

A cultural elsewhere

Many things are occurring in the cultural system. While scholars try to understand the features of the emerging paradigm, in the real world things simply happen: maybe the problems are quite the same as before, but the needs are certainly evolving. Culture is becoming central in the approach of so many individuals and groups and we can observe that, despite the frequent complaints generated by a fearful and static view, there is a shared perception of the unique and multi-dimensional impact of culture upon welfare and happiness.

Rather than emphasizing the symbolic value of phenomena, the prevailing value is their actual ability to face and possibly solve problems. The articles on place branding by Ares Kalandides, and on crowdfunding by Chiara Spinelli address specific issues connected by a common orientation: a new conception of time and space needed to craft the emerging identity of contemporary society. For too long we have been familiar with cloudy labels such as “nation”, “humanity”, “past”, giving the flavour of a sacred culture. Who are the real stakeholders of the cultural system? It strongly depends on a variety of factors and in any case it needs a precise identification of those who get benefits, who can materially produce or enjoy cultural supply, and who are willing to pay, support, donate and participate.

Such a new phenomenology may sound unexpected just because the analysis and the regulations appear to consider steady and solid the system based upon the illusion of mechanical rationality and of technical specialisation. Actually, it is not at all surprising: in the long and varied past a number of interesting innovations were adopted to provide the society with tools able to consistently combine creative and semantic orientations on one hand, technical and financial needs on the other.

The theatre was transformed, from a stone acoustic amplifier to a wooden social circle, and then from a club sitting-room to a technologically advanced site; the theatrical enjoyment changed a lot according to the social preference, and it was facilitated by the material structure and the conventional shape of theatres. The same kind of evolution occurred in the visual arts, from the religious prescriptions of the Egyptian temples to the tale of life of roman frescoes, from the ethical option illustrated in catholic churches despite the forgotten prohibition to fall into the iconolatric comfort, to the alchemic eye played upon atomised colours, materic drawings, eloquent gestures of contemporary art.

The crucial point is related to the selection and the organisation of culture and the arts. Who is entitled to choose (and therefore to accept or reject)? Once it was the ruler of the Country or the Town, quite often melting political, religious and economic powers. Then it was the outcome of a complex negotiation among initiated professionals: public decision-makers, creative artists, commercial intermediaries. In the enlightened nirvana opened at the Bastille and fading at the European Central Bank everything was comfortable: cultural organisations could ignore the audience, governments could build consensus, private companies could enjoy a noble reputation. It is over.

Now a complex and horizontal society is progressively taking time and space, expanding its apparently naïf approach based upon relationships and proximity, trust and cooperation, imagination and participation. It's time for a new cultural handbook, written by a magmatic community able to avoid prejudices and dogmas in view of a more diffused presence of culture in normal lives, possibly everywhere. We need to combine experience and vision together: it's the challenge faced by the newly born think tank “[epos](#)”, hosted in this Journal.

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Esperienze e strumenti per cultura e territorio

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The lesson we learn from the analysis of such new views and experiences is that we cannot anymore rely upon the presumed superiority of the specific arts disciplines; but also economics does not manage to remain isolated on its ivory tower (the present shows how economists fail when they believe too much in their crystal ball). We need a multi-disciplinary approach, based upon the reciprocal appraisal and the strategic cooperation, since cultural complexity can be dealt with only from a fertile and versatile perspective. The future is here.



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