

Culture and social welfare: thinking about the bolognese context

Culture is a core value in our everyday life. In the centuries societies inherited traditions, histories, arts, ideologies in a constant work in progress of reprocessing and enrichment: it is a human capital.

At the same time we are consciously and unconsciously witnesses of what happened in the past, to live the present and to build the future: it is an “inner necessity”(1) that shows who we are and how we are changing. This is way we need to reinterpret the meaning of *culture* under an etymological point of view: from the Latin *colere* – *cultivation*, to *culto*, of gods. Therefore this word has a double significance linked to something extremely concrete, as the agriculture, and then to the religion and the spirituality. As cultural managers and amateurs, we must “to get our hands dirty”, going deeper to this issue and let understand how culture can improve our life. The article supports the thesis that culture is a real development engine able to enhance our social welfare. If public entities, associations and private bodies will adopt a joint point of view, results will be tangible.

Social welfare must provide a level of well-being and social support for all citizens. Services are a key to create an effective and efficient system to satisfy the fundamental needs and culture is one of the tools. Not only sick persons, disables or poor persons need a support throughout cultural projects and artistic proposals but workers, parents and artists as well. This is way public management must think about a concrete strategy able to simplify the encounter between citizens and art. We need to open our cultural centers to everyone. Museums, theatres, opera houses, festivals, exhibitions are often seen as closed cathedrals, that only academics, intellectuals or the high society can reach. On the contrary we have to break up that trend to create an open system and support new comers. “Our kindergarten are our new parliaments, our schools are our target” said the actor and writer Alessandro Bergonzoni during the seminar “Un Bel welfare”, which recently took place in Bologna. It’s important to educate children and young people on the value of culture, establishing an habit. “In the cultural centers, we need to move in the bodies not the minds”(2) and to be focused on the demand of what the potential audience is looking for.

In the past there were some models able to truly pander to citizens in that sense. In the 40’s, one of them was the Italian engineer, politician and industrialist Adriano Olivetti. He believed that the profit of his entrepreneurial activity should be reinvested for the benefits of the whole society. He often invited in his factory artists, writers, painters and poets such as Moravia, Pasolini, Luigi IX, Guttuso. He thought that to improve the quality of life of his employees, the industry should have been also a creative place. He developed an interest in architecture, as well as urban and community planning. In that way, at the same time he met his workers’ necessities and aroused in them a new curiosity in culture. He shared his time between business pursuits and attempts to practice and spread the utopian ideal of community life. He decreased the hours of work and increased salaries and fringe benefits. By 1957 Olivetti workers showed the highest productivity in the metallurgical industry. He understood that life can be enhanced not only thanks’ higher salaries but also thanks’ to culture, able to generate new ideas, new perspectives and motivations. Beauty, truth and justice were his guiding lights. This micro and private model should be considered by our administrations as an example to think about cultural policies.

Following this path, Bologna as well is becoming a theatre for a cultural blossoming. The venture is very new. The initiative starts from the Seragnoli Foundation which worked on a project linked to the Company GD: the MAST Foundation. It is an international cultural and philanthropic institution that focuses on art, technology and innovation. Looking at new generation as the primary target, MAST Foundation favours

the development of creativity and entrepreneurs also with the goal of cooperating with other institutions, in order to support economic and social growth. Within this perspective, MAST builds a bridge between the Company and the Community. The activities are offered to the external visitors, as well as the company employees, sharing the same philosophy based on technology, art and innovation. It is composed by a number of services: a gallery, an academy, a kindergarten, a restaurant and a gym. The centre is still a start up but very soon we will have the feedbacks.

The bolognese public system as well is working on a new venture called PSM – Piano strategico metropolitano 2020. Within this field the territorial entities – Emilia Romagna Region, the Province and the Municipality of Bologna – approved 66 projects in the creative and manufacturing sector, to enhance the international and cultural weight of the city and to improve the social welfare.

These projects are articulated in different areas: innovation and development, social welfare and group cohesiveness, education and environmentalism. PSM should be different from the previous cases because it is formulated considering the current economic crisis. For that the PSM doesn't allocate funds and resources to realize new activities or major works, but it is supposed to create a network and a round table in the local area. If politicians can't financially support the cultural action, their aim is establishing a system between themselves and organizations, giving for example new spaces and creating facilitations for cultural activities. The issue is always the same: does PSM is the nth case of managerial rhetoric or will it be able to adopt an effective solution? We could only measure its outcomes in the near future, hoping to regain our trust in the public system of Bologna.

In order to evaluate the impact and to analyze costs and benefits of the previous projects, we should wait some years but in the meanwhile reorganize our work tools. We has to change our mind to think about culture as a social participation and a joint stock, understanding how it could be a way to empower the community.

Notes

(1) Kandjisky, *Concerning the Spiritual*

(2) Michele Trimarchi, mention from the conference "Bologna piano strategico metropolitano"



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