

## Does Culture Need New Audiences? Absolutely Yes!

In a time of austerity, audience development represents a fundamental aspect which should be taken into account. In the traditional business sectors, the demand side has always played a key role in order to predict and satisfy a huge range of needs – sometimes real, but more often market-oriented. As the ultimate end of productive firms is increasing their profits year after year, advertising and customer care perfectly exemplify two of the most powerful tools to seduce people and induce them to buy a lot of not useful things, just by selling the idea of a fictional lack people do not yet know to have, but they will soon have. Even if such a commercial behaviour is trivial and out of basic ethical principles, the message between the lines is that consumers matter.

On the contrary, in the Italian cultural realm we are witnessing a growing gap between the supply of products and services and the demand side. An excessive self-referential cultural system, together with a low attention to cultural audience's requests and desires, are at the same time cause and effect of a static perception of cultural phenomena. As Lyn Gardner noted in a recent Guardian blog, cultural organisations are afraid of asking people what they really want, transforming the relationship with the audience into a boring marriage of convenience. In this respect, if cultural institutions will continue perceiving themselves as locked places specifically dedicated to the upper classes of society, they will be doomed to forget their primary functions such as education and research. Those realities will have to learn to speak with different kinds of audience and, in particular, with under-represented groups like young people, women, migrants and disabled persons. The spread of diversity is one of the roles of culture and continuing to ignore important portions of population will limit the potential of culture as the main driver for the achievement of social cohesion and well-being.

Public funding is another significant factor which has played a key role in the separation of the cultural supply from the demand side over the years. The certainty of having a sum of money, independent from cultural organisations' economic results, represents an obstacle to the improvement of job's quality, contributing to the inability of attracting new audiences. As commons, culture needs a public support but nowadays it is necessary to design and develop new funding models based upon measurable outputs and outcomes, strongly related to the attainment of the expected results and objectives.

It is not a mere coincidence that the European Union includes audience development among its priorities within the new funding programme "Creative Europe". In the report "European Audiences: 2020 and beyond", the European Union defines audience development as "a strategic and interactive process of making the arts widely accessible by cultural organisations, which aims at engaging individuals and communities in fully experiencing, enjoying, participating in and valuing the arts". In this context, an interesting initiative has been proposed by the Arts Council England by introducing new conditions on funding: "arts organisations applying for NPO status from 2015 to 2018 will have to show how they will capture, report and share their audience data", encouraging organisations to demonstrate how they would develop audiences.

In order to bring out and amplify the phenomenon of audience development at the local level, many European Countries intends to continue the path taken in recent years by identifying new targets and tracking guidelines that stimulate cultural institutions to widen and diversify audience, as Martha Friel explains in her paper on children-related cultural policies in EU Countries. In this perspective, culture should occupy new spaces, going beyond the mainstream system and participating in everyday activities,

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as Cristina Sciarrone points out in her contribution on the street-art phenomenon as urban regeneration's tool.



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