

13 Ideas about Artistic Expenses

By J.L. Marzo

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1- Public cultural policy has been kidnapped by big cultural infrastructures. Both civil demands for politicians to develop a genuine territorial policy using all available resources, and some promoters' eagerness to carry out such policy, are absolutely at odds with an evidence: there is not an specific reason for that policy to be applied, given that responsibility for supporting creation is not anymore assumed by centers with projects intended to encourage a cultural policy, but by those centers that are only interested in completing their programs.

2- Even though we acknowledge the importance of both public and private cooperation in regards of financial support for many State art centers, public conditions of access, programs, teaching and support for creation principles must be clearly stated, for all these aspects should be guaranteed by public institutions, which are always more effectively supportive of infrastructures.

3- Cultural policy's objectives have been considerably transformed. Today, public budget utilizes culture as a smoke screen for other activities, be they commercial, industrial, touristic or related to infrastructures. However, culture itself doesn't seem to be enough justification. Some may think that's all right, because culture per se doesn't exist: the problem lies in a new game of confusion created by the new dynamics adopted by public budgets: the fact that once culture has been transformed into an important sector of economy, the design of a cultural image made on behalf of those involved in this business is completely justified. Quite democratic but absolutely deceitful.

4- Today, cultural policy is an alibi for the complex touristic plot in Spain and Catalonia. Art biennials or contemporary art museums are inaugurated all across the country, and the investments are so gigantic that there is virtually nothing left for financing other cultural projects in these cities or regions (Victoria's Artium, MUSAC in León or CAC in Malaga are among the most recent examples). Rather than generating local structures of creation, these museums are intended to become architectonic icons, eventually housing collections of famous artworks by famous artists or serving as venues for temporal internationalist exhibitions, highly spectacular and easily broadcasted among touristic routes. Current cultural policy is also intimately related to certain urban and commercial promotion interests.

Such relation is consolidated by establishing big constructions (Barcelona is a good example of this phenomena), or by creating financial-political brands that mechanically operate as identity logos (Forum). We're talking about cultural policies that provide showcases for new technological and industrial business networks, visualizing wicked forms of sponsorship. In short: current cultural policies are due to a concept of culture as a spur for economic profit.

5- Culture subsidizes economy, but economy doesn't sponsor culture. Is it just because culture doesn't need to be sponsored? Is it just because culture supports itself spontaneously? If so, why do we have to swallow all those artistic logos of cultural policies? How did culture become a reduced catalogue of icons? Questions are very simple: for instance, the money for supporting production in the current Culture Council of Catalonia's Government comes exclusively from official culture budgets for culture and these expenses are not shared among the rest of involved councils (tourism, trade, industry, public works). Why? If the construction of big cultural venues produces an expansion of hotel industry, not to mention restaurants and all kinds of services, then why is there no reciprocity at all? How come this surplus is not used to reinforce different policies of cultural support that may be related to "other" productive practices?

6- According to such paradox, cultural policy seems to be reduced in many occasions to a theatrical performance consisting of spending official cultural budget. The platforms on which this performance is staged are becoming smaller and smaller, since they are now obliged to be more strategic as a result of the great number of elements that intervene in the process. One of the most evident cases is the distribution of cultural budget: on the one hand, we have a sum invested in "productive" activities, that is, those activities that generate profit and directly spur economy; on the other hand, we have a sum invested in activities considered "non-productive", although this money appears as a "gratuitous" support to avantgarde investigation. An example of this dichotomy can be found between the Catalanian Institute of Cultural Industries (ICIC) and the Institute for Artistic Creation and Contemporary Thought (ICAC), both cultural organizations depending on Catalonia's government. While ICIC is focused on strategic management of big cultural business, ICAC supports those "experimental practices that can hardly obtain a minimum share in cultural market". I'm not saying this distinction is wrong for itself. Nevertheless, big cultural business have an utterly political nature, or, more accurately, they have a politically triggered orbit, whereas less commercial experimentation and production must bear with the anathema of potential irresponsibility, hence they are submitted to a closer control. The fact that the first proposals about the future of the Arts Council were quickly debated by politicians, who labeled them as "merely consultative but nor executive", provides an accurate definition of a hidden dynamics

applied through the current cultural policies to the expression, both social and public, of art.

7- Institutional devices of culture are suspicious about artists and, by extension, about other similar independent cultural agents. This, in principle, is somehow logical from our national perspective based on such abstract formulas as the “professional” artist, the lonely rider or the punk boy in his motorcycle, in short, problem kids, reckless squanderers. It’s always useful having this notion at hand if one is not in the mood for munificence. The fact that institutions are always doubtful about giving money for artists to create can also be explained by the traditional aim to oversee and control artistic production. The reasons are very amusing: censorship or political correction, the need to balance the interests of those “families” that exert an influence on institutional culture, not to mention a certain formalist, stylistic censorship whose main argument against artworks is they don’t represent the “authentic” values of what is considered avant-gardist and a potential generator of profitable logos both for media and international museums market.

8- Cultural policy seems to be fossilizing around “observatories”, think tanks, centralized spaces and groups that are able to orchestrate not only budgets but also an important cluster of interests. If it’s true that these laboratories, often controlled by *professionalized* cultural managers whose solutions are nothing but hollow sophistication, have become the only advisers in this awkward cultural policy, then we may be running the risk of seeing the whole situation turned into a dependant, vertical, macroscopic projection, in which decisions are made only by means of pure strategy, locating every aspect in a diagram of expenses and calculations. The notion of policy as a fancy textile is just O.K., nevertheless, in a context as unsteady as the art environment -which has been transformed into a museum itself, in an endangered species to be protected, and a couple of decades after the “sorpasso” of commercial audiovisual imagery- that kind of policy has eventually created a production network that only provides shelter for big cultural infrastructures. In other words, they create the contents for museums, while artists are just the labor force they need to supply a museum program. Water: the cultural policy we have is identical to this country’s culture itself. Culture is designed.

9- Cultural policy seems to be less and less interested in the actual platforms where cultural practice takes place. It is urgent to get balanced. While, on the one hand, planning according to the many parts and created interests involved is a logical step, it is also true that this kind of strategy is demagogic without direct participation of those who actually inhabit places, including programs adapted to those specific places.

10- Independent cultural creators and producers must be provided with

the necessary tools in order to obtain varied forms and conditions of production. The main tool, the most direct one, is financial support. It is useless and absurd to keep focusing on other questions. Mechanisms are all we must care about. Art centers should hand over an important share of their budget to creators themselves, so they can perform their activities, guaranteeing the proper conditions and supervising the process in order to avoid confusion, thus making management easier. Creators are very acquainted –more than one might expect– with production processes, and they are not necessarily dependant on institutional technicians for designing and performing their creations, although they should constantly learn from those technicians. Perhaps combining technicians and artists in the same management network would make things a little bit better. On the other hand, too frequently perhaps, some institutional productions are very expensive on behalf of companies and suppliers, either because institutions delay payments due to a complex bureaucracy, or either because suppliers apply an automatic extra charge whenever they work with foundations and politicians. It's been attested that many creators are able to produce their works without great expenses but also preserving presentation and competence standards, which is mainly a consequence of an horizontal and transversal manner of getting things done, a manner that makes those self-sustained, self-taught, less professional elements more confident when a network of suppliers is being carried out.

11- Budget is important because it is a transference of a real production device. Nevertheless, a cultural policy shouldn't be exclusively based on giving money. Cultural policies don't lack money but political determination and, above all, there is an absence of policies intended to encourage investigation and education (the situation, in this latter aspect, is now worse than ever). Likewise, it must be stated that there are other circuits that have nothing to do with established circuits: cultural policy must be social but it shouldn't be neither cultural nor sociological. That's how cultural policy starts. Once cultural policy reaches maturity it should become, like everything else, an I+D. Only if it's an important issue, we will eventually see if everything deserves to be called art.

12- A cultural policy cannot be based neither on “the acknowledgment of a work's merits” nor on “a lifetime at the service of arts and knowledge” (according to the mottos created by Ministries of both Conservatives and Socialists and their cultural departments). That's actually the function of awards. Without an explicit support to education and production conditions of young creators, regardless of the circuits these creators will eventually join in, cultural policy usually becomes an spectacle-policy that ignores the need for resources intended to provide social expression with a real critical, public dimension.

13- Institutional cultural policy has decided to promote a forest controlled

by big trees, ignoring the lower ones that are obliged to exist in a context that gets darker every day under the branches of big trees. These forests give the impression of being gigantic and they certainly look healthy and leafy. But it's just a delusion. Small plants and grass have become either French gardens or they are preserved as endangered species (with great expenses), instead of consider this flora as the main source of cultural ecosystem. By the way, please, forgive my awkward floral attack.