

## Creative challenges

### Descrizione

It may sound obvious: in order for creative products to conquer markets we need creativity; business creativity. In the last decade debates and books about creativity were multiplied, in the attempt at answering to crucial questions ranging from the definition of creativity to the identification of creative activities, from the measurement of the impact of creativity upon local economies to the needed design of public action in support of creative artists and organisations. In such a way, although a varied and lively discussion is always healthy, 'creativity' was added to 'art' and 'culture' as iconic labels generously including an extremely wide and heterogeneous realm of objects, actions and exchanges.

Neither right nor wrong, it seems to be the clear symptom of an urgency reflecting the attention (and the obsession) for taxonomies and hierarchies needed in the serial economy. The arts and culture, and quite recently creativity, have been absorbed in a simple and rigid view whose map is a grid of models. Textbook economics, comfortable for teaching and learning but poor and dry to interpret the real world, has ended up to describe a mechanical reality; the art system did not manage to resist such a dimensional siren, and accepted (often claimed) to be considered and evaluated exactly like manufacturing companies.

Dozens of books, articles and discussions struggled to emphasize the entrepreneurial nature of museums, and the need for cultural business; delicate and controversial areas such as cultural marketing were often faced simply adding the adjective to the noun, in a rather oxymorical game. Certainly, the temptation to put everything in order despite its unpredictable and magmatic nature may have proved excessive, mainly when these beliefs are conveyed in classrooms; nevertheless some need to get oriented in the art, culture and creativity systems is quite relevant: it exerts a powerful influence upon regulation, subsidies, taxes, employment and all the wide range of economic issues.

The passage from theory to reality can reveal crucial stages and unsatisfying outcomes, due to the multidimensional features of creative processes. Creativity can arise and grow in specific territorial areas where various resources are rooted and eclectic processes are started; moreover it develops along a curve able to self-feed and multiply in the first stage, to consolidate when its critical mass become sustainable, but it is naturally doomed to decline; it should be accompanied by a favourable economic environment and a sensitive public action in order for the indispensable freedom to be combined with a sufficiently responsive eco-system and with finely-tuned tools of public support.

It is a sort of dynamic dilemma, where flexible strategies, rapid tactics and some non-prejudicial ability to elaborate specific approaches and actions manage to develop within a rigorous framework more focused upon processes and causal relationships. In such a respect the site-specificity of creative processes, their need of accurately crafted combinations of skills and competences, their strategic options related to alliances and synergies in both local and de-localised economies are fundamental for their survival and possibly growth. Not only creative processes cannot be cloned, benchmarked and even compared, but they end up to evolve through time, and therefore need to be adaptive and to combine experience and improvisation, like in any jazz session.

The value of creativity can be seen from various perspectives. Many analyses appear to be subject to conventional views and tools of textbook economics whose fundamentals have been continuously stolen and often distorted by the public administration and the army of their technical consultants with the poor goal of showing the dimensions of the creative sector, be it 'class', 'industry', 'city' and the like. Perhaps generated by an inferiority complex of non-structured areas in relation to the mainstream economy, such a view of creativity ends up to make its features homogeneous and almost standardised. Many architects are certainly creative, but not each architecture atelier is creative by definition. Statistics are useful, but as Ronald Coase used to say: "If you torture figures sufficiently, at the end nature will confess".

The analytical isolation of the creative economy as the sum of specific professional areas (artists, musicians, designers, architects, chefs, fashion dress designers, even lawyers and similar white-collar people) is generated by the shared worry of showing its dimensions and to avoid any view considering the arts, culture and creativity areas of pleasurable but negligible, useless and unproductive activities. Being relevant from the dimensional perspective they should be accepted as fully significant in the economy. Such an obsession shows its peak in the diffused discussion on the economic impact of culture (but 'creativity' sounds more fashionable and young) where ordinary expenditures in hotels, restaurants and means of transportation are presented as a unique merit, while they are in fact generated by every activity, even in a higher quantity.

In such a way we are left with two important questions. The former is: what is the role of creativity in each professional activity? Rather than falling into the taxonomy trap which considers creativity almost automatic in some activities, we should accurately analyse many professional areas in order for their creative inclination to be identified as a powerful ingredient of complex productive action; this includes the arts in their conventional definition, expands our scope to non-artistic activities, but selects creative resources and inputs on the basis of their endemic feature: to use existing ideas, objects and actions combining them in a new and unpredictable way. Everything can benefit from creativity, but nothing can be automatically creative.

The latter question is: what is the relationship between the creative system and the rest of the economy? In such a case we need to engage in a subtle, wide and delicate analysis of the impact that creative activities can exert upon plain and ordinary activities, and at the same time understand in which ways can creativity itself get improvements from the growth of the economy. A powerful example is given by technology, whose birth and growth is not necessarily due to creative intuitions, but often represent effective responses to material needs; their expansion can provide creative activities with wider scope and longer horizons. Being chaotic, creativity proves fertile and unfungible.

These simple questions lead us to uncover new perspectives for the creative system and its value for society and the economy. Both its managerial protocols and the features of public action need a substantial redesign, slowly but firmly moving from the standardised rules of mainstream private companies and dimensional monetary public support, to a more versatile and flexible toolbox able to explore the emerging markets, to elaborate specific views and tools for action, to craft asymmetrical synergies with the rest of the economy. It may seem weak and fragile, being transferred from solid and known grids to moving and surprising lands. It certainly requires non-prejudicial views and adaptive skills, but it can lead to a much more effective combination of ingredients whose compatibility has been denied for too long by the binary separation of manufacturing usefulness and cultural leisure.

The internal structure of creative organisations, whatever legal form they may adopt, should be designed as a patchwork of converging skills and professional areas, where experience and orientation should count more than formal assessments and academic degrees. Creative supply, be it formed by artworks, handicrafts, objects and activities such as performances, must explore the multiple channels aimed at elaborating, expressing and exchanging cultural discourse, in a world whose sensorial and cognitive dimensions require an expanding width to languages, styles and techniques. Cross-mediality is not only related to the interactions between analogic and digital dimensions, rather it includes a wide variety of means and tools whereby users can extract the value of creative products from indefinite points of view, and can integrate them in an indefinite process of semantic cross-fertilisation.

Co-operation, hybridation, and intuition will crowd-out hierarchies, fixed rules, safe protocols. Of course this will possibly increase the proportion of risk, but such an eclectism will be able to rapidly respond to its presence through the elaboration and realisation of appropriate action. Managerial and organisational smoothness will reduce the amount of rigid failures, since it naturally favours adaptation, evolution and change. Not only such organisations will be able to generate value properly interpreting the orientation of the emerging markets, but they will eventually prove able to anticipate trends and desires of contemporary society.

On the other side of the coin, public action cannot credibly survive in an evaluation-funding loop which, despite the wide acceptance due to its comfortable and predictable system, is bound to extinction in a public economy with decreasing financial resources and increasing selectivity. Creative organisations facing complex markets, and interacting with heterogeneous stakeholders, find being endowed with infrastructure, technology, human capital and access to markets much more effective than simple (ever more simplistic) monetary subsidies rooted in aesthetical evaluations and aimed at survival. A sound selection should be carried out by an equilibrated combination of public capital and market responses.

The magmatic and dynamic realm of what we conventionally define cultural and creative industries needs non-prejudicial analysis and the consequent scientific enthusiasm towards the experiences able to craft sensible responses to needs, expectations and desires of a society in which culture occupies a growingly crucial role. Iasa Monique Ribeiro focuses upon the importance of participation as a powerful channel aimed at generating contents and strategies through the intensive interaction between creative industries and communities; Florence Harmelin provides us with a detailed analysis of a EU funded program for emerging creative business, aimed at strengthening confidence and effective flexibility; Diana Cardaci and Francesca Selleri focus upon the semantic roots of many creative markets, showing how poetry can be properly conveyed within a cross-medial channel able to multiply its value.

The lesson we learn is simple: credible horizons for creative industries rely upon new approaches able to overcome the standardised textbook view; reciprocal listening, both internally and in the institutional and economic interactions, is the most effective tool to explore markets. Creative economy cannot be simplified with mechanical models: problem solving is bound to fail in a world of unpredictable changes; strategies may arise from problem facing. Action springs from interpretation.

## **Campi meta**