

The role of culture in society

In an age of insecurity and inequality, the capacity of culture to generate positive impacts seems to be a certainty. Over the past years, an increasing number of studies have analysed the cultural and creative industries' realm with the aim to demonstrate that cultural projects are good investments not only in terms of social benefits but also in terms of economic and financial returns.

Given the relevance of culture to people and places, an interesting report – released in July 2014 – presents an original perspective about the measurable economic effects of sport and culture on local economies. This study carried out a systematic review of over 550 policy evaluations of major sporting and cultural events and facilities, from the UK and other OECD countries.

Promoted by the “What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth (WWG), which is a collaboration between the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), Centre for Cities and Arup, the study intends to help politicians and institutions “to have more informed debates and to improve policy making”.

As stated in the report aforementioned, the main outcomes of such evaluation process can be summarized as follows:

- the overall measurable effects of projects on a local economy tend not to be large and are more often zero. Any wage and income effects are usually small and limited to the immediate locality or particular types of workers;
- facilities are likely to have a positive impact on very local property prices;
- projects may have been associated with increased trade imports and exports, including tourism, although these effects may be short lived.(1)

Even if this study is focused on projects at the grand end of the scale, and we need more innovative approaches in order to measure the economic impact of smaller projects, it represents a reflective and uncommon voice that demands to pay attention to specific aspects in order to have “realistic expectations of what cultural projects can achieve”.

How to find the most suitable role of culture in our contemporary society is also the main topic of the January Issue of Tafter Journal. From different points of view, all the articles published in the current number of the Journal, try to answer the question “did the project/policy work?”.

Valentina Martino, in her paper about the usage of arts and culture as a global communication media, reflects upon new models of interaction between arts and business, presenting numerous sponsorship experiences and asking for a cultural system able to stimulate the development of high-visibility partnerships in order to establish long-standing commitment of private actors.

The article by Giulia Lasen shows an intimate overview of some thought-provoking papers, presented at the ICCPR2014, on the relationship between cultural policy and globalization. Analysing the international dimension of culture, the author invites us to explore the consequences of globalization on policy making, taking into account a wide and varied range of aspects such as international development, social justice, creative economy and sustainable urban development, which are relevant for the whole society.

Monika Rut's interview with Prof. Raphael H. Cohen is part of a series of interviews under the title "Art, Science, Society", and addresses the issues of the innovations and helps spread the broad range of perspectives presented during the Digital Art Weeks's Innovations Forum Conference on Innovation, Opportunity and Social Entrepreneurship, held in autumn of 2014 at Seoul National University.

In troubled times as the present days, income stagnation, growing inequality, and economic insecurity are affecting cultural policies, undermining future expectations and increasing current anxieties. In such a context, the role of policymakers becomes even more relevant for the success of cultural management. We strongly feel that this is the right moment to bet on longevity of cultural projects impact, which should be an integral part of a broader strategy rather than seen as stand-alone phenomenon.

Notes

(1) What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth, *Evidence Review: Sport and Culture*, July 2014. Available at <http://whatworksgrowth.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/14-07-03-Culture-and-Sport.pdf>



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