

# Product Orientation in Contemporary Art Organisations: A model of Parallel Convergence from French and British Experiences

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## **Abstract**

The debate around cultural policies has always tended to polarize towards two extremes: democratisation of culture versus cultural democracy. Cultural policies in France during Lang's arts administration or in the UK under Smith's ministry should theoretically be addressed in a cultural democracy context. This study focused on different marketing orientations in contemporary art public funded institutions and tried to set these choices into a cultural policy framework. The investigation has originated from a case-study around two important European institutions active in contemporary art: the BALTIC in Gateshead-Newcastle (UK) and the MOCA in Lyon (France). The paper argues that French and British models of cultural policies - born in different cultural frameworks- are actually moving towards many common outcomes. MOCA and BALTIC have followed a similar orientation towards art production on site and support to artists, but in the medium long-term divergence of objectives and search for sustainability have arisen.

## **Keywords**

Cultural policy, contemporary art, strategic orientation, Baltic Flour Mills, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon.

## **Introduction**

Understanding of different marketing orientations in contemporary art public funded institutions seems closely related with Governments' cultural policy. The aim of this paper is to understand the conditions of sustainability for those contemporary art organisations, which are strongly oriented to support the production of new artists. The investigation originates from a case-study around two important European institutions active in contemporary art: the Baltic Flour Mills (BALTIC) in Gateshead-Newcastle, North East of England and the *Musée d'Art Contemporain* (MOCA) in Lyon, Rhone-Alps Region.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first paragraph shortly reviews cultural policies in France and United Kingdom in the last 20 years trying to address the two cultural approaches stigmatised in the literature and emerged in the official documents of French Ministry of Culture and British Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS). The second and the third parts describe the organisations underlying differences and analogies in concept, cultural activities, business and organisational model and strategy. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with local stakeholders and top management of these organisations, which have also provided internal reports and official statements. Since financial viability has become a priority, both museums have to reconsider their business model and make it consistent with their strategic orientation. In the final paragraph, strategic orientations are compared with cultural policies in a sustainability perspective. This study argues that French and British models of cultural policies -born in different cultural frameworks- are actually moving towards many common outcomes. On the contrary, two significant organisations, which were consistent with those frameworks and seemed to pursue the same approach to art production on-site, are in fact diverging in order to be sustainable and to deliver against their rationale in the urban context of Lyon and Gateshead-Newcastle.

## **Cultural Policies in France and United Kingdom**

The debate around cultural policies has always tended to polarize towards two extremes: democratisation of culture versus cultural democracy. According to Evrard (EVRARD, 1997), these two paradigms are set in a complex philosophical and aesthetical framework and are closely linked with social behaviours and communication theory. Democratisation of culture is a kind of paternalistic vision in which the modern State has to promote arts as the Church and the monarchs fostered them until the XIX century. Governments should provide means by which artists can express in order to satisfy the best instincts of the dominant class. In this vision, only supporting “high culture” in all its forms is possible to widespread culture and to allow also lower classes benefiting from arts. The audience has a passive role since the transmission of knowledge is vertical, in a top-down relation between the producer and the consumer, who must be educated in order to appraise entirely the performance or the object. The State facilitates the delivery and decides what must be delivered because has a sort of ethic duty in choosing the “best” and the “right” for its citizens. This theory fits perfectly in the Positivistic philosophy and in the colonial thought: it recognises a superior sense of “beauty” which every human being should appreciate and the existence of some forms of arts which exploit this better than others. The work of art is the pivot of a democratisation of culture policy and the research of excellence is the main aim. In many statements of such a policy, references to the concept of audience would not be a sincere effort to match consumer needs, but another implicit declaration of an elitist idea of culture.

Cultural democracy is a product of the post-modernism thought. The quality of a work of art depends on a subjective judgement of taste and it is no more possible to draw an unconditional hierarchy of value. The models of communication and consumption are quite the opposite in the two systems: democratisation implies a transfer of information from the centre, which usually embodies the capital city, to periphery, whilst the democracy is based on a multilevel connection of independent units linked in a network. The State acts as regulator, which supplies equal opportunities, making people play an active role in assessing what really fits in their concept of leisure and what does not. If people are not only able of appreciating arts, but they are also skilled in creating it, then State’s funding priorities should target community-based projects that

actively involve public in the artistic production (HUGHSON and INGLIS, 2001).

France and Britain are considered the champions of these different systems and in the last 20 years apparently undertook divergent way of delivering culture through public funding. France is the icon of the Architect State in funding arts and culture. According to Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey (HILLMAN-CHARTRAND and MCCAUGHEY, 1989) in this model Governments play a direct role by owning and running many arts organizations and being in control of the others through a Minister of Culture, whose main concern should regard the social welfare. On the contrary, the British system is based on non-departmental public bodies, as the Arts Councils, that decide which organizations or artists should receive support, ensuring either a sort of decision-making independence from the politic power and an ambition to excellence through a peer evaluation system.

Also politically, there is a kind of opposite cycle: Margaret Thatcher became prime minister in 1979 and the Conservative party kept the charge until 1997, whereas in France, the Socialist Party won the general election and Francois Mitterand took over as new president in 1981. The second half of Nineties is dominated by the personality of Jacques Chirac in France and shaped by the New Labour's Third Way in the British policy.

The Eighties are very difficult for arts in England. A new notion of culture arose from postmodernism and the Arts Council had to justify to the nation public expenditure in culture in a period of high level of unemployment. The principle of excellence was not enough in a relativistic paradigm of art assessment and even the concept of access was felt as a patronizing attempt to bring art to people. The government was more concerned with increasing private funding and, following the American facilitator's model, developing a culture of business sponsorship. The economic dimension of culture was well underlined in John Myerscough book *The economic importance of arts in Britain*, which was often used to underpin an instrumental view of culture. In order to defend public arts funding many authors tried to demonstrate the positive impact of the cultural sector in term job creation, tourist promotion, urban regeneration, earnings in the creative industry, etc, but they often forgot to take into account the genuine purpose of the artistic activity (BELFIORE, 2002).

In early Nineties, John Major's governments made three significant changes in the cultural sector:

- ✓ the creation in 1992 of the first cultural Ministry in UK history (Department of National Heritage), responsible for arts, tourism, heritage, broadcasting and film: after years of stagnation public funding increased;
- ✓ the allocation to arts of a percentage of the National Lottery profit, which strengthens Arts Council's budget, but mainly for capital projects;
- ✓ the separation in 1994 of Scottish and Welsh Arts Council and the reorganization of 10 Regional Arts Boards with additional responsibilities.

The hallmark of New Labour's approach to culture is the idea of "creative industries" that Chris Smith, first minister of the new DMCS, develops in the book *Creative Britain*. His concept of cultural democracy resides in a cultural economy where arts are accessible not only in terms of a physical delivery but also in term of relevance and meaning (HUGHSON and INGLIS, 2001). The four key themes of this policy are access, excellence, education and economic value, with a clear shift of focus from economic towards social considerations. As some critics stressed, "with New Labour we now have to reach not only large number of people, but also the right people

and affect their lives for the better. In other words we are now expected to be agents for social change” (ROBERTS and MAITLAND, 2002: 20).

The appointment of Jack Lang as Minister of Culture in 1981 has seen a turning point in French cultural policy. Lang accepted and developed a broader definition of culture, which engages with rock music, comics, street theatre, circus, industrial heritage, etc., and set out the cultural revival as main stream of a renewed national identity. Many critics see in his course the natural predecessor of Smith’s policy. In a year he doubled ministry’s resources and the cultural spending as a percentage of the state budget rose from 0,47% to 0,76%, reaching 0,93% in 1986 and remained over 0.9 ever since also during right-wing governments.

Another milestone of this policy was the commitment of the so-called *Grands Travaux*, which turned out in a wide range of new buildings for arts even if very much concentrated in Paris. Even the election of Chirac to the *Elysée* does not modify the direction of cultural policy, but at least introduces some redefinitions of roles. More attention is given for increasing discretion of local authorities in spending decisions and for strengthening arts education and training in school in order to fill the “taste gap” between what the public wants and what is on offer.

In the period between 1979 and 1993 (roughly equivalent to Thatcher/Major and Mitterand/Lang years), perhaps not surprisingly France put much more resources in supporting the culture: real-term cultural spending nearly tripled in France and increased by a bit more than 40% in Britain. In the Nineties Britain covered most of the gap with a growth of more than 50% whilst French one was no more than 5%: in 1993 British budget was around 1/3 of French one, in 2000 it increased till about 2/3. This is not the only clue that the two systems once so different are converging. Even though opposed parties alternately took over in the two countries, policies increasingly find common fields of likeness.

Cultural policies in France during Lang’s arts administration or in the UK under Smith’s ministry should theoretically be addressed in a cultural democracy context. Although they moved more towards a participatory-model, they actually seemed to claim a strong and active guide for the arts, which is a presumed shortage of the elitist approach. Still, Garnham (GARNHAM, 2001) argues that also changes in language are significant: the shift under New Labour from “cultural industries” to “creative industries” would mark a belief back to an artist-centred policy and a traditional hierarchy of quality rather than a step forward on audience’s preferences and consumption. In contrast, more restrictive cultural policies, trying to rationalise arts through commercialisation and the “safe” principles of free markets, might have brought into organizations together with economical constrains also an awareness of uninhibited creativity. Many intellectuals and curators have a strong bias against the market as decision-making mechanism for culture and they often pretend not to consider that the market is a system, which basically works on supply and demand: if “high quality” is asked for, probably the market can produce it. Frey (FREY, 2000) states one of market’s great advantages is that it fosters variety, which is a major value come out of post-modern thought.

Once more, the debate seems to converge towards the traditional dichotomy: access or excellence? Should cultural policy be driven by stimulating people’s participation to arts or by supporting leading organizations and artists? Is it possible for a Government or an arts body to achieve both aims or are they mutually exclusive?

## Moca

*"Le Musée est un harmonieux mélange entre l'histoire et la modernité."* MOCA Architect

City of Lyon's commitment to contemporary art begins in 1976 when the *Espace Lyonnais d'Art Contemporain* (ELAC) opens and then again in 1983 a new section for contemporary art is set off at the *Musée des Beaux-Arts* in order to provide the city with a proper collection and to support the annual international festival *Octobre des Arts*. In 1984 the section moves to the *Palais des Beaux-Arts* and in 1988 the Ministry of Culture with the support of the local government implements the project of the *Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon* (MOCA).

In 1991 *Octobre des Arts* is transformed into the *Biennal d'Art Contemporain* under the curatorship of Thierry Raspail who is the actual director of MOCA.

At the end of 1995 the 3rd edition of Biennale launches the new museum building by architect Renzo Piano inside a peripheral quarter called *Cité Internationale*. The MOCA is located in a renewed palace which hosted the fair in the Thirties and manages a total space 6.300 sqm, the half of which is dedicated to exhibition activities. The Ministry of Culture and Communication has played a critical role in the development of the museum also by financing more than 20% of the project through the cultural regional agency DRAC (*Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles*), but the MOCA is neither the sole or the most important venture. The regeneration project involves a 20 hectares area strongly characterised by the Rhone River and the *Tete d'Or*, one of the largest parks in Europe, and aims to forge a multifunctional quarter which melts economic interests, cultural venues, leisure attractions, service companies and residential utilities.

### Concept

*"C'est un musée qui travail avec l'artiste sur des projets génériques. C'est surtout un musée d'artiste. Nous appelons ça une immobilité invisible"* Director, MOCA

The management of MOCA has pointed out two objectives: to gather a unique and international contemporary art collection and to underpin and promote artistic production.

In order to understand role and functions of the museum it seems reasonable to make clear specific meanings attributed to the collection. Traditionally, an art collection tries to represent and document history by gathering its works and re-assembling them in artistic periods. Quite the opposite, MOCA decides to build up its collection on the notion of plastic languages rather than on an historical approach. The artistic project investigates modernity using three key-words: limit, immaterial, presence.

Museum's mission is the production of art: the first stakeholder is not the public but the artist who must have the opportunity to work on site and for the site.

In the last years the cut in the budget has reduced new acquisitions and nowadays the museum can afford only one big buy per year. 30% of works are from Lyon region and about 45% are French. Since 1992 the catalogue of acquisitions is annually published.

The museum programme based on production has induced architect Piano to conceive an interior space totally unfixed in order to address the variable needs of creators and

unpredictable visions of curators. The main dimension of this spatial flexibility is invisibility: a system of mobile internal walls allows changing continuously display.

## **Cultural Activities**

*“Nous ne sommes pas un Musée d’identité locale, nous sommes reconnu plus sur un niveau internationale que local. C’est bien pour ça que notre Director a inventé les activités hors murs, afin de sensibiliser le banlieue local sur l’art contemporain”* Education Manager, MOCA

The MOCA attracts annually about 100.000 visitors. The *Service Culturel et des Publics* is committed to build and maintain relationship with the public that has been clustered in 5 target-groups: students, teachers, adults, far-away audience and new audience.

- ✓ Students. Schools are regular costumers for the museum that has been able to work on trust and to assure a continuous participation to its exhibition programmes. Students are the first target for guided tours and laboratories that the museum organises with the support of specialised personnel called *animateurs*.
- ✓ Teachers. They decide about the visit and are constantly informed about museum activities. Before any event, every teacher of the region is invited for special presentation in the museum in order to give details around the aim, the works and the meaning of the exhibition. This kind of approach has a long-term educational perspective and in fact it has been successful because it has raised the number of activities requested by schools. An increasing attention is for social operators that have recently begun to attend the museum with the people they care for. The management has noticed a shortage in the supply for university students.
- ✓ Adults. People in their mature age seem to deal not easily with contemporary art and the MOCA has difficulties in keeping their fidelity. Moreover, cuts in the budget have reduced activities, which have might interest this audience, like conferences, courses, and performances. In order to tackle the reduction of activities the MOCA has invested on training the guides and on developing the role of *mediateurs*, who are a sort intermediary between visitors and works of art.
- ✓ Far-away audience. This definition involves all the non-audience, which are all those people that do not have the opportunity to come to the museum and to visit personally. They are far away both physically and culturally and they often belong to special needs categories like prisoners, the sick in the hospitals, the blind and the deaf, youth communities, local authorities and aggregation centres. Projects focused on this multidimensional group imply educational activities which are delivered in their place of resident instead of into the museum.
- ✓ New Audience. The decreasing of outreach activities has compelled to move towards new targets and new forms of cultural entertainment. The museum is therefore become a location rent for corporate hospitality, cultural venues and generally *“soirée haute gamme”*

## **Business and Organisational Model**

The MOCA is a relatively autonomous structure although salaries are paid by the city council. The Organisational chart shows a staff of 35 people that can double during the preparation of exhibitions. Interviews have underlined a low level of integration among departments, a focus on duties and a very strong leadership concentrated in the director, who has clearly and steady defined mission and objectives of the organisation.

The two Biennale have been managed by the *Association de Festival Internationaux* but they are under the curatorship of the Director of the MOCA and of the *Maison de la Danse*.

Central government keeps on being the main sponsor for the museum. In order to favour French art production the government has sustained the purchase of original art. According to the agreement between the *Ville de Lyon* and the Ministry of Culture, MOCA could count on FF 1.7 million per year which has been used for an aggressive acquisition policy with about 400 international works have been collected.

Nowadays the museum can relay on €80.000 for new acquisitions. The other activities (exhibitions, presentation, documentation, communication, small tools, videos) cost about €630.000, while artists in resident have a €50.000 budget. The municipality pays salaries, utilities, running costs and extraordinary maintenance.

Private subsidies contribute for 3-4% of total budget. Other income turns up from exhibition touring, royalties of the coffee-bar and bookshop revenue. There is no control over price decisions because the municipality collects earnings and the museum cannot consider price for tickets or for letting spaces among its marketing leverages.

### **Strategic Orientation**

Artistic programme follows the needs of developing the present collection and so new acquisitions depend on the exhibitions put forward. According to the kind of works that can broaden the collection relatively to specific plastic languages, the MOCA negotiates with artists and either the museum commissions artistic research projects or cooperates in the production of remarkable works of art.

Exhibitions can also be sold and tour nationally and internationally. Every year 3 or 4 big events are organised and some other little showcases.

It is because of this productive feature that the MOCA is currently defined as *Musée d'artist* and in fact, in order to commission an artistic project, artists' different works and individual paths are investigated and among them only creations relevant to the actual curatorial programme are chosen. This explains also why museum collection is never presented in the traditional way but it is time by time assembled according to plastic languages which the MOCA has exploited. The artist is sometimes commissioned to analyse retrospectively his/her work and eventually to create a new work on site which is unique and will be purchased by the MOCA. The museum has provided artists with a studio, close to the exhibition space, where they can work and a small flat where they can live for short periods.

A key element in the museum strategy is the *Biennial d'Art Contemporain* because it was functional to obtain financial support from the public sector and therefore allowed the creation of the museum itself.

Every Biennale explores specific artistic languages and it aims at both giving continuity to the museum production and spreading its work around the contemporary art world. Moreover, the birth of another flagship event -the *Biennial de la Danse*- has raised the image of Lyon as the only city in Europe with Venice that organises two internationally recognised Biennale.

## Critical Features

The MOCA has progressively faced a reduction in the annual budget that has consequently constrained the core activities. In the next years, the MOCA will have to deal with the following decisions:

- ✓ Balancing financial support. The museum has flourished exclusively because of generous public grants, but now it might consider both to involve private partners and to strengthen its commercial activities. In order to reinforce its economic autonomy, it must transform from a mere centre of cost to a centre of income, for example by managing price policy.
- ✓ Re-orienting marketing focus. The MOCA decides which artists and what art are worth to exhibit according to direction's artistic framework. The taste of public is never taken into consideration and it is completely exogenous to any process of decision.
- ✓ Defining its institutional role. The museum is not integrated with the local community or, at least, it seems to address only the elitist portion of the audience. On the other hand, the international orientation is consistent with the process of development of the quarter and with the differentiation of its cultural and entertainment supply.

## Baltic Flour Mills

*"What we want to see for the future is the BALTIC developing in the way it has done: absolutely international reputation for the highest quality contemporary art. We would like to see it to do more in terms of links with the local businesses and local communities, so that it becomes more rooted in the area. You can join international reputation and local community focus together!"*  
Property Manager, Gateshead Council

The BALTIC is a contemporary art centre located on the South Bank of the River Tyne in Gateshead, North-East of England and it is the biggest contemporary art space in England apart from the Tate Modern in London. In the mid Nineties, architect Dominic Williams won a competition to convert a redundant 1950's flour mill into an arts centre using a £33 million funding from the National Lottery. Works started in 1999 and the Baltic was inaugurated in July 2002, but Sune Nordgren had been appointed as director since 1996 in order to promote artistic activities before the opening. The building is now divided in four levels for a total 8.500 sqm, 3.300 available for exhibitions.

## Concept

*"BALTIC was thought as a very happening gallery, purely for contemporary art, without its own collection, a place where different things would happen: a Factory of Art, where art is developed within the space. It is also very linked with education in terms of opportunity to people to come in and see different things of the highest quality of art, nationally and internationally"* Head of Visual Art, Arts Council NE

Initially, the BALTIC was conceived strongly connected to its original productive function and, in fact, it was developed as an "art factory" where art was not just exhibited but was created "ex novo". On the one hand, this explains the lack of a permanent collection, on the other, a commitment with "artists in resident" programmes. No collection confers the organisation a greater openness and flexibility because it allows changing continuously the works on show and being updated to the latest trends. Contemporary art is considered a complex framework



because is set in the present: the choice of working only on temporary exhibition avoids providing an anthology on something which is in continuous evolution. Even under a logistic point of view, no collection means any experts on conservation or restorations and any increasing costs for acquisition and storage.

Artists in resident programmes can last from few weeks to six months and have two main objectives:

- ✓ make the BALTIC a renewed centre for arts production
- ✓ make artists' job closer to visitors and general public

In a second phase, the end of the lottery revenue moved the focus towards the commercial activities and marketing and education programmes have received more resources. The aim is to keep on attracting people even when the novelty of the renewed building is over, not only by organising good exhibitions but also transforming the BALTIC in an entertainment site where people can shop, read, eat or just wander around. The BALTIC do not want to be perceived as a permanent body, but more a sequence of experiences that continues to accumulate in the collective memory of every visitor.

### **Cultural Activities**

*"In the first year 1 million people came, but the most of them came because of the physical attraction, the building is an icon. I think that the BALTIC did not really have a mechanism to look after the audience as they come in. Whether you like it or not BALTIC is a visitor's experience: we have to make sure that they do not just come once, but that they come back and spend money in our facilities. We have to find out more about our audience, marketing research has not really been done. The curatorial vision will not be driven by what people tell us: my model is about to produce more information"* Former Director, BALTIC

The artistic programme is both ambitious and accessible. Diversity in exhibitions has three dimensions: artists are chosen in the local, national and international context; artistic languages range from painting or sculpture to digital art and the production has the aspiration of reaching heterogeneous audience. Studios are not closed and visitor's participation is encouraged.

The educative role of BALTIC is intrinsic to its supply system and it is not simply directed to young public. *Education Department's* main aim is to ensure that residents and tourists might receive benefits from BALTIC. The freedom of access and the absence of any charge should stimulate visitors to enter any time they want and to make it not only a space for art, but also a place for meeting people.

Together with the traditional guided tours and laboratories museum operators try to communicate contemporary art by sharing experiences and stimulating creativity.

The BALTIC is not just a gallery, but it has gathered an impressive archive with the digital and paper documentation of all works that people can access even on-line. The arts library has attracted students and experts from local universities and the museum publishes its catalogues and a series on the art discourse called B.Read.

## **Business and Organisational Model**

*“In order to have support from the Arts Council and the governmental agencies, you then have to demonstrate that there is a public support in terms of a lot of audience development and market research: not only to underline the need for public support but to know which direction we ought to go and the sort of things the gallery ought to incorporate. One of the biggest things that came out was education facilities that were more than just the gallery space”* Property Manager, Gateshead Council.

The BALTIC is governed by a Board of Trustees with 14 members who represent not only the funding bodies and the local authorities, but also the professional and academic sector. The Arts Council, private partners and donors are assuming a prominent position with the end of lottery grants.

The organisational chart has a functional structure and employs 41 people excluded personnel for cleanings and security. The three main areas refer to: the artistic programme that cares for curatorial and educational activities; the communication department, which is committed also with fundraising; and the financial unit that ensures all administrative duties.

The Balance Sheet for 2004 reveals that BALTIC is fairly dependent on public money (over 65% of total resources) from the Lottery, which usually supports only capital spending, but in this case is still covering also current expenditure. Sponsorships count for 8% of income. The BALTIC has incomes for about £4 million: £1,5 million for activities and services, £1,5 million for personnel and £1 million for the building management.

The BALTIC is a charitable trust, which benefits fiscal incentive because of its no-profit status. A trading company manages the for-profit sector as commercial outlets, lettings and sponsors.

Commercial activities are differentiated and quite remunerative. There are two restaurants managed in outsourcing: the Rooftop offers top level cuisine in a luxury space, while the Riverside situated in the mezzanine is more an everyday meal restaurant. The coffee bar is open to the bank and attracts even people that do not enter the BALTIC. The bookshop is specialised on art books but it also sells merchandising with the BALTIC brand.

## **Strategic Orientation**

*“This is an old industrial area, suffering a huge de-industrialisation, losing population and jobs since the II World War and the Region thought: we have to reinvent us, we have to become something different. And they asked me: ‘Can you help us with the arts?’ And I said: ‘What we can do is to use the arts to change the way people think about you and change the way you think about yourself.’”* Creative Director, development agency

The BALTIC is one the element of a complex local policy aimed at reinforcing the identity capital of the area. Financing, project, launch and management have involved three main organisations: the Gateshead Council, the Arts Council of England and the One North East. The local authority did not put forward a proper cultural strategic planning but it has been able to catch the political wheel in order to interrupt the post-industrial decadence. Investment in public art and then in infrastructure for the arts has attracted renewed interest for the whole region. The Arts Council has supported the bid for the Arts Lottery Fund, which has financed the project, while the regional development agency was responsible for the local economic policy and it has coordinated a wider process of partnership in the creative industry.

Even before the building was ready, the BALTIC was operative. From 1998 it has been inaugurated a programme called B4B of various events organised in collaboration with other partners:

- ✓ B4B on site: installations inside the empty building
- ✓ B4B digital: web site and DVDs on digital arts
- ✓ B4B exhibitions: a programme of exhibitions with the collaboration of other institutions and galleries
- ✓ B4B artist in residence: first workshops in the new building
- ✓ B4B off site: artistic activities around the city

When BALTIC officially opened in 2002 it was like a continuation of the past activity which had effectively motivated people and raised interest in contemporary art.

The BALTIC never really felt a competition with London but tried to differentiate by not proposing tour exhibitions or buying blockbusters, but only presenting unique events.

### **Critical Features**

After the dramatic success of the opening -more than 1 million visitors in 18 months- the management has started a process of evaluation in order to fine tune activities and check consistency of the medium term vision. The revision stressed three levels of difficulties:

- ✓ Positioning: the museum has not reached an international prominence and the development of people coming from outside the region or overseas is still limited.
- ✓ Efficiency: there is a shortage in the full use of spaces and the digital media floor has not been used and has become obsolete soon.
- ✓ Financial sustainability. Within a year, money from the Lottery will finish and without a solid and reliable institutional or private partner, the BALTIC will have to close.

The BALTIC is realising that should capitalise on the good reputation acquired locally and on the sense of belonging that has awakened in the people living in the region.

### **Strategic Orientation in Museums and Cultural Policy**

According to Bianchini (BIANCHINI, 1998), a cultural planning approach can change the role of museums into an urban context. MOCA and BALTIC refer to two different models of museum sustainability. The former can be described as a quite traditional triangle based on artistic contents, museum organisation and visitors. The whole organisation under a strict artistic direction is concerned with delivering its vision of the art excluding from this process the audience, which can only accept passively. In the latter, artistic contents and building work together and become a single pole of attraction. Visitors have been substituted by local participants and from the environment arises a strong demand for integration and partnership with other organisations, which operate in a broader cultural field.

In the attempt to order the complexity of cultural planning in local *milieux*, some authors (BIANCHINI, 1998; MOMMAAS, 2004) have tried to classify cluster of cultural venues by using some core dimensions that can be applied also in Lyon and Gateshead-Newcastle. Firstly, in

terms of horizontal portfolio of activities, the MOCA is quite a monolithic institution for “high culture” and even if it is conceived as one of the elements of the *Cité Internationale* cultural quarter, it is an introverted place weakly linked with the external environment. On the contrary, the BALTIC is even physically remarkable for its openness to the Quayside and for a more diffuse contamination of its core business with other leisure activities. A second element involves the spatial distribution inside the cities: the MOCA was born in a new brand quarter at the periphery, but with the ambition of being one of the most fashionable areas in town; while the BALTIC is the first capital project of regeneration in the centre of a former industrial city. Thirdly, in the MOCA the moment of artistic production is completely separated from the moment of consumption and there is not vertical integration of activities. On the contrary, BALTIC is committed to a process of co-production that involves audience and it is strictly functional to the social and educational responsibility of the museum. It might be defined a sophisticated form of participatory art.

Strategic orientations suggest that the two national systems once so different are now converging. Even though opposed parties alternately took over in the two countries, policies increasingly find common fields of likeness even when organisational path seem to diverge. Three levels of “parallel convergences” emerged:

✓ Model: Architect vs. Patron.

There are still very significant differences between the two ways in which the State relates with and funds culture. Britain, in respect to the arm’s length principle, set up a network of intermediate bodies, even if in the last ten years the creation of a Ministry has clearly redefined the length of the arm. Besides, cultural organizations thrive on the benefit of their autonomy, which provides financial and managerial freedom of choice and a tighter responsibility and accountability (SCHUSTER, 1998). However, BALTIC after two years of amazing public success is now dealing with budget constraints and medium-term sustainability might pass only through the safe care of the Arts Council. Meanwhile, France hardly stepping back from a central and capillary *dirigisme* asked financial monitoring to directly controlled organizations, which very often in the past did not have any constraint in spending.

✓ Structure: Decentralization vs. Centralisation & Distribution vs. Concentration.

In both countries, Governments are delegating responsibilities to regions, in a process of devolution that has been pushed forward for many years in the UK. Decentralization also may be seen in a horizontal dimension as an attempt at spreading cultural activities outside the big centres of production. In general, both countries spend a disproportionate percentage of their grants in their capital cities and in their family jewels. In the museums sector, for instance, 17 national organizations attract the whole DMCS grant and in France, despite the desire for *déconcentration*, the Louvre and Versailles still receive 71% of the budget for museums.

Both Lyon and Gateshead-Newcastle have shown the tremendous abilities of competing with their capital cities both in terms of quality and numbers, investing on the cultural image of “European centres for contemporary art”. Lyon has accomplished its international ambition and can be considered the second artistic city of France, while originality of BALTIC has not been internationally recognised yet.

✓ System. Supply vs. Demand.

Both systems have been artist-centred in a common effort of developing a high quality professional body, capable to produce the best art for the nation. Despite governmental rhetoric, funding allocations indicated a primary commitment to major organizations and very little budget for audience development.

MOCA is fixed on its original structure and routine and it is centred on the “product”. BALTIC public success seems definitely connected with the building more than with the contents despite the top quality art exhibited. In order to survive and to build up on customers’ fidelity, the organisation is moving focus on marketing and on its natural inclination to local relationship. This attitude explains a major concern with the value for visitor -especially in its identity dimension- and with the process of distribution.

## Conclusion

The debate in contemporary art museums seems very much concerned with who has the right to decide about quality and therefore choose which kind of art is worth to support. Up to now practice has demonstrated that decisions on cultural issues has been taken either by the art establishment (critics, curators, scholars) which should lobby for artists, or by the elected politicians, who should represent the people. Mixed regimes are increasingly prevalent, but they remain indirect systems, where the elites are in charge of judgments. Some economists reevaluate the direct role of citizens in artistic choices and claim subsidies for consumers rather than for producers. Peacock (PEACOCK, 1994), in behalf of consumer sovereignty, even when subjected to quality certification constrains, favours voucher schemes and some form of tax relief on consumers’ art expenditure. The main alternative is to subsidize the supply in order to fulfil the principle of additionality. Peacock demonstrates that only no-profit organizations actually increase the relevant cultural output beyond what it would be without subsidy, and this is one of the reasons why these forms are preferred by funding bodies. Nevertheless, here comes the paradox of effectiveness: grant-makers are used to select organizations that are not going to match what consumers want and, since they do not respond to market incentives, they sometimes feel free to raise tickets costs (TOWSE, 1994).

The cases presented show that cultural policies effect on organisational models and strategic orientations of cultural organisations. MOCA and BALTIC have followed a similar orientation towards self-production and support to artists, but in the medium long-term divergence of objectives and search for sustainability have arisen. The BALTIC is perceived as a mean for urban regeneration conducted through investments on physical and symbolic capital. Such a model of art production cannot be sustainable without a persistent commitment of public authorities. The MOCA might continue its strategy of production because its cultural role is functional to the city image. MOCA is then a tool of place marketing that contributes to raise the image of Lyon as a wealthy and intellectual city, but do not have any considerable impact acting as social actor because it is not integrated into the local community. The risk is to become progressively an extraneous body and to stay marginal to the vernacular life of the town.

Preserving artistic freedom means to allow the majority to express their creativity in the forms they prefer. The French approach for a major effort in the educational system and larger cultural commitment at every level of public institutions is aimed to provide the consumer with an educational framework and to enhance participation in arts. On the one hand, duty of a democratic state is to guarantee the availability of those minority forms of art that would not survive without subsidy. On the other, dropping the “heroic myth” of culture’s transforming

power (BENNETT, 2002), a realistic assessment of what culture can do and a sincere desire of audience development could eventually lead to a redefinition of the cultural core product, which embraces aspirations, needs, level of knowledge and roots of audience.

“High” and “low” culture probably collapsed into each other, and organizations must learn how to thrive in the broader leisure and entertainment competition, even compromising their presumed integrity. Finding out what the public wants and providing them an engaging experience means helping them to find out more for themselves, not just giving them what cultural elites believe they would find out. Artistic encounters cannot be predefined, but can enrich the single participant in a unique experience that does not necessarily coincide with the intentional effects or with the aims of pretentious policies. Spalding claims that museums “need to become less like textbooks and more like magazines, that contain articles of varying length according to the subject and its potential to interest its readers.” (SPALDING, 2002: 89)

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