

## **THE CULTURAL INDUSTRIES AND THE ECONOMY OF CULTURE**

The cultural industries – culture as business, often very big business – are the policy-makers' pets these days, for obvious reasons. But there are also good reasons, less obvious perhaps but crucial nevertheless, why not-for-profit cultural operators should pay attention to them too.

Having just edited a 500-page multi-author volume on 'the cultural economy', let me try and explain why. Today, an ever-increasing range of symbolic goods and services is being produced and distributed. In the process, the aesthetic has been commodified while the commodity has been aestheticized. While the industrial and the digital mediate practically every cultural process, the segment of the economy that is concerned with such symbolic goods and services mobilizes considerable human, material and technical resources. No wonder that the 'cultural' has become a central economic policy issue! Witness the 2006 study *The Economy of Culture in Europe* done for the European Commission by KEA European Affairs.

These developments have also generated the new agenda and discourse of the 'creative industries.' The idea of 'creativity', that till recently artists had the principal claim on, has been vastly expanded over the last decade. Today, it is applied to a very broad range of activities and professions, many of which are far removed from artistic creation. It is enshrined in the Commission's 2007 Communication, in which 'promoting culture as a catalyst for creativity' is a key strand.

But where do we locate ourselves in this 'creative industries' agenda? Our activities are neither industrial nor are they for-profit. We're not arguing here that art and commerce are two opposing worlds, far from it. However, we do want to make the case for engaging with this other world in our own terms. This is the challenge. It has been taken up by analysts who make industry-relevant arguments on behalf of non-industrial, not-for-profit cultural work: our sector is embedded in networks that are interwoven with the creative industries; it develops human capital skills that can be applied in the creative industries and beyond; it includes organisational models and practices that can be used in industry and other domains; it is an attractor of creative individuals and dynamic businesses.

Some of these arguments are perhaps overstated. The real problem, though, is less with the ideas themselves and more with the instrumentalizing path they take us down. Do we want to take this path? And surely there are broader reasons to be wary. Should all types of cultural production be justified in terms of economic gain? We may find it tactically useful to use these arguments in our own rhetoric because it is the language policy-makers want to hear. The problem though is that this paradigm obliges us to adopt an essentially neo-liberal worldview. Is this what we believe in?

These are some of the reasons why it is important to understand the cultural economy and to reflect both on the impacts it has on non-market forms of cultural activity and new relations between the two that affect artistic work.

Recent writings by cultural economists, geographers and other social scientists can help us do this by unpacking the issues involved; some of these writings are cited below.

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