

The Sacred and the Vulgar

Descrizione

Last month Richard Florida released a new edition of his famously controversial book, “The Rise of the Creative Class Revisited”. Now that the business world is interested in creativity, the new edition could, potentially, outsell the first edition many times over.

The recent popularity of creativity may come as a relief to some. Those that have been tirelessly advocating for the arts’ place in education can now more easily connect arts education to preparedness for entering the workforce. Cultural economists also benefit as more cities want metrics to prove the cultural vibrancy of their community. This edition includes an article by Valentina Montalto, in which she describes new efforts to quantify the impact of creative industries and, importantly, the effects of policy.

Many cultural managers face a choice in how they will react to the creative economy discussion. They must decide if they will use the creative economy to leverage their institution, i.e., proclaim to the surrounding community that the institution’s success directly benefits their businesses and lives. Many have already been making this case, but the audience is now primed and ready to listen.

Some cultural managers view the creativity boon as a fad that will come and go. Some have made the creativity case so many times, to so many deaf ears, that they will never try it again. Some others just don’t care what the lay population finds interesting. These types will choose not to join the discussion. Their institutions will remain sacred.

Richard Florida and many others do not view the creative economy as a passing fad, rather, that it is the new reality. Those of this opinion will bravely move forward into

the vulgar world of popularity. These managers will interact with the masses at every opportunity: pushing information out through social media and also listening to the feedback; using interactive technology in exhibits and during performances; partnering with other institutions on local policy issues, and inviting young and non-wealthy people to serve on boards of directors.

Julia Ferreira de Abreu's article on branding describes steps an institution can take to become an integrated member of its community. Most American arts organizations, receiving little or no funding from government, have no choice but to market their programs and view branding as a survival technique. Some European institutions, however, are just beginning their adventures with mass appeal and will have to address quandaries raised in the article, such as creating mission-consistent marketing practices or the decision to separate artistic and executive leadership.

Successful integration into the local economy will likely result in deeper investment by community members— more donations, more frequent visits, more recommendations to friends and family. More communication with the public may result in requests that do not align with the organization's mission. The ideal relationship is one in which the community trusts the artistic vision of the cultural manager. It takes time to build that level of trust, which means this decision is a long-term commitment.

Richard Florida gave cultural managers an optimistic vision ten years ago and that vision is becoming reality. Many arts and culture organizations have already joined the creative economy movement. There's no better time than the present to make that decision and chart the new course.

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