reclaiming their traditions. Their work demonstrated how creative workshops could serve as sites for collective healing and community mobilisation. Arts-based participatory methods such as those used in the work of Lykes et al. (2022) are rooted in an understanding that lived experience plays a pivotal role in deepening democracy by broadening participation, fostering empathy, and challenging dominant narratives within democratic processes (Nussbaum, 2003).

Kwok and Ku's research (2008) exemplifies participatory research in urban planning. Their research focuses on the use of Photovoice and visual simulation modelling workshops with newly arrived women from mainland China in Hong Kong to facilitate their participation in urban planning discussions. Their aim was to enable these marginalised voices to contribute meaningfully to public discourse and decision-making processes on planning issues that directly affected these women's lives.

More recently, House et al. (2024) worked with women in Timor-Leste using Photovoice to document their experiences in fisheries monitoring programs, enabling participants to share their experiences of fisheries management. For House et al. (2024) photo stories as a method for participatory research demonstrated that relationships are critically important in developing spaces suitable for participatory processes. The relationships that are created by co-creators in research such as House et al.'s can advance collective action and advocacy.

Many of these processes did not have concrete policy outcomes that could claim impact on democratic institutions. However, by prefiguring more empathetic communities of care, greater unity and even strengthening social imaginaries, they can be critical tools for democratisation, as defined above, through inclusive and empowering processes (Nunn, 2022).

7

How are Arts-Based and Creative Methods Employed in Practice?

7.2 How are Arts-Based and Creative Methods Employed in Practice?

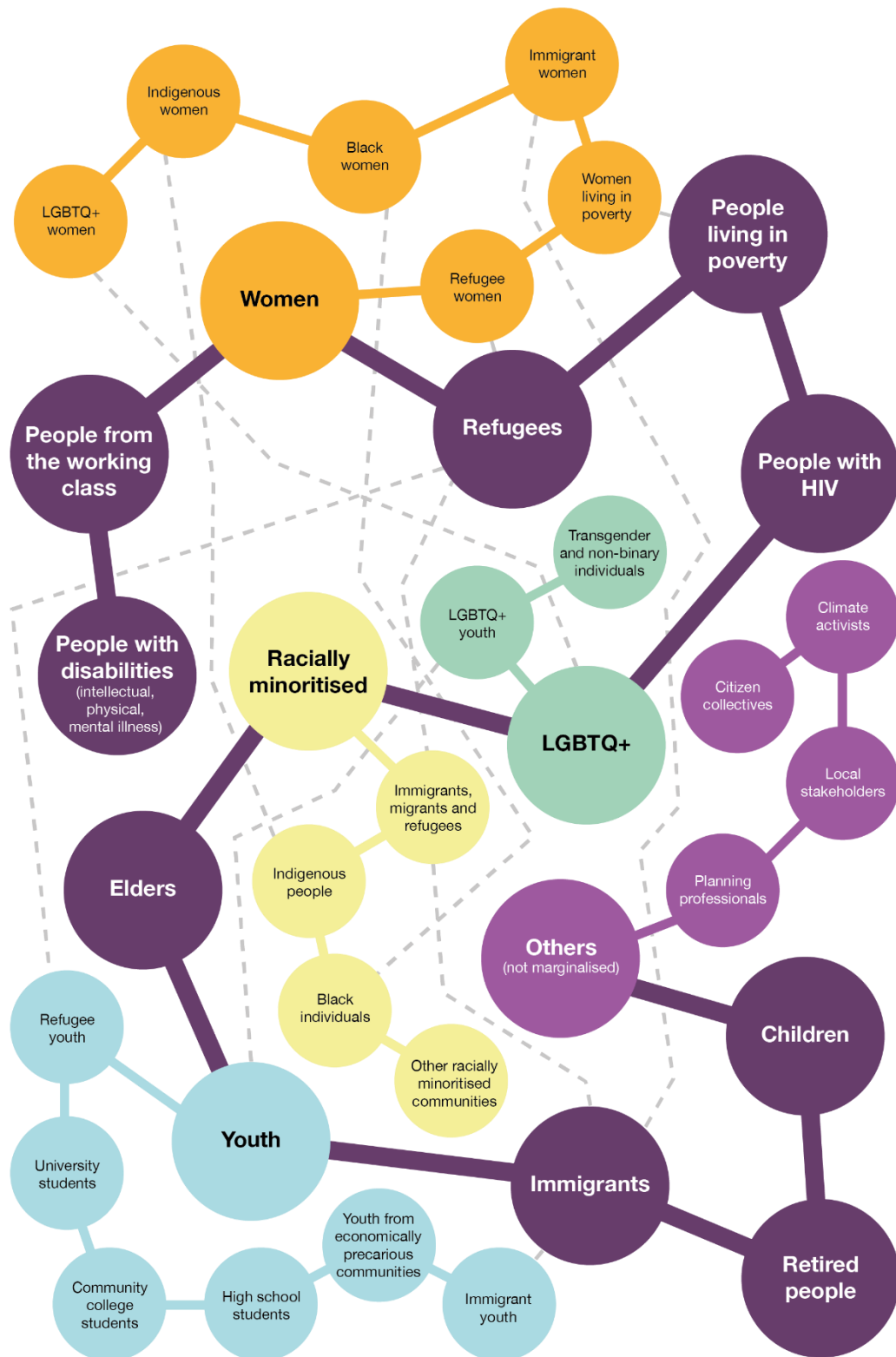
In this section, we delve into the practical aspects of arts-based methods in participatory engagement processes, examining who were the participants, how the organisers dealt with the identities and experiences of the participants, and how these methods have been implemented to accommodate participants' specific needs. These elements are intrinsically linked, reflecting the overarching rationale of including marginalised groups in participatory processes and the practical steps taken to achieve this goal.

7.2.1 Participants and Intersectionality

Our analysis revealed a diverse range of participants across the reviewed studies. These included young people, women, ethnically minoritised groups, immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people living in poverty, among others (see Figure 3). While some studies focused on specific demographic groups, many worked with participants who embodied multiple, overlapping identities and experiences of marginalisation. How authors approached and wrote about participants' identities varied - some explicitly problematised identity categories and discussed the complexities of representation, while others adopted more straightforward demographic descriptions. This diversity and complexity of participants' backgrounds and experiences call for an intersectional analysis of participatory practices.

Drawing from our definitions section, we understand intersectionality as a framework which emphasises that human lives cannot be reduced to single characteristics and that social categories are socially constructed and dynamic. Through this lens, our scoping review reveals how intersectionality manifests in participatory practices, particularly through arts-based and creative approaches. Many studies worked with participants holding multiple identities, historically marginalised in policymaking and society - for instance, young LGBTQ+ people, immigrant women, or Indigenous women affected by poverty. While explicit theoretical engagement with intersectionality varied across studies, several key insights emerged that can deepen our understanding of how intersecting forms of oppression shape participatory experiences.

Figure 7.1 Participant groups



For instance, Lykes et al. (2022), in their participatory action research with Maya women in Guatemala, highlight the importance of understanding how "racialized and gendered violence" (p. 218) intersects to compound trauma and impact wellbeing. Their work with Indigenous women who survived genocidal violence demonstrates the importance of understanding overlapping forms of oppression. In participatory research, this recognition of intersecting oppressions shapes how knowledge is produced. Crucial to an intersectional approach is the centring of lived experience in knowledge co-creation. This is expressed by Davis et al. (2019) who studied Black women's experiences of safety in Oklahoma City. The authors assert that "meaningful knowledge production must be recentred and guided by Black women themselves" (p. 917), and this process can lead to a more nuanced and relevant understanding of complex social issues affecting them.

Another critical aspect underscored in the literature is the importance of recognising the complexities of intersectional identities within groups that may appear homogeneous at first glance. Some researchers explicitly recognise that the issues they are studying through arts-based and creative methods are compounded by intersectionality. For instance, Treffry-Goatley et al. (2018) found that "sexual violence is entrenched in gender inequality and discrimination, which is deepened by the intersectionality of sex, race, and class" (p. 14). Additionally, McQuaid and Plastow (2017), working with women in Uganda through applied theatre, recognise how intersecting oppressions can lead to internalised subordination, noting that many women "felt unable - even unworthy - to contribute to discussions on topics dealing with more than everyday life, and on many occasions deferred to any men present" (p. 969).

Even when researchers employ explicitly feminist approaches to participatory methods, intersectional limitations must be carefully considered and acknowledged. For instance, Burkett and Carter (2020), despite using Photovoice as a feminist participatory methodology to challenge male-dominated narratives in recreational fishing, recognise that their limited collection of socio-economic information about participants prevented a deeper intersectional feminist analysis. This limitation restricted their ability to understand how gender interacts with multiple group identities and institutional differences to shape women's experiences.

7.2.2 Inclusivity strategies

Researchers and practitioners often find themselves needing to adopt strategies throughout the process to better serve their participants and achieve project goals. The changes reflect a responsiveness to the challenges and opportunities that arise in participatory processes, as well as a commitment to creating more inclusive environments. These changes demonstrate sensitivity to how methods are used with groups as well as the relationships between facilitators and participants.

Sensitivity to participants' needs

The inclusivity strategies often reflect the rationale for employing arts-based methods in the first place, bearing in mind the characteristics of each participant group that would require such adaptations to take place. Several studies reported adapting their methods to accommodate participants' needs and capacities. MacDonald et al. (2011) note that when using role-play with adolescents to discuss sensitive topics such as sexual risk-taking behaviours, "a safe space for expressing their views" (p. 1131) can be ensured by matching facilitators and participants in gender and age. In this way, facilitators can "convey acceptance verbally and nonverbally when discussing sexual health topics, promot[ing] a sense of control within the participants" (p. 1130).

Inclusivity strategies can help respond to cultural norms, as in Phoenix et al. (2024). The authors suggest developing cultural humility by following communities' rules rather than relying on own

assumptions. However, at times inclusivity might entail challenging cultural norms in a community rather than reinforcing them. McQuaid and Plastow (2017), in a long-term project promoting a community's capacity to unite across social barriers and challenging systemic injustices under a fiercely patriarchal society, allowed participants autonomy to form their own groups. However, "when the group would meet or rehearse, this group of men would often state their ideas and expect—and get—others to acquiesce" (p. 977). After an agreement that women should be represented in decision-making, strategies were taken such as a secret ballot to elect signatories for an organisation's bank account and management positions, a decision that rebalanced power between male and female participants.

Ensuring inclusive environments

The creation of more inclusive environments for participants - where everyone is willing and able to voice their opinions - is one of the main reasons for the employment of inclusivity strategies. Loignon et al. (2020) used Photovoice to address poverty in primary care systems involving People Living in Poverty (PLP), who often feel discredited by such systems. They ensured the group of PLP had someone "who understood their reality and how to create the necessary conditions to facilitate their expression of their experiential knowledge and their collaboration" (p. 218) to accompany them through healthcare processes. This ensured that care was taken to avoid the instrumentalisation of their experiences. Participants were also financially compensated for each session to strengthen their "engagement in the project, leading them to 'give priority to their participation in project' meetings' over other types of activities" (p. 219). These strategies promoted the active participation of the patient participants, leading to changes in primary care systems and avoiding the "research to end up on a shelf" (p. 221).

Jimenez et al. (2021) emphasise the complexity of working with marginalised young people, particularly when dealing with sensitive or traumatic subjects. They found that "stories with unresolved endings or themes of victimisation which focused on important moments or trauma, more so than those stories of resilience, required more involvement by the adult – not only to help process, but to shape the stories in a way that would be accessible to a public audience and empower youth" (p. 201). The authors underscore the need for comprehensive training of facilitators that goes beyond technical skills to include awareness of systemic social issues to ensure sensitive handling of difficult topics.

Responsiveness

Many authors recognised their positionality and the need to actively address power dynamics within participatory processes. On a project with former refugee youth, Sloane and Wallin (2013) employed Forum and Image Theatre aiming (1) for students to develop their critical consciousness and agency around issues of social injustices to inspire social change, and (2) for opening space for problematising the oppressiveness of the English language, reducing some of the language barriers in the school community. The researchers presented two main inclusivity strategies to address these aims: firstly, through demonstrations of "confidence in the participants' ability to work through disagreements with one another" (p. 459) without making impositions or micromanaging their relations; secondly, through approaches to help the participants overcome language barriers in social situations, including through the use of non-verbal communication, sign language, music, and access to translators and interpreters. These strategies helped participants "to have control over the construction of their stories, and to shape how the embodiment of those experiences within the individual and social environment is communicated" (p. 462). They also helped to develop critical consciousness in relation to language barriers, helping them to better "articulate the ways in which they could deal with them" (p. 466).

By tailoring approaches to the specific needs of participant groups, researchers and practitioners enhance the potential for meaningful engagement and impactful outcomes. This is particularly crucial when working with communities that have historically been excluded from traditional research and policymaking processes.

7.2.3 Challenges

Arts-based methods introduce additional layers of power complexity within participatory spaces. Hong (2018) highlights how funding structures directly impact artistic independence, noting that "For most artists, the issue of funding is tied to the limits of his/her autonomy." (p. 414) Artists often face "strategic choice[s] in either aligning with existing political boundaries and if or when to take up state funding" (Hong, 2018, p. 413). These challenges - from funding constraints to emotional labour - often overlap and intersect in complex ways, inadvertently creating multi-layered barriers to participation and engagement.

Funding

Rasmussen (2017) elaborates on this dynamic, pointing out how projects funded through traditional art channels often face pressure to prioritise artistic outcomes over participatory goals. This can lead to situations where "the projects are legitimated by established performance artists and funded as 'proper' art projects, interferes with the political ambitions and creates problems and impairment of potential." (p. 9) The result is often a prioritisation of theatrical performance over authentic democratic expression and dialogue. This reveals a fundamental paradox in arts funding, where the very structures meant to support creative expression can end up constraining its democratic and transformative potential. This suggests that the institutionalisation of participatory arts through traditional funding channels might inadvertently reinforce rather than challenge existing power dynamics in cultural production.

Ownership and control

Several authors highlight challenges related to transferring ownership of both process and outcomes to participants (Abraham, 2023; Kwok & Ku, 2008; Redwood et al., 2022). As Kwok and Ku (2008) explicitly express, "We are also struggling with how to transfer 'ownership' of the project into the hands of the local community." (p. 279) Redwood et al. (2022) further elaborate on this issue, noting that "the notion of taking control was itself an unnerving process" (p. 51) for some participants in their project. They explain that participants became overwhelmed by the open-ended participatory approach, as they were not used to being given such ownership and responsibility. Some participants disengaged because they felt producing the films was an unachievable task.

Vulnerability

Power dynamics extend beyond institutional structures to shape how arts-based and creative methods develop and operate across multiple dimensions, including gender, language, race, and class, reflecting the intersectional nature of exclusion discussed earlier. Mecca and Ballesté-Isern's (2024) work with young immigrants from North Africa living in Spain provides an example of these dynamics. Their research reveals that even when activities focused on bodily expression rather than verbal communication, additional layers of exclusion emerged, as "the privileges afforded by gender and the classed dimensions of language confound such easy conclusions" about participation (p. 10). Their findings highlight how language proficiency intersects with other forms of social privilege to create complex barriers to engagement, even in supposedly non-verbal artistic practices.

These challenges reflect the intersectional complexities identified by scholars like Walsh and Burnett (2021), where dynamics of class, language, gender, race, and able-bodiedness shape participation in profound ways. Butterwick and Selman (2003) describe how creative processes can generate "feelings of unease" (p. 13) during periods of creation and sharing, particularly when dealing with sensitive or personal material. This vulnerability becomes especially apparent in performance contexts, as illustrated in their study of a theatre project where discomfort arose during cross-racial casting, revealing unaddressed tensions around race and representation.

These vulnerabilities become even more pronounced when considering the permanent nature of certain artistic methods. Visual methods like film and photography raise particularly complex ethical issues around representation. The permanent and potentially wide-reaching nature of visual documentation can amplify the power dynamics and vulnerabilities already present in participatory artistic processes, making it crucial for practitioners to carefully balance visibility with protection.

Barriers to participation

Arts-based and creative methods can further problematise issues of self-censorship, as the latter can interact with practical aspects of artistic methods, creating multiple layers of barriers to participation. Walsh and Burnett (2021) observed this dynamic in their video documentation, where participants who were comfortable discussing sensitive topics in private became noticeably less confident when speaking on camera, highlighting how the choice of the documentation method can affect participants' expression and willingness to participate. Their research revealed how participants' hesitation stemmed from multiple concerns: fear of repercussions from white landowners if they spoke openly about land issues, worry about backlash from their own political or religious organisations, and anxiety about the permanent nature of filmed documentation. As one participant noted, people were "scared of the ears that will hear and the reaction" (Walsh & Burnett 2021, p. 617). This self-censorship was particularly evident in discussions about land justice, where the permanence of video recording made participants cautious about expressing anger or strong opinions that could later be used against them. The hesitation of the participants reveals how technical elements of artistic methods can amplify existing power dynamics and vulnerabilities, especially in contexts where speaking out carries real social, economic, and political risks. This demonstrates how the choice of the medium itself - in this case, video - can become entangled with broader issues of surveillance, exposure, and the complex web of local power relations that shape who feels safe to speak and what they feel safe to say.

The unfamiliarity or perceived difficulty of artistic methods can thus create a double barrier - one of technical skill and one of emotional discomfort. Sextou and Smith (2017) note that some participants/potential participants were afraid of art methods, with many expressing fears of exposure or inadequacy. The interplay between practical barriers and emotional vulnerability further complicates this landscape. When participants feel inadequate about their artistic abilities or uncomfortable with documentation methods, these practical challenges can amplify existing power imbalances and reinforce self-censorship. This suggests that practitioners need to consider not just the artistic and participatory aspects of their methods, but also how practical requirements might create additional barriers for participants.

Methodological Limitations

The interpretation of artistic outputs presents significant methodological challenges. Amazonas et al. (2019) explain that artistic outputs can be affected by "ambiguous elements, researcher bias, or lack of familiarity with local realities and worldviews" (p.352). Details such as distance, centrality, colour, and

size of elements can reflect emotions or subjective conditions of the picture's author, making interpretation both challenging and rich with information. The character of visual data means that researchers must constantly balance between simplifying for analysis and maintaining the complexity inherent in artistic expression.

This raises questions about how meaning is derived from artistic data and what might be lost or misinterpreted in the process. In this case, Amazonas et al. (2019) found that researchers from the Global Norths have a tendency to separate 'nature' and 'culture' into distinct categories that did not align with Indigenous cosmologies, potentially leading to misreading of artistic representations. While arts-based methods offer valuable opportunities for capturing complex knowledge, particularly across cultural boundaries, the challenges of interpretation highlight the importance of being explicit about the limitations and potential biases in the research process.

Emotional Labour

The implementation of arts-based methods raises distinct ethical challenges that go beyond those typically encountered in traditional participatory processes. For instance, arts-based methods, while offering powerful tools for engagement and expression, can inadvertently create new forms of vulnerability and ethical concerns through their very artistic nature. The burden of emotional labour is particularly acute for participants from marginalised communities. Switzer (2020) describes how one participant, Buttercup, described as “a trans woman of colour”, experienced burnout from the constant pressure to share her stories and serve as a role model. This example highlights how arts-based participation can inadvertently add to the emotional burden of individuals already navigating systemic oppression, leading Switzer to emphasise that “sustainable supports were needed so that youth ‘can continue to work progressively’” (p. 181).

8

**What is the
impact of arts-
based and
creative
methods?**

8.1 What is the impact of arts-based and creative methods?

All participatory processes can have a profound impact on individuals, communities, and government institutions. We find that arts-based approaches both amplify and problematise the impact of participation on marginalised groups.

8.1.1 Impact on individuals

While arts-based and creative methods are often implemented with explicit aims of catalysing social change and influencing policy, as discussed in the rationale chapter, our review revealed an interesting tension between these intentions and actual outcomes. The work of Latz (2012) and Elliott (2021) suggest that the most significant impact of arts-based methods, similarly to other participatory processes, concerns individual transformation, as all recognise the structural limitations of these often-micro projects to achieve more structural change. Latz's (2012), in her examination of Photovoice methodology, revealed that participants primarily experienced what she terms "reflective consciousness" - a deep introspective awareness of their personal journeys - rather than the critical consciousness for social change traditionally associated with Photovoice. Similarly, Elliott (2021) found that while their Legislative Theatre project failed to impact formal Youth Parliament decision-making processes, it significantly enhanced participants' sense of empowerment and ability to imagine alternative futures. As argued by Asenbaum et al. (forthcoming), impact on participants can potentially open opportunities for broader social change when situated in a "wider vision of structural transformation, institutionalization and embeddedness", whereby participatory scholars and practitioners more explicitly link their practice and small-scale initiatives to wider projects that can help "advance structural analysis" and systemic change.

An important, yet often overlooked, outcome of arts-based participatory methods is the enjoyment participants experience during the process. Bussu et al. (forthcoming) write on their work using Legislative Theatre with young people on mental health and note how "a crucial aspect of LT as a practice [is] that is based on structured and purposeful fun to dismantle power dynamics and co-create new relational dynamics, through openness to discovery and play. This allowed young people to make noise, take space, and act silly, while considering seriously what social change can mean and what it should look like". House et al. (2024), working with women fishery monitors in Timor-Leste, noted that participants in their Photovoice project "enjoyed learning about photography and storytelling" (p.15), indicating that the process itself was a source of pleasure and engagement.

The development of new communication skills was a key outcome across various studies (De Vecchi et al., 2016; MacDonald et al., 2015; House et al., 2024). Pereira et al. (2019) noted that fiction writing and creative storytelling around concrete topics allow people to express different meanings, engage with emotions, and think about future possibilities. Studies across diverse contexts report enhanced participant self-expression and emotional processing through arts-based methods (Vargas et al., 2022; Abraham, 2023; De St. Croix, 2020; Latz, 2012; Trott, 2019; Clennon et al., 2015; Loignon et al., 2020). Luchs and Miller (2014) found that collective storytelling helped share stories that "could unlock an unspeakable past" (p.443), highlighting the potential of arts-based approaches for emotional healing.

The culmination of these impacts often led to significant personal growth and empowerment. Numerous studies reported increased confidence and self-esteem among participants (Kwok & Ku, 2008; McQuaid & Plastow, 2017; Sloane & Wallin, 2013; Gittings et al., 2022; Vargas et al., 2022; Bussu et al., forthcoming). McQuaid and Plastow (2017), working in Uganda, observed that women involved in their applied theatre project reported feeling "less isolated, had increased knowledge and confidence, and

had new purpose in working to achieve 'community development'" (p. 974). This empowerment was often linked to the new skills developed through the arts-based processes.

While the impacts discussed thus far focus primarily on the participants, practitioners and researchers also reported significant learnings through these processes. The organisers gained knowledge about their participants and improved their reflexivity and self-awareness through these learning processes. Francis (2013), reflecting on Forum Theatre work addressing heterosexism in South African schools, reported gaining insights into praxis and biases. Loignon et al. (2020) emphasised how practitioners' self-awareness led to methodological improvements.

8.1.2 Impact on communities

Arts-based and creative methods have demonstrated significant potential for strengthening social capital and fostering collective action within communities. This impact manifests in various ways: strengthening social bonds, facilitating knowledge sharing, enhancing community identity, and catalysing collective action for social change.

Several papers revealed how arts-based methods are often employed with the expectation of fostering social cohesion and collective resilience, thus contributing to the overall wellbeing of the community (Trott, 2019; Lykes et al., 2022; Kwok & Ku, 2008). For instance, McQuaid and Plastow (2017) used Applied Theatre techniques in Walukuba, Uganda, to bring together different generations and genders in addressing community issues. Through weekly participatory workshops, they created non-hierarchical spaces where traditionally marginalised voices, particularly those of women, were able to contribute equally to discussions on social, economic and environmental challenges facing their community. Similarly, MacDonald et al. (2015), in their research on using youth-led participatory video in Rigolet to enhance Inuit youth adaptive capacities for dealing with climate change, found that the project had a significant impact at the community level. Community members recognised the value of youth-created videos to share perspectives, start discussions, and inform programming and decision-making around issues relevant to young people, including climate change adaptation.

The scoping review showed that arts-based and creative methods can strengthen the connections among participants, for example, by creating new friendships and networks, thus building new social capital (Gittings et al., 2022; Fiddian-Green & Gubrium, 2021). Sextou and Smith (2017) observed that recreational drama activities for older adults led to new friendships, with participants reporting that they "met up with other members outside of class" (p. 280) and created a sense of loyalty within the group. Similarly, Kwok and Ku (2008) noted that their Photovoice project "helped to establish relationships among these newly arrived women, strengthening their social cohesion" (p.279). This social cohesion emerged through several key mechanisms: the creation of safe spaces where women with similar migration experiences could meet and interact and the development of informal support networks where participants shared resources and information about housing, education and employment.

These methods contribute to an increased sense of belonging and community identity. For instance, Photovoice contribute significantly to strengthening community bonds and collective identity through multiple mechanisms. House et al. (2024), in research on participatory fisheries monitoring in Timor-Leste, found that participants constructed "a narrative of personal learning and growth, alongside increased community education and autonomy to manage marine resources" (p. 15).

This potential for community healing and resilience-building - not just as bouncing back but forward towards alternative and more inclusive futures - is particularly evident in contexts of historical trauma or ongoing conflict. Lykes et al. (2022) demonstrate this through their long-term PhotoPAR work with Maya

Ixil and K'iche' women in Chajul, Guatemala. Rather than positioning participants solely as victims of armed conflict, PhotoPAR enabled them to document their "herstory" through participatory methods, contributing to community rebuilding. Through taking photographs, conducting interviews, and creating collaborative narratives, women could share previously unvoiced experiences and document their Mayan traditions and cultural practices that had been under attack.

8.1.3 Impact on Government and Policy Change

These initiatives often address specific policy issues within the confines of small-scale projects, rather than connecting to broader participatory democracy processes and visions. There is limited evidence on the long-term effects of arts-based and creative methods on democratic institutions and processes. It should be emphasised, however, that there is limited available empirical research into the policy impact of participatory processes more broadly. Indeed, there are criticisms of current PDD practice for having limited explicit impact on policy (Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018; Bussu et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, the papers reviewed discuss the potential of these practices in influencing policymaking processes and state institutions, primarily by influencing discourses and increasing visibility and representation of marginalised voices. As described above, there is value-added by the arts-based and creative methods used in research that can strengthen inclusivity, ensure embedded participation and advance participatory cultures. Several studies highlight how arts-based methods can impact public discourse and challenge existing stereotypes and demonstrate how such methods can add value to the deliberative spaces (Nunn, 2022; Bussu et al., 2022).

Arts-based participatory methods have proven particularly effective at including marginalised voices in policy discussions. In Quebec, Loignon et al. (2020) used Photovoice with people living in poverty and healthcare professionals to reflect on healthcare inequalities, leading to increased awareness among healthcare teams about the realities of people in poverty. Loignon et al. (2020) demonstrated that by developing collective agency and co-creating novel understanding of policy problems based on their experience, communities were able to shift policymaking.

In the Netherlands, Heerings et al. (2022) developed innovative methods combining trigger films and photo-elicitation to enable meaningful participation from vulnerable service users, including people with intellectual disabilities and serious mental illness, in healthcare service design. They described how their participatory method led to the development of "practical tools [which] were developed to overcome barriers regarding the involvement of people with disabilities" (p.2246). Drawing from Experience-based Co-design, they used deliberation techniques to support participants to improve services. These methods strengthened participants' sense of self-determination to foster more meaningful engagement in care-related decision-making.

Hong (2018) carried out research with Singaporean youth social activists. The young people had to negotiate carefully how to develop their socio-political imaginations for future transformation, while recognising what was possible within the confines of the state accepted narratives. By engaging in arts-based methodologies they were able to better negotiate these tensions and so make a greater impact.

9

Discussion

9. 1 Discussion

This scoping review highlights important findings on how arts-based and creative methods are used in participatory processes. Many of the lessons that can be drawn from these experiences might inform future design approaches in participatory deliberative democracy, where to date there is limited experimentation with these more creative methods. This review thus provides an opportunity to enrich the field, moving us away from solely talk-centric participation and deliberation. These lessons include how these methods build participants' capacity, disrupt power dynamics, promote epistemic justice and improve democratic quality.

Arts-based approaches can strengthen inclusion of diverse groups, improving wellbeing and building capacity and self-efficacy among participants. The conscientisation process led by participants themselves (Freire, 1970) can contribute to deepening democracy and advancing social justice. By including all those who are affected by a policy problem, the quality of democracy is improved because it advances epistemic and social justice in policymaking. In addition, the freedom of expression at the heart of arts-based and creative methods can indeed challenge “democratic solutionism” and “output-orientation” fostering more open-ended explorations of ‘alternative, more democratic futures’ (Asenbaum & Hanusch, 2021, p. 9).

By facilitating co-creation of new knowledge through participation, arts-based and creative methods can help centre and recognise marginalised groups' expertise and experience of their own realities. The use of artistic and creative methods can create environments that support co-construction of collective understanding of systemic causes of oppression that challenges existing assumptions about issues and reframe problems and solutions from participants' perspectives. A strength of arts-based approaches is how they reduce epistemic injustice. They can provide marginalised knowledge the credibility that it might not otherwise be given (Fricker, 2007). The collaborative process of creating artefacts to showcase lived experiences means all participants are involved in generating social meanings and collectively making sense of lived experiences to create new knowledge (ibid.).

The review has also identified how through play and games, arts-based and creative methods can help disrupt and even out unequal power dynamics between facilitators and participants, and among participants. Play, joyful and creative practices can foster expression of ideas that might be difficult to articulate verbally. Playfulness thus becomes an important tool to centre participants' perspectives. Kubová (2021), exploring the role of play in democracy, describes play, like democracy, as an ambiguous, complex, and paradoxical concept that can have multiple meanings and interpretations. The concept invites us to have an open and flexible approach that sees play as a source of community, joy, creativity, subversion of social norms, and as a tool for liveliness and reflexivity. Within participatory democracy, playfulness encourages creativity and experimentation which can lead to unexpected insights and deeper levels of democratic engagement (Urban & Kubová, 2021). For example, creative tools like drawing, mapping, or theatre can allow participants to visualise complex issues and express themselves more fully. Through fun and playfulness, arts-based methods can enable a more level-playing field that overcomes barriers of language, status and cultural capital; they can help reframe discourses from perspectives that are marginalised or ignored and be catalysts of trust-building processes.

However, creative methods, arts and playfulness, in particular targeting marginalised groups, can also be easily added to ‘business-as-usual’ policymaking processes and even provide a cover for dominant neoliberal ideologies (Peck & Theodore, 2019). In this respect, many authors recognised the need for reflexivity on their positionality. Reflexivity asks that we are sensitive and responsive to the needs of

participants, including by adapting practice to emergent participants' needs and group dynamics. A lack of understanding of the socio-economic, political and cultural context thus risks reproducing and further entrenching power inequalities. Careful consideration of how these methods are used, when and with whom, might also help avoid risks of impoverishing political conversations and contributing to infantilising political discourse, as well as lived experiences, through gamification (Hon, 2023).

9.2 Problematising arts-based and creative methods

Overall, we recognise the opportunities that arts-based methods can bring into participatory and deliberative democracy to strengthen inclusion and further social justice, but there are challenges that come with using these methods. It is important to recognise that the use of arts-based and creative methods with marginalised groups is unlikely to resolve their exclusion from participatory and deliberative democratic processes without careful consideration of how to address these challenges. Therefore, as part of the review, we also paid attention to what might hinder positive impact.

Power dynamics influence arts-based methods across various dimensions such as gender, language, race, and class. Non-verbal artistic activities can still be exclusionary due to intersecting social privileges. Creative processes can cause discomfort, especially with sensitive material and visual methods like film and photography can pose ethical challenges due to their permanent nature, which can exacerbate existing power imbalances. The emotional labour involved in arts-based methods can cause burnout as participants can feel pressured to share their stories.

Yúdice (2003) thus warns against the expediency of using arts as a panacea to solve social problems. While arts-based and creative methods can catalyse new social imaginaries that can challenge oppressive systems (Mouffe, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2017), they also add in a layer of complexity to power relations. With the involvement of creative practitioners, there are issues of artistic autonomy and creative control about how knowledge is created. Furthermore, despite an awareness that the quality of the creative artefacts per se is not of great importance, the review found that some participants might be unwilling to use artistic methods due to fear and discomfort about their perceived lack of creativity. Access to these imaginaries might be restricted by constraints which limit participants' abilities to imagine different possibilities because people are socialised into what is considered common sense and legitimate (Latimer & Skeggs, 2011). It is thus critical to build participants' artistic capabilities – the ability to create, engage with and interpret creative outputs, and establish an environment where participants feel comfortable enough to experiment with these methods in ways that unleash their imagination.

In terms of policy impact, varied institutional and cultural contexts for arts-based participatory processes were often democratising even if they did not always result in formal policy changes. The case studies we explored illustrate how arts-based methods across different policy contexts amplify the voices of marginalised groups. Examples included collage-making to address sexual violence on campus, Legislative Theatre to support youth influence on mental health policy, storytelling to evaluate youth services, and Photovoice to explore urban planning with immigrant women. These research projects enabled participants to co-create knowledge and engage in social action, often addressing social injustices directly or indirectly, while fostering collective agency and critical communities.

Similarly to other participatory processes, there is certainly a need to reflect more on the channels through which co-created knowledge is fed into policymaking; attention to how these processes embed and work productively with policy environments and wider civil society will thus be crucial (see also Bussu et al., 2022).

10

Conclusion

Conclusion

This scoping review reveals both the promise and complexity of arts-based and creative methods in participatory processes. Our analysis demonstrates that while these methods are found across participatory research, participatory deliberative democracy (PDD), and coproduction processes, they are most prevalent in participatory research traditions. These methods have proven particularly effective at creating spaces where marginalised voices can be heard, enabling alternative forms of expression that transcend traditional verbal communication barriers. Through play and embodied practices, arts-based approaches can help level power differentials and create more accessible environments for participation.

The challenges identified – from instrumentalisation of artistic practices to ethical concerns about representation and ownership – point to the need to carefully consider how these methods might reinforce or challenge existing inequalities. This is particularly significant when working with marginalised communities who are already navigating complex systems of intersectional oppression. Importantly, non-participation should be understood not as a failure but as a potential act of agency and resistance, particularly when the stakes of visibility and representation are high. As Switzer (2020) notes, "Sometimes participants can 'choose' to participate and not participate simultaneously, given what's at stake" (p. 187).

An important tension emerges between intended outcomes and actual impacts, which is also a familiar issue across most democratic innovations. While many projects have ambitions to foster tangible structural and policy change, the most consistent and documented outcomes occur at the individual level, such as self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, enhanced communication skills and critical awareness. While these individual transformations may ultimately contribute to broader social change, the direct policy impact of arts-based methods remains limited and difficult to measure. Therefore, it is important to consider whether there is a danger of overpromising on the impact of participation more broadly on policymaking. To avoid this overpromise, it is critical to reflect on the routes to influencing policymaking, recognising its complexity and the conditions that can foster embeddedness of a participatory culture, beyond isolated projects (Bussu et al., 2022).

Thus, the successful implementation of arts-based methods demands a critical awareness of how these methods operate within broader socio-economic, cultural and political contexts, to expose rather than entrench the complex intersectional exclusions at play within participatory spaces, as well as society at large. The scoping review identified the lack of explicit engagement with intersectionality which can limit the transformational promise that arts-based and creative approaches can bring to participatory and deliberative democracy. Only through careful consideration of these dynamics can arts-based methods serve to promote substantive inclusive participatory policymaking and intersectional equity.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Reference list with methods, type of participation process, participants, summary and policy focus

Authors	Phase	Method	Type of participatory engagement process	Participant	Sector	Summary	Reference
Amazonas et al 2019	1	Rich Picture Method	Participatory research	Indigenous youth and young adults in the Brazilian Amazon	Resource management	Used picture drawing method in Tumucumaque Complex to represent system dynamics and facilitate discussions. Method helped overcome linguistic, educational, and cultural barriers.	<i>Amazonas, I. T., Kawa, N. C., Zanetti, V., Linke, I., & Sinisgalli, P. A. (2019). Using rich pictures to model the 'Good life' in Indigenous communities of the Tumucumaque complex in Brazilian Amazonia. Human Ecology, 47(3), 341–354.</i>
Burkett and Carter 2020	1	Photovoice	Participatory research	Women	Community development	This study used Photovoice, a feminist participatory research methodology, to analyse the recreational fishing experiences of 15 Michigan women by combining individual photography, facilitated group discussions, and community presentations to provide unique settings for participants to share and compare their experiences in a meaningful, participant-driven context.	<i>Burkett, E., & Carter, A. (2020). It's Not about the Fish: Women's Experiences in a Gendered Recreation Landscape. Leisure Sciences, 44(7), 1013–1030.</i>
Butterwick and Selman 2003	1	Popular theatre	Participatory research	Women, women of color, lesbians	Gender Policy	Used popular theatre to create "third spaces" for exploring feminist coalition. Focused on creating conditions for expressing understandings and demonstrating listening across differences.	<i>Butterwick, S., & Selman, J. (2003). Deep Listening in a Feminist Popular Theatre project: Upsetting the position of audience in Participatory education. Adult Education Quarterly, 54(1), 7–22.</i>
Cerecer et al 2013	1	Blog	Participatory research	High school and college students of Latina/o, Chicana/o, African American, Asian, and biracial backgrounds	Educational access for undocumented students	Created blog to inform undocumented students about educational rights and policies in Utah. Institutionalized informal ways students share educational resources.	<i>Cerecer, D. a. Q., Cahill, C., & Bradley, M. (2013). Toward a Critical Youth Policy Praxis: Critical Youth Studies and Participatory Action research. Theory Into Practice, 52(3), 216–223.</i>
Clennon et al 2015	1	Journalism, video diaries, community filmmaking, photography, poetry workshops	Community development, action research	Intergenerational groups	Community development	Used multiple creative methods in Manchester, UK for community development. Focused on governance and community development through arts-based engagement.	<i>Clennon, O. D., Kagan, C., Lawthom, R., & Swindells, R. (2015). Participation in community arts: lessons from the inner-city. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 20(3), 331–346.</i>

Curato 2020	1	Photojournalism, rap music, performance art	Community development & participatory research	Communities experiencing poverty affected by the war on drugs, mothers and widows of drug suspects ambushed or killed in police operations	Drug policy	Examined how communities in the Philippines used creative forms to express political voice under an authoritarian regime. Documented how mothers transformed grief into political statements through performance and visual storytelling in protests.	<i>Curato, N. (2020). Asserting disadvantaged communities' deliberative agency in a media-saturated society. Theory and Society, 50(4), 657–677.</i>
Davis et al 2019	1	Photovoice	Participatory research & Community development	African American women	Urban planning and policing	Used Photovoice in Oklahoma City to influence local planning and policing policies. Created traveling exhibition that brought Black women's perspectives into policy discussions.	<i>Davis, D., Harris, C., Johnson, V., Pennington, C., Redus, C., Sanders, T., Ta-Nesert, N., Sofola, G., Morrison, V., Harris, J., & Gulilat, E. (2019). Black women's perspectives on neighborhood safety: Reflections from The Women of Northeast Oklahoma City Photovoice Project. Gender Place & Culture, 27(7), 917–943.</i>
de St. Croix 2020	1	Storytelling	Participatory Research	Youth workers, young people, and others directly involved in youth work	Youth services evaluation	Developed storytelling workshops as an alternative to conventional impact measurement in youth work assessment in England. Aimed to democratise evaluation by moving away from top-down, managerial logic towards more inclusive methods.	<i>de St Croix, T. (2020). Re-imagining accountability: storytelling workshops for evaluation in and beyond youth work. Pedagogy Culture and Society, 30(5), 697–714.</i>
De Vecchi et al 2016	1	Digital storytelling	Scoping review of 15 articles: Participatory research, Community development, Community-Based Participatory Research	Mental health service users	Mental health services	This is a scoping review examines how digital storytelling in mental health contexts has been used across four key areas (educational interventions, learning skills, understanding others' experiences, and understanding personal experiences) to help stakeholders communicate and share lived experiences.	<i>De Vecchi, N., Kenny, A., Dickson-Swift, V., & Kidd, S. (2016). How digital storytelling is used in mental health: A scoping review. International Journal of Mental Health Nursing, 25(3), 183–193.</i>
Fergie et al 2023	1	Prints, posters, performance art	PDD	Young people	Health	Used creative methods to develop visions for reducing health inequalities in UK cities. Young people shared creative visions for alternative futures and developed policy recommendations.	<i>Fergie, G., Vaczy, C., Smith, K., Mackenzie, M., Phan, T. T., & Hilton, S. (2023). Young people's perspectives on addressing UK health inequalities: utopian visions and preferences for action. Health Expectations, 26(6), 2264–2277.</i>

Fiddian-Green & Gubrium (2021)	1	Comics, graphic novels, participatory film, Photovoice	Diverse participatory processes	LGBTQ, nonbinary, and other gender-diverse young people; people who inject drugs living with hepatitis C virus; young women who trade sex; undocumented and formerly undocumented immigrants; and people living with HIV/AIDS.	Health equity	Used multiple creative methods to address equity for gender-diverse youth in US. Focused on promoting health equity through community-oriented storytelling.	Fiddian-Green, A., & Gubrium, A. (2021). <i>Critical Narrative Intervention for Health Equity Research and Practice: Editorial Commentary Introducing the Health Promotion Practice Critical Narrative Intervention Special Collection</i> . <i>Health Promotion Practice</i> , 22(2_suppl), 2S-7S.
Francis 2013	1	Forum Theatre	Participatory research	Young African and coloured learners	Education	Used Forum Theatre with 16- to 18-year-old students in South Africa to address heterosexism and heteronormativity in school settings. Created participatory theatre processes that enabled learners to recognise and rehearse their agency to bring about positive change in their school.	Francis, D. (2013). "You know the homophobic stuff is not in me, like us, it's out there". <i>Using Participatory Theatre to challenge heterosexism and heteronormativity in a South African school</i> . <i>South African Journal of Education</i> , 33(4), 1-14.
Gittings et al 2022	1	Theatre, song, mural-making	Participatory research	Adolescents and young people affected by HIV	Youth health services and HIV/AIDS policy	Used participatory arts-based methods with young people in South Africa to explore health experiences and HIV/AIDS stigma. Drew on country's historical use of performance art in anti-apartheid activism to mediate power inequities between researchers and participants.	Gittings, L., Medley, S., Logie, C. H., Ralayo, N., Cluver, L., Petersen, N., Chen-Charles, J., & Toska, E. (2022). <i>Art-based reflections from 12 years of adolescent health and development-related research in South Africa</i> . <i>Health Promotion International</i> , 37(Supplement_2), ii83–ii96.
Gouache 2021	1	Participatory filmmaking, gamification	PDD	Diverse citizens including retired people, climate activists, families	Local policy design and future planning	Used creative approaches in the small town of Marcoussis, France, to engage citizens in imagining the town's future in 2038. Combined gamification and participatory filmmaking to make policy-making more accessible to citizens who might not typically engage in traditional consultation processes.	Gouache, C. (2021). <i>Imagining the future with citizens: participatory foresight and democratic policy design in Marcoussis, France</i> . <i>Policy Design and Practice</i> , 5(1), 66–85.
Griffiths et al 2006	1	Video, Theatre of Possibilities	Participatory research	disadvantaged and/or disaffected children	Education	Used arts-based work in Nottingham schools to help disadvantaged children develop voice and agency. Created spaces where children could learn to participate in their communities.	Griffiths, M., Berry, J., Holt, A., Naylor, J., & Weekes, P. (2006). <i>Learning to be in public spaces: in from the margins with dancers, sculptors, painters and musicians</i> . <i>British Journal of Educational Studies</i> , 54(3), 352–371.

Heerings et al 2022	1	Trigger films	Participatory research, Coproduction of services	Care organisations clients, informal carers and professionals	Care services	Developed the 'Ask us!' method in Netherlands combining creative approaches to improve long-term care services. Demonstrated how creative methods could help transform healthcare services by enabling meaningful participation from vulnerable service users in care organisations.	<i>Heerings, M., Van De Bovenkamp, H., Cardol, M., & Bal, R. (2022). Ask us! Adjusting experience-based codesign to be responsive to people with intellectual disabilities, serious mental illness or older persons receiving support with independent living. Health Expectations, 25(5), 2246–2254.</i>
Hong 2018	1	Performance art, photography	Participatory Research	Youth, social activists	Urban planning	Studied informal arts collectives using creative approaches to influence urban planning in Singapore. Showed how collectives navigated between state support and autonomy while using arts to enable citizens to regain democratic control over urban processes.	<i>Hong, D. (2018). Building the urban commons in Singapore: the cemetery, red-light district and public housing estates as sites of contestation. Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, 19(3), 404–418.</i>
House et al 2024	1	Photovoice	Participatory Research	Women involved in fisheries monitoring	Marine resource management	Used Photovoice with women (20-35 years old) in Timor-Leste to document their experiences in fisheries monitoring programs. Project enabled participants to share their perspectives on marine resource management and community development while evaluating program impacts.	<i>House, J., Amaral, N. M. S., De Jesus, J. S., Gomes, J., Chew, M., Kleiber, D., Steenbergen, D. J., & Stacey, N. (2024). Women's experiences of participatory small-scale fisheries monitoring in Timor-Leste. MAST. Maritime Studies/Maritime Studies, 23(1).</i>
Jimenez et al 2021	1	Digital storytelling	Participatory research	Early adolescents from economically precarious communities, and adult mentors	Digital media literacy, Education	In this digital storytelling program, 16 youth (ages 11-14) and 18 adult mentors collaborated over multiple sessions to create stories about their lives and experiences, with youth making key decisions about content and representation. The study revealed how youth exercised strategic restraint during the storytelling process - sometimes withholding personal stories or modifying their narratives - as a form of agency when negotiating power dynamics with adult mentors.	<i>Jimenez, C., Clark, L. S., Kennedy, H., Nisle, S., Engle, C., Matyasic, S., & Anyon, Y. (2021). The art of youthful restraint: negotiating youth-adult relations in digital media literacy. Learning Media and Technology, 46(2), 190–203.</i>
Kwok and Ku 2008	1	Photovoice; visual simulation scale modelling	Participatory research	Recent female immigrants	Urban planning and public housing	Used Photovoice and modelling workshops in Hong Kong to facilitate immigrant women's participation in urban planning discussions. Helped women articulate their housing needs and concerns to policymakers through visual methods.	<i>Kwok, J. Y., & Ku, H. (2008). Making habitable space together with female Chinese immigrants to Hong Kong. Action Research, 6(3), 261–283.</i>
Loignon et al 2020	1	Photovoice	Participatory research	People Living in Poverty and with low health literacy; Healthcare professionals	Healthcare	A project to address poverty in partnership with an international organisation involving healthcare professionals and individuals in poverty, facilitating discussion sessions and a photo exhibition. The initiative enhanced community engagement and led to changes in primary care, integrating socio-economic context into medical records and eliminating fees for those on social assistance.	<i>Loignon, C., Dupéré, S., Bush, P., Truchon, K., Boyer, S., & Hudon, C. (2020). Using photovoice to reflect on poverty and address social inequalities among primary care teams. Action Research, 21(2), 211–229.</i>

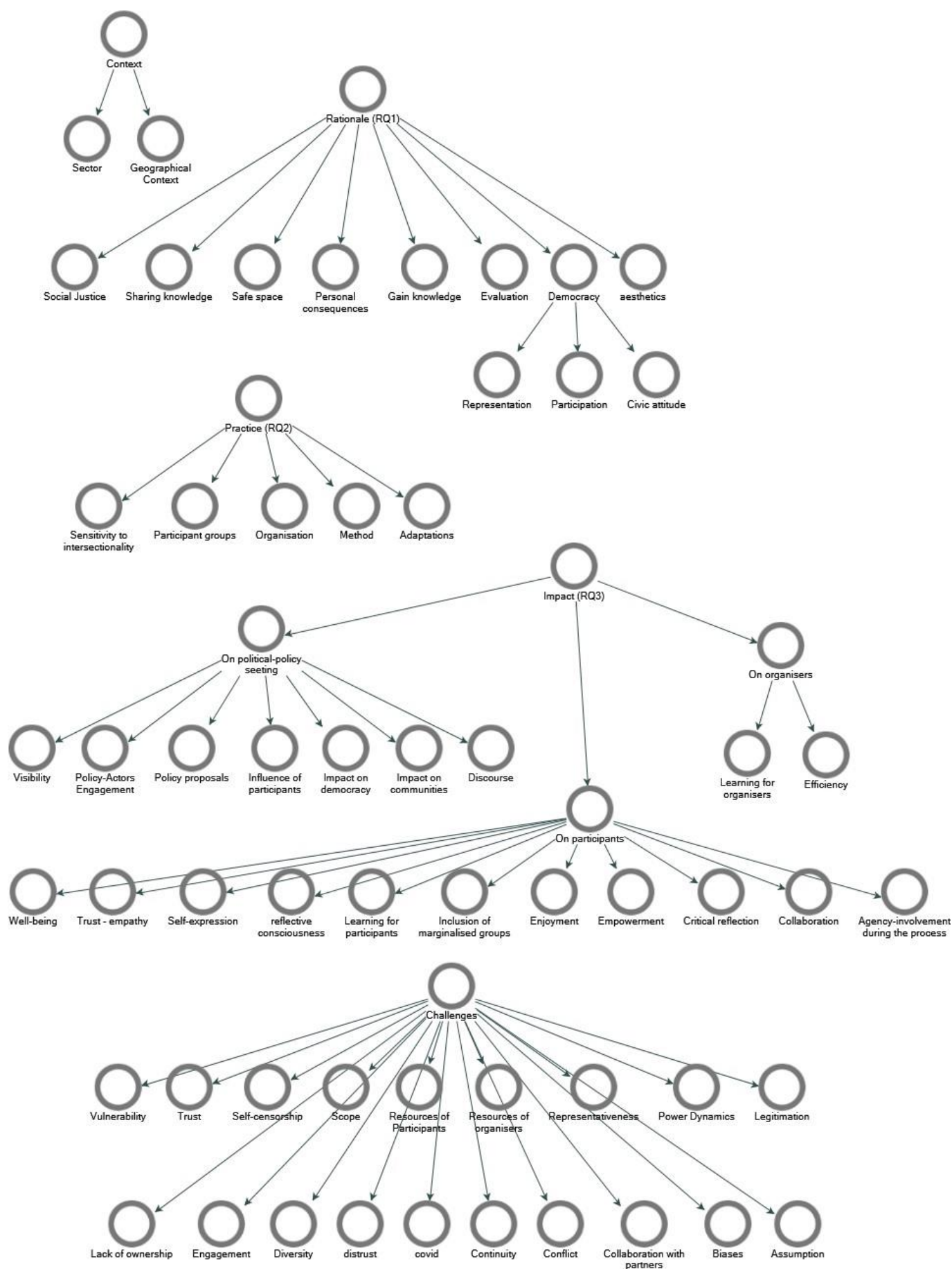
Luchs and Miller 2014	1	Tours; Digital Stories	Participatory research	Refugee Youth	Education	This article examines the often-overlooked outreach phase in participatory visual methodologies, focusing on a project that enabled over 150 youth to enhance their media skills and challenge harmful stereotypes through creative expression, culminating in a city-wide school tour of their digital stories that prompted reflection on ethical considerations and effective methods for participant engagement, extending participation beyond process and into outreach.	<i>Luchs, M., & Miller, E. (2014). Not so far away: a collaborative model of engaging refugee youth in the outreach of their digital stories. Area, 48(4), 442–448.</i>
Lykes et al 2022	1	PhotoPAR	Community Development & Participatory research	Maya Ixil and K'iche' women	Human Rights	The PhotoPAR project aimed to re-reflect on the memories of survivance and persistence of Maya Ixil and K'iche' women faced with human rights violations during Guatemala's armed conflict. The research emphasized community-based workshops and actions, and transformative engagement with traditional practices, showcasing the significance of long-term feminist community-based accompaniment in post-conflict recovery.	<i>Lykes, M. B., Távara, G., & Rey-Guerra, C. (2022). Making meaning of women's persistence and protagonism in the wake of genocidal violence: Maya Ixil and K'iche' women of Chajul, Guatemala. Feminism & Psychology, 33(2), 215–235.</i>
MacDonald et al 2011	1	Role Play; Dramatization; Reflective Writing	Participatory research	Youth	Sexual Health Education	A project aimed to enhance adolescent participation in a study designed to develop and evaluate prevention resources on sexual risk-taking behaviours, showcasing strategies for optimising youth engagement and providing insights to guide future research practices.	<i>MacDonald, J. M., Gagnon, A. J., Mitchell, C., Di Meglio, G., Rennick, J. E., & Cox, J. (2011). Include them and they will tell you: Learnings from a participatory process with youth. Qualitative Health Research, 21(8), 1127–1135.</i>
McQuaid and Plastow 2017	1	Applied Theatre; Image Theatre	Community Development & Participatory research	People living in in a context of entrenched urban poverty and a patriarchal culture	Social inclusion	This article reflects on a long-term intergenerational project aimed at promoting a community's capacity to unite across social barriers in recognizing and challenging systemic injustices and inequalities through community-led interventions inspired by African Feminism and Stiwanism. It highlights the successes and complexities of this approach in addressing entrenched urban poverty and women living under a fiercely patriarchal a society.	<i>McQuaid, K., & Plastow, J. (2017). Ethnography, Applied Theatre and Stiwanism: Creative Methods in search of Praxis amongst Men and Women in Jinja, Uganda. Journal of International Development, 29(7), 961–980.</i>
Mecca and Ballesté-Isern 2024	1	Applied Theatre	Participatory research	Young unaccompanied immigrants from North Africa.	Migration and youth integration	Used Applied Theatre with young migrants in Spain to create non-paternalistic and non-stigmatising experiences. Employed body-based and affective approaches to help marginalised youth voice their life situations on their own terms.	<i>Mecca, M., & Ballesté-Isern, E. (2024). Exploring mediation through creativity: ethnography, theatre and cinema with Maghrebi unaccompanied migrant youth in Barcelona. European Journal of Social Work, 1–14.</i>
Njeru et al 2015	1	Digital Storytelling	Participatory Research	Immigrant and refugee Somali and Latino communities	Health; Education	A project aimed to develop a digital storytelling intervention for reduction of diabetes-related health disparities among patients with type II diabetes using a community-based participatory research approach. Conducted with Somali and Latino communities, it highlighted medication	<i>Njeru, J. W., Patten, C. A., Hanza, M. M. K., Brockman, T. A., Ridgeway, J. L., Weis, J. A., Clark, M. M., Goodson, M., Osman, A., Porraz-Capetillo, G., Hared, A., Myers, A., Sia, I. G., & Wieland, M. L. (2015). Stories for change: development of</i>

						management, glucose self-monitoring, physical activity, and nutrition through powerful stories, emphasizing the importance of equitable partnerships in addressing health disparities for people with chronic disease.	<i>a diabetes digital storytelling intervention for refugees and immigrants to minnesota using qualitative methods. BMC Public Health, 15(1).</i>
Phoenix et al 2024	1	Visual Prototyping	Participatory research	People from Equity-Deserving Groups	Health services design	This project aimed to advance a collective vision for equity-based cocreation by engaging people from equity-deserving groups in designing health and social services. Held at CoPro2022, it involved immersive, arts-based dialogue and resulted in six visual prototypes, highlighting key themes like inclusivity, relationship nurturing, and transformation, to guide future cocreation activities.	<i>Phoenix, M., Moll, S., Vrzovski, A., Bhaskar, L., Micsinszki, S., Bruce, E., Mulalu, L., Hossain, P., Freeman, B., Mulvale, G., & Consortium, C. (2024). Advancing a collective vision for equity-based cocreation through prototyping at an international forum. Health Expectations, 27(2).</i>
Rasmussen 2017	1	Applied Theatre	Two case studies of Participatory Action Research projects using theatre	Actor with Down Syndrome, Theatre student; Performance artists, Pupils and teachers in schools	Performance arts; Education	The project examined paradoxes in the use of theatre for participatory democracy, using Rancière's framework to highlight tensions between social and aesthetic aims. It analyses two applied theatre cases - a collaborative performance with an actress with Down Syndrome, and a theatrical "take over" of the management of schools –, emphasizing discursive reform to address aesthetic diversity and improve theatre's role in modernist cultural democracy.	<i>Rasmussen, B. (2017). Applied theatre in times of terror: Accepting aesthetic diversity and going beyond dilemma. Applied Theatre Research, 5(3), 169–182.</i>
Sextou and Smith 2017	1	Applied Theatre	Participatory research	Older adults, elderly people	Theatre education; Elderly mental health	A project exploring the application of recreational dramatic activities for older adults (55+) and elderly people under Applied Theatre, highlighting concerns over their health and wellbeing in Western societies, particularly loneliness.	<i>Sextou, P., & Smith, C. (2017). Drama is for Life! Recreational Drama Activities for the Elderly in the UK. Text Matters, 7, 273–290.</i>
Sloane and Wallin 2013	1	Theatre for the Living & Theatre of the Oppressed (insights); Forum Theatre & Image Theatre (practice)	Participatory research	Former refugee youth, guardians, parents and the general public	Education	The project aimed to broaden democratic engagement using Forum and Image Theatre, providing opportunities for former refugee youth, guardians, parents and the general public to address complex school community challenges at an individual and at a policy level.	<i>Sloane, J. A., & Wallin, D. (2013). Theatre of the Commons: a theatrical inquiry into the democratic engagement of former refugee families in Canadian public high school communities. Educational Research, 55(4), 454–472.</i>
Switzer 2020	1	Photovoice	Participatory research	Youth (predominantly identified as LGBTQ+)	HIV prevention and harm reduction program	A project that aims to explore the implications of non-participation in a youth-led HIV prevention and harm reduction peer-education program. It highlights how young people navigate their participation and their narratives' counter-hegemonic understanding of participation.	<i>Switzer, S. (2020). "People give and take a lot in order to participate in things:" Youth talk back – making a case for non-participation. Curriculum Inquiry, 50(2), 168–193.</i>
Treffry-Goatley et al 2018	1	Collage; Storytelling	Participatory research	Undergraduate students/student teachers, Young black African women	Education; Sexual violence prevention	Exploring sexual violence in higher education, this project used participatory visual methods with student teachers from two South African universities to help women students break the silence and stimulate dialogue on sexual violence,	<i>Treffry-Goatley, A., De Lange, N., Moletsane, R., Mkhize, N., & Masinga, L. (2018). What does it mean to be a young African woman on a university campus in times of sexual violence? A new moment,</i>

						showing that these tools fostered deep reflections and supported introspection on their experiences, responses, and ways to sustain conversations about gender equality.	<i>a new conversation. Behavioral Sciences, 8(8), 67.</i>
Trott 2019	1	Photovoice	Participatory research	Children	Climate education	The project aimed to act on climate change through a participatory action research program involving children in local community settings. Combining climate education with Photovoice, it emphasised transformative sustainability learning to boost children's climate awareness and agency.	<i>Trott, C. D. (2019). Reshaping our world: Collaborating with children for community-based climate change action. Action Research, 17(1), 42–62.</i>
Vargas et al 2022	1	Photovoice	Participatory research	Young high school students from a disadvantaged and marginalised neighborhood	Education; Urban Planning	The project aimed to address youth marginalization in city planning using a Freirian approach to identify structural and communicative oppressions in education. Focusing on the use of Photovoice with 27 high school students to increase their awareness of their environment, both personal and urban, it promoted the co-creation of narratives, enabling them to express their desired transformations in Valencia while promoting an education that empowers students as agents for social and environmental transformation.	<i>Vargas, M. L., Maicas-Pérez, M., Hernández, C. M., & Fernández-Baldor, Á. (2022). "They Take Away What We Are": Contributions of a Participatory Process with Photovoice to the Capabilities for Epistemic Liberation of Young People. Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, 23(1), 50–72.</i>
Bussu et al forthcoming	2	Legislative Theatre, digital storytelling, poetry, podcasting	PDD (Legislative Theatre and digital democracy)	Young people	Mental health services and policy	Project in Greater Manchester using multiple creative methods to strengthen youth voice in mental health policy and practice. Young people co-designed participatory spaces and evaluation methods, leading to policy recommendations and ongoing dialogue with local institutions.	<i>Bussu, S., Rubin, K., Carroll, N. & Eve, Z. (forthcoming), Redefining Youth Mental Health through a youth-led Mindset Revolution, Action Research</i>
Elliott 2021	2	Legislative Theatre	PDD (Legislative Theatre)	Young people	Mental health	Used Legislative Theatre with young people in UK to explore barriers to mental health support. Created spaces for youth to engage directly with Members of Parliament and influence decision-making processes.	<i>Elliott, M. (2021). Young people as legislators: legislative theatre and Youth Parliament. Applied Theatre Research, 9(1), 73–86.</i>
Latz 2012	2	Photovoice	Participatory research	community college students	Education	Community college students were given cameras and photo prompts to document aspects of their educational lives, followed by interviews where they narrated the meanings behind their photographs.	<i>Latz, A. O. (2012). Toward a new conceptualization of photovoice: blending the photographic as method and Self-Reflection. Journal of Visual Literacy, 31(2), 49–70.</i>
MacDonald et al 2015	2	Participatory video	Participatory research	Inuit youth	Sustainability	Inuit youth (ages 12-16) from Rigolet, Nunatsiavut participated in a two-week video workshop where they learned filmmaking skills and created a 17-minute film showcasing winter activities and life in their community of Rigolet. While the researchers' initial focus was climate change adaptation, the youth-led process resulted in a film about community life, demonstrating how participatory	<i>MacDonald, J. P., Ford, J., Willox, A. C., Mitchell, C., Productions, K., Lab, M. W. S. a. D. M., & Government, R. I. C. (2015). Youth-Led Participatory Video as a Strategy to Enhance Inuit Youth Adaptive Capacities for Dealing with Climate Change. ARCTIC, 68(4), 486.</i>

						video can support youth agency while building protective factors like community pride and intergenerational connections.	
Moletsane et al 2009	2	Photovoice	Participatory research	Youth in a rural context	HIV awareness and stigma reduction	The project aimed to promote childhood and youth activism regarding HIV and AIDS through participatory approaches, particularly through the use of Photovoice. Conducted with Grade 8 and 9 learners in a deep rural school in South Africa, it focused on understanding and addressing stigma and discrimination against those affected by HIV. The study highlighted themes of awareness, stigma impact, and personal agency. Despite improving perceptions about HIV, significant ignorance and negative attitudes persist.	Moletsane, R., De Lange, N., Mitchell, C., Stuart, J., Buthelezi, T., & Taylor, M. (2009). <i>Photo-voice as a tool for analysis and activism in response to HIV and AIDS stigmatisation in a rural KwaZulu-Natal school. Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health</i> , 19(1), 19–28.
Nunn 2022	2	Music workshops; Songwriting; Sculpture	Participatory research	Refugee-background young people	Migration and Youth Integration	The project used participatory arts-based research where refugee youth worked as co-researchers with artists and researchers over a 3-month period, participating in approximately 12 arts sessions that included discussions, critical reflection activities, skills building, and art-making.	Nunn, C. (2022). <i>The participatory arts-based research project as an exceptional sphere of belonging. Qualitative Research</i> , 22(2), pp.251-268.
Redwood et al 2022	2	Participatory filmmaking	PDD	Youth activists	Peacebuilding	Developed hybrid approach to peacebuilding through participatory filmmaking with youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Created non-hierarchical project structure that enabled meaningful youth participation in shaping peacebuilding processes.	Redwood, H., Fairey, T., & Hasić, J. (2022). <i>Hybrid peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Participatory arts and youth activism as vehicles of social change. Journal of Peacebuilding & Development</i> , 17(1), 42–57.
Ronzi et al 2016	2	Photovoice	Participatory research	Older adults more from four contrasting geographical areas	Urbanism	Used Photovoice with older people (60 years or more) in Liverpool to understand how cities could better support aging populations. Led to direct engagement between participants and city stakeholders.	Ronzi, S., Pope, D., Orton, L., & Bruce, N. (2016). <i>Using photovoice methods to explore older people's perceptions of respect and social inclusion in cities: Opportunities, challenges and solutions. SSM - Population Health</i> , 2, 732–745.
Walsh and Burnett 2021	2	Participatory filmmaking	Participatory research	Young people	Land justice and environmental governance	Collaborated with young people (18-25) in South Africa through participatory filmmaking to address land justice in Karoo region. Noted challenges when participants felt uncomfortable discussing sensitive political topics on camera.	Walsh, A., & Burnett, S. (2021). <i>Voicing ambiguities in theLizwi Lenyaniso Lomhlabaco-creator collective. Research in Drama Education the Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance</i> , 26(4), 605–620.

Appendix 2. Diagram with codes used in NVivo



For more information

Email: UK-PBA-inspire@ipsos.com

Website: www.inspiredemocracy.eu

LinkedIn: [horizon_inspire](#)

X: [HORIZON_INSPIRE](#)

INSPIRE is about fostering a more inclusive and participatory society, which starts from the experience and knowledge of marginalised groups to inform more equitable policies. We combine different methodological approaches to evaluate the inclusiveness of past and current democratic innovations, and we test arts-based methods as a way to create more intersectionally inclusive spaces to reimagine democracy, bringing fun into policymaking.