



# South African Cultural Observatory

Annual Report  
2015/16  
Narrative Summary

December 2016



## Overview

The Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) established the South African Cultural Observatory (SACO) with the primary objective of advancing research in the field of cultural information systems. The SACO is also tasked with developing information networks that enhance collaborative research projects; and becoming a holistic repository, collector and developer of knowledge, information, which can present evidence concerning the content, structure and dynamics of the sector. The below document outlines the SACO's outputs with a focus on its successes, particularly research, in its first year of operations, April 2015 to March 2016.

SACO traces its origins to 2011 Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) Mzansi Golden Economy policy document. The Mzansi Golden Economy notes that while the cultural and creative economy is undervalued, it actually has significant potential in terms of generating development possibilities, and strengthening job creation options for the country. Through a range of consultations with stakeholders, with their consultants, in 2012/13 DAC started looking at the possibility of setting up a national cultural observatory, aligned with an international trend towards establishing cultural observatories.

Essentially, the SACO is the informative 'nerve centre' that provides not only the strategic vision, but also the organising principle to develop cultural indicators and information systems appropriate to the South African context and collection of statistics based on the sector needs. The SACO started operating in earnest in 2015/16 after a competitive bid process – hosted by Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), in partnership with Rhodes University and the University of Fort Hare – and has accomplished a great deal in a short time to support the South African government's desire for greater systematisation of the collection of cultural information, particularly about South Africa's cultural economy. In delivering on its mandate to research the cultural and creative economy, the SACO undertakes monitoring and evaluation exercises or impact assessments of cultural spending across the arts, culture and heritage sectors analysing their impact and multipliers. The SACO asks deep and necessary questions, while taking a holistic view of the industry to identify trends and supplies research outputs to support decision-making and service delivery.

### **Objectives**

The primary objective of the SACO is to advance research in the field of cultural information systems. This is supported by its secondary objectives: The development of information networks that enhance collaborative research projects; and the establishment of the SACO as a holistic repository, collector and developer of knowledge, information, which can present evidence concerning the content, structure and dynamics of the sector. To do this, SACO develops systemised methodologies for the monitoring and evaluation of cultural ventures and cultural activities, particularly those funded by government. Its achievements toward delivering against its mandate in the first year of operation, April 2015 to March 2016, are outlined below.

## Introduction

During the 2015/16 financial year the South African Cultural Observatory moved along an upward trajectory to full operation and project delivery. At a high level the successes achieved during the first year of operations were significant. The SACO was successfully introduced to the arts, heritage and culture practitioners, organisations and the greater industry. The 2015/16 financial year saw, among others, the following primary SACO activities taking place:

- the signing of the service level agreement with DAC;
- completed MOU's signed with Rhodes University and the University of Fort Hare;

- the SACO's physical and organisational establishment;
- secondment and appointment of the core management team and other human resources;
- appropriate support services and capacities to deliver on the project;
- all systems and procedures required to operate the SACO;
- a website developed and all IT systems established at physical site;
- the procurement of LibWin, a library system;
- the development of a five-year National Research Agenda;
- commissioning of research and the and
- 79% of all deliverables achieved.

A total of 95% of all outputs were delivered (see below for list of deliverables). A small percentage of the outputs, a total of 5%, were not achieved due to delays and these were re-scheduled accordingly and shifted into Year 2 where appropriate. The successes and challenges experienced in Year 1 FY 2015/16 are summarised below, but broad consensus is that the project has been well initiated and has the necessary operational infrastructure, systems and processes for the production of outputs to expand considerably in the coming years.

## Key deliverables

The SACO is mandated to deliver the following outputs, as per the Annual Performance Plan (APP):

### Administrative

#### Ensuring that all administrative agreements, strategies and plans are in place

- Refine and implement key development indicators.
- Planning, memorandums of understanding, service level agreements, strategies and business plans.
- Regular consultations with DAC.

### Infrastructure

#### Ensuring the SACO has all the infrastructure needed to function and operate

- Establish and maintain office (including running costs and equipment).

### Operations

#### Ensuring the SACO has all the staff, capacity and relevant processes & procedures to operate and is operating at optimum

- Staffing and recruitment of core staff and coordinators.
- Participation in and facilitation of workshops and seminars; briefings to DAC and stakeholders; attendance of international conference.
- Identification of scholarship criteria, advertise scholarships, assess and award scholarships.
- Preparations for sector capacity-building.

### Research

#### Deliver research to support decision-making, service delivery & sector advancement

- Launch of SACO including reports on baseline study, best practice review and stakeholder engagement.
- Design, refinement and testing of methodology.
- Development of a Library system.
- Research commissioned on 9 domains including: call for papers, research awards, and monitoring process.
- Country briefs for cultural diplomacy process.

### Raising Awareness

#### Spread the word about the SACO, its mandate, research and news & information across arts, heritage, culture sectors and reach stakeholders

- IT systems: development of website and databases.
- Communication, marketing and launch of the website.
- Domain workshops and national conference.

## Major successes

SACO's first year of operation was largely marked by the organisation's establishment with some significant achievements which enable the next phases of the project. Primarily the successes centre on administrative, infrastructural, operational, communicative, planning and developmental activities.

The main achievements were:

- Establishment of office space.
- Establishment of the website and IT systems.
- Development and purchase of a sector database.
- Procurement of LibWin online library system.
- Recruitment and establishment of an operational core team.
- Signing of MOU between partner universities.
- Design of marketing materials, logo and basic corporate identity.
- Distribution of regular communiques via emailer, including newsletter.
- Regular public relations and communications activities generating publicity.
- Development of Five-Year Research Agenda with 15 core focus areas.
- Completion of the review of best practice, methods and the proposed way forward and submission of: "South African Cultural and Creative Industries Mapping Study: Review of Methods and the Way Forward".
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) finalised.
- Monitoring and Evaluation Project Plan developed and approved
- National Domain Workshop – hosted in Johannesburg in February 2016.
- Ongoing consultations with DAC throughout the year.
- Research commissioned including mapping studies and the Development of a Framework for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Publicly Funded Arts, Culture and Heritage. The research outputs include:
  - Framework for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Publically Funded Arts, Culture and Heritage
  - Review of best practice, methods and the proposed way forward and submission of: "South African Cultural and Creative Industries Mapping Study: Review of Methods and the Way Forward"
  - Mapping Studies focused on:
    - Performance & Celebration
    - Visual Arts & Crafts
    - Design & Creative Services
  - A Statistical Framework
  - A Forecasting Model
  - The five-year National Research Agenda
- Cultural diplomacy plan developed and initial meetings held with Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa (OCPA).
- Scholarships advertised and two awarded.

## Snapshots

### Research Achievements

Although much of the year was spent operationalising the SACO, there were still some prominent research achievements, primarily the first draft of the National Research Agenda 2015-2020 which was presented at



both the National Domain Workshop and the National Conference. The Research Agenda is the seminal guiding document for research across the sector, focusing on the critical need for research into 15 key areas.

The Research Agenda is an attempt by the DAC to focus research efforts and resources towards achieving research outputs that would enhance the development of the Cultural and Creative Industries in South Africa and to advance the policy imperatives of the South African Government and its key stakeholders. The Research Agenda inputs – taken from the two major stakeholder engagements, at the National Domain Workshop and the National Conference – will see the document being updated as a “living agenda”.

Other research commissioned or generated by the SACO – which is critical to the expanded research portfolio the SACO will manage in 2016/17 – included some key baseline studies and frameworks. The SACO completed a review of the best practices, methods and approaches to mapping studies, a fundamental research area for the SACO. The results of this process are summarised in the report: “South African Cultural and Creative Industries Mapping Study: Review of Methods and the Way Forward”. In addition to this three mapping studies were completed focused on these sectors: Performance & Celebration; Visual Arts & Crafts; Design & Creative Services.

The SACO also developed a “Framework for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Publically Funded Arts, Culture and Heritage”, which it has been disseminating via its online channels, to stakeholders and which provides practitioners with a framework through which to analyse the impact of sector interventions. Finally, the SACO developed both a Statistical Framework and a Forecasting Model during the 2015/16 financial year.

## Sector Engagements: Workshops & Conferences

During the period under review the SACO planned two major stakeholder interventions – the National Domain Workshop hosted in Johannesburg and the National Conference hosted in Port Elizabeth. The National Workshop served to introduce the SACO to the cultural and creative industry, to present the Research Agenda, the “Framework for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Publically Funded Arts, Culture and Heritage”, and to connect with the greater sector, engage with practitioners and to ensure that, sector-wide, there was an understanding of why DAC has established the SACO, what the mandate is and how the sector can play an active role.

The National Conference expanded on this by encouraging the sector to think about how culture is counted, why it needs to be counted, what the Cultural and Creative industries look like in the National and International Context, and what the potential routes to better performance of the look like in the context of the real needs of South Africans and the economy. Cases studies were presented; international best practices were highlighted by guest speakers; best practices were shared from other observatories and arts council delegates. The conference was a resounding success. It was well-attended and supported, with quality presentations and papers given; and a significant networking opportunity for both the sector and the SACO. Both events meaningfully raised the profile of the SACO – one of the key deliverables of the year.

## Challenge areas

The initiation of the project was not without its expected teething problems considering the size, scope and mandate of SACO. Many of these were adequately managed within the year and centred around a number of delays which did impact on the turnaround of some of the deliverables quarter-on-quarter; these were then either deferred to the final quarter (Q4) or to Year 2. However, overall 95% of the deliverables were



achieved with only 5% not achieved. The 5% non-achieved deliverables were however not material to the delivery of the project and was mainly related to the number and frequency of meetings with DAC.

## Way forward

Overall the SACO was wholly established in Year 1, with significant advances made toward the delivery of 95% of the key outcomes, with only a minor number of the deliverables not being met, i.e. the number of meetings between the SACO and DAC. The majority of the challenges experienced were managed strategically within the Financial Year; however some of the challenges were managed by deferring them to Year 2 and securing a funds re-allocation/saving for the next year.

Other than this small non-deliverable, and in the context of some challenges associated with establishing and operationalising a project of this nature, the SACO has performed well and maintained delivery focus. Looking ahead, lessons from Year 1 will inform the approach to the management of challenges in Year 2 and 3 and the amplification of SACO's successes, particularly around the core focus on research.

In 2016/17 a mid-term review was completed at the project half-way point in September 2016, by auditors and accountants, Mazars, and showed the research institute achieving 99.95% of its budgeted key activities and deliverables, and that it is on track to complete all deliverables within the project time frame – a good indicator for the overall performance expected in Year 2.