

From Negotiated Order to Freedom Proper

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Abstract

In this paper I apply theories and concepts from Organization Theory to study the Roberto Cimetta Fund as an organization that facilitates international collaboration and knowledge-sharing with/for independent art organizations. I set out to answer this question: ***what are the challenges and consequences of collaboration, networking and knowledge-sharing for independent art organizations?*** I argue that independent art organizations are obliged to deal with a paradoxical situation at organizational level: to make a balance between the environmental pressure and artistic freedom through 'negotiated order' and through learning process, to empower the independent sector.

Introduction

In recent decades *collaboration, networking and knowledge-sharing* are some of the most central concerns of the independent art organizations¹ in the postindustrial societies. It is argued that not only "organizations can learn, just as individuals can" (Hatch 2013: 304) but also that arts organizations are uniquely capable of facilitating 'social learning systems' and become the indispensable means for disseminating shared-knowledge and communal experience through interaction with the broader society locally, regionally and globally. There are numerous artistic networks and collaborative programs throughout Europe and their number is growing (even though funding opportunities are at the same time shrinking by austerity measures). These collaborations are not confined to coproduction and touring of artworks, but also platforms for professional development, learning and exchange of artistic experience. There are also several public funding programs available for international, cross-cultural collaboration, which promote 'artistic mobility' and creativity. The Roberto Cimetta Fund (RCF) is one of the most active organizations that promote international collaboration and knowledge-sharing through grants for artistic mobility, particularly in the MENA region.

This paper looks at the independent art organizations as a sector (for the level of study) and examines the RCF in particular as an organization that is directly involved in international collaboration and learning through 'communities of practice' (Wenger 2000). In particular I will focus on a new initiative by RCF i.e. 'What's Your Challenge?' (WYCH Forum) that is to serve as a social learning platform for the members of the artistic network from the MENA region, associated with RCF. I claim that this initiation adds a new layer of value to the Cimetta Fund as a 'learning organization' (Hatch: *ibid*) where expert knowledge from various countries and cultures as well as 'tacit knowledge' (Polanyi 1962) of individual artists can be shared and used to strengthen the international community of artists and independent art organizations. I further argue that the empowering and transformative potentials of collaboration and knowledge-sharing (in a forum such as WYCH) is a widow of opportunity for artists to collectively look for solutions and through 'negotiated order' (Hatch 2013: 172)

¹ By 'independent' I simply mean cultural organization that in a broad sense are not representing the so-called 'national heritage' as conceived by modernist notion of culture.

overcome the paradoxical situation of artistic freedom and independence in the one hand and organizational structure, institutionalization and environmental pressure on the other.

Collaboration between independent art organizations is a sign of solidarity. I claim that solidarity is performative and transformative. As the Brazilian theater director, Augusto Boal has claimed “to transform is to be transformed. The action of transforming is, in itself, transforming” (2008: xxi).

What is RCF?

RCF is a not-for-profit international association “created in 1999 to respond rapidly and directly to artists and cultural managers who wish to travel in order to develop artistic cooperation and projects” (RCF 2014a). RCF policy is aligned with “the recommendations of the UNESCO Convention that calls for the strengthening of multilateral relations between North and South and preferential treatment to artists and professionals from developing countries”. Furthermore “partnerships and joint projects are [developed to] establish long term multilateral processes, policies and programs” in 68 different countries (ibid). Since its establishment RCF “has provided 1300 travel grants to individual artists, managers and cultural professionals from the South and the North. Today the members of the Board of Directors are from North Africa, Europe and the Middle East providing a wide and effective cooperation on the question of transnational mobility” (RCF 2013: 2).

In addition to funding, RCF offers “expertise in international cultural cooperation to local, regional, national and international governing bodies to assist them in developing and implementing well-planned strategies on transnational mobility for artists and cultural operators in the region” (ibid: 3). RCF is a networking, flexible structure that acts as an intermediary between institutions and individuals, that is “an external actor allowing neighbors to address common issues of concern” (ibid). On the Roberto Cimetta Fund’s chart of organization—that asserts its values—one of the aims of the organization is “to contribute to changing the perception of transnational mobility as a learning process with positive benefits” (RCF 2012). RCF considers that mobility is an essential learning tool and a legitimate policy that recognizes the free circulation of culture professionals. [...] Mobility means intercultural dialogue where the artistic community can acquire intercultural competencies through confrontation, curiosity and permeation allowing for new forms of art and culture to emerge”. RCF asserts the need to strengthen artistic solidarity and addresses the artistic, geographical and directional imbalances that are characteristic of current cultural and artistic models of international partnerships” (RCF 2014a).

In order to achieve its set goals, RCF requires constant learning and updating of relevant and useful information not only about their partners and artists they support but also about the contexts in which those artists operate. To address this issue RCF has initiated WYCH Forum for the purpose of *knowledge-sharing and collective learning*. In the press release of February 2014 for the forum, RCF announced that:

“The main objectives [of the Forum] are to share knowledge [...], to communicate the similarities and dissimilarities of conditions, to identify the specific and shared problems or challenges faced by the members, to collectively search for solutions that can be implemented (reciprocally and effectively) and elaborate realistic strategies through collective actions or support through members’ own communities or countries” (RCF 2014b).

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

In this section I will proceed with a briefly presentation and defining of a number of key concepts and theories that will be built into the discussion later in this paper. Familiarity with these conceptual and theoretical frameworks are crucial for comprehension of the argument. I will refer to these concepts and theories through the paper in relation to deferent aspects of the issue and the research question. In the following section I will discuss the methodological distinction between three different perspectives in the Organization Theory.

Learning: central to the topic of this paper is the issue of learning in organizations. It is a strong current issue in the postindustrial knowledge economy. Depending on various perceptions of how we acquire knowledge, the organizational theories differ in their approach i.e. whether we consider learning as A) an individual mental process, B) knowledge as an objective production factor that can be acquired, or C) learning as practical, context-dependent social process.

Communities of Practice is a social learning system theory presented by the cognitive anthropologists Etienne Wenger who maintains that learning is not a one-person activity, but a social process that develops in three dimensions: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger 2000). “Communities of practice are the basic building blocks of a social learning system” that achieve their objective by the means of “events, leadership, connectivity, membership, projects, and artifacts” (ibid: 229–230). The concept of communities of practice is very suitable here for us to describe the goals and practice of RCF.

Tacit knowledge is a concept in philosophy of science, proposed by the Hungarian polymath Michael Polanyi (1962). Tacit knowledge is the “personal, intuitive, and context-based understandings and appreciation that allows you to perform expertly or to function competently within a given cultural context” (Hatch 2013: 304). In arts and creative process, tacit knowledge is the most crucial way of learning; it is the main means of transmission of knowledge and experience. The artistic mobility facilitated by RCF, is thus a valuable framework for creation and sharing of tacit knowledge and ‘practice-based theorizing’ (Gherardi 2011: 215).

Negotiated Order is a term coined by Anselm Strauss, indicating that social order is an informal negotiated agreement among the members besides (or despite) the formal rules and regulations. (Hatch 2013: 172) Negotiated order can account for improvement of performance and achievement of the organizational goals, through inter-personal negotiation. In this paper I argue that collective artistic process and creative collaboration are the perfect examples of negotiated order than can be utilized as a liberating force. The RCF networking and WYCH Forum are empowered by negotiated order.

Storytelling is an important aspect of an organization’s culture that “is a key part of member’s sense-making and means to supplanting individuals memories with institutional memories” (Hatch 2013: 177). In international artistic collaboration storytelling plays an important role in learning process. Partners learn from similarities and dissimilarities of their experiences and their contexts.

Artistic mobility is the transnational temporary travel of artists and cultural professionals as part of their regular working life. It contributes to sustainable models of international

cultural and artistic eco-systems. Artistic mobility facilitates dialogue and is a messenger of cultural diversity and partnerships (RCF 2013: 3).

All these concepts are at work in the activities of RCF and the collaborations that it supports and creates. In next section, I briefly explain the three different perspectives of Organization Theory before drawing a historical background for contextualizing the independent art organizations in Europe and the transformation of the environment in the last three decades.

Methodological Foundations of OT

Theories do not live in vacuum; they are social constructions and product of history. As Robert Cox has pointed out “theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose” (cited in O'Brien 2010: 18). The field of Organization Theory is a multidisciplinary field of study, incorporating many theories and concepts from across a vast number of academic disciplines. Mary Jo Hatch (2013) categorizes the organization theory into three different perspectives: Modern, Symbolic and Postmodern. These different perspectives are markedly different from each other in terms of their methodological foundations, that is, they differ in their ontological and epistemological assumptions as well as their views on what an organization is, how it should be studied and for what purpose.

The **Modern** perspective stems from the objective ontology of the Enlightenment project and its positivist epistemology. Enlightenment had replaced the God of the Middle Ages with an almighty Nature-Mathematician whose grand design of the universe could be scientifically observed by rational subject and empirically formulated into testable hypothesis. This belief led to the racialist² myth of ‘progress’ and the grand narratives that justified abuses of power and imperial ambitions (Hatch 2013: 11 & 40). For the modernists organizations are thus ‘real’ entities, designed objectively to facilitate the rational decision-making processes, based on universal laws to transform the ‘nature’ for the sake of maximizing of Man’s utility through optimization.

The **Symbolic** perspective sets to soften some of the more aggressive edges of the modern perspective by adapting a subjective ontology and an interpretative epistemology. The proponents of this perspective assert that knowledge is intersubjective and claims of truth relative to the knower(s) and thus socially constructed via an ensemble of symbols, contexts and interpretations. They maintain that organizations are constructed webs of meaning that exists in and through the interactions of the actors. I argue that the symbolic perspective tries to humanize the modern perception and behavior—not by radically criticizing the foundation of modernist’s assumptions—but rather by introducing a moderate approach to it. The symbolic perspective takes into consideration the importance of theories such as social construction, cognitive psychology, institutionalizations and the role of culture in organizations. The alternative views offered by symbolic perspective should be understood in the context of the devastating outcomes of imperialist capitalism, culminating in two vicious World Wars that shattered the belief in progress and divulged “the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism” (Adorno 1997: 34).

The radical opposition to the logic of modernism came through what is commonly known as postmodernism³. The **postmodern** perspective aims at obliterating the logical foundation of

² Racialism as “a movement of ideas” distinguished from racism (Todorov 1993: 91).

³ There are two dramatically different strands to postmodernism: one is “postmodernity as a

modern rationality, by attacking its very roots: the *grand narratives* of the Enlightenment. Jean Francois Lyotard defines “postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives” (1983: xxiv) that focuses instead on “flux and change as modeled by the structures of language [...to] reveal the power relations from which humans should seek liberation.” (Hatch 2013: 47). By the method of ‘deconstruction’—which delegitimizes legitimacy of dominant discourse through interchangeable contextual interpretations—postmodern thinkers pathologically and forensically deal with the monster of modernity as if it were a *text*. Deconstructing the discourse of modernity is to make the “central features of constructed reality visible and thereby liberate us from their influence on our way of thinking and acting” (Hatch 2012: 44). The pathological approach—and as it were, clinical treatment of modernity, particularly in the works of Michel Foucault is of great significant. Babak Ahmadi points out that “according to Lyotard [postmodernism] ‘is to understand modernism, plus its crisis.’ The concept of crisis has a central role in postmodern debate [...]. It is used in the sense that was familiar in the ancient medical perception: that is, when an organism struck by disease cannot cure itself by the means of its own internal and organic mechanism” (Ahmadi 1992: 475). In this world of flux and crisis, wrapped in ‘hyperreality’ everything can be *read as text*: “all the structures called real, economic, historical, socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents” are *text* for Derrida who infamously declared: “there is nothing outside the text” (Derrida 1988: 148).

Study and defining the nature of independent arts organizations through the established typologies of organization theory can be difficult and complex. The difficulty lies both in the nature of artistic creativity and its oppositional relation with institutional organization structure in the one hand and with theoretical academic frameworks that are usually devised to explain the bureaucratic, industrial and economic organizations⁴. I argue that independent arts organizations are stuck in the purgatory of environmental pressure of the neoliberal discourse that obliges them to react in such way that can be best described by the modernist perspective. Art organizations are engaged in a field that by definition is subversive and emancipatory—which is best described by postmodern perspective. I argue that these two incompatible perspectives should be brought simultaneously into our discussion in order to shed light on the conditions in which independent sector functions.

I assert that independent art organizations are the ‘site of contradiction’ (Schechner 2006: 141) i.e. while flying the banner of postmodern subversiveness in their ethos, they are at organizational level and in their socio-economic context forced to comply with the neoliberal discourse and its modernist foundation. It is through adaptation of a hybrid perspective that we can understand the importance of collaboration and knowledge-sharing for the independent art organizations through artistic mobility. In order to make sense of this contradiction, it is necessary to have an overview of the historical background of changes in the socio-political context in which the independent art organizations operate. In the next section I attempt to establish that overview.

period of time that comes after the modernist period in history. The other takes a more philosophical perspective and considers postmodernism to be a new way of viewing the world, a new philosophy” (McAuley 2007: 200). In this paper we are concerned with the latter definition.

⁴ Not to mention what the American playwright, David Mamet calls the ‘Jesus Factor’ that is “it works correctly on paper but for some reason doesn’t work when we get it on its feet” (1991: 41) or what Andre Spicer (2013) labeled as “the role of bullshit in organizations”.

Historical Background

One of the most complicated issues of capitalism is the absorption and reinvestment of surplus capital (Harvey 2007). I argue that neoliberalism attitude in dealing with ‘society’⁵ and economy that has resulted in particular plans of urban development project through gentrification and cultural tourism. It had to impose a certain definition of ‘creative industry’ that is at the very opposite of what art means to the independent sector. A very brief and sketchy historical background will illuminate this point.

Collaboration and knowledge-sharing is and has always been an integral part of artistic creativity. Notwithstanding the role of artifacts/artworks in bourgeois societies—who instrumentalize and commodify art as symbols of power and social status—artistic creativity has always been an organic part of communal life in all societies (Carey 2005). In the industrial societies, arts became synonymous with and represented in *buildings*, that is ‘cultural organizations’ such as museums and opera houses whose façade resemble that of governmental and financial institutions, representing the opulent values of the dominant class (Fitzgerald 2013). This rather new ‘functionalist’ role of arts in society had for long excluded the majority of the working class population who viewed ‘arts’ as elitist and irrelevant to their daily life. With the advent of Keynesian welfare states in most of Western Europe and the empowerment of the working class, independent culture houses and community art centers began to emerge in different European cities whose priority was not to produce and exhibit ‘high art’ but rather to become a platform for ‘cultural diversity’ and ‘creative process’ for the members of the community. These organizations can be considered the prime examples of ‘social learning systems’ *before* such term had been coined.

The emergence of neoliberal regime and its attack on welfare state had a devastating effect on these independent, community-based, grass-root organizations. Many of these culture and art centers had to close down, reshape or relocate due to cut in public funding, gentrification and social transformation, enforced by politics and marketization of entire society. However these organizations must not totally disappear because the capitalists need to put on a spectacle of ‘cultural industry’ to attract tourist in the big financial centers i.e. the ‘neoliberal cities’ (Harvey 2012). Under immense pressure from this environment, majority of the independent art organizations had to adopt in order to survive. They had to find a balance between isomorphism and independence.

One of the main trends of adaptation of the new discourse was this that the cultural sector thought they should talk back to politicians ‘in their own language’ through mimicking the New Public Management mindset, trying to prove the ‘usefulness’ of arts in the society and to justify “the colossal injections of other people's money” into arts (Carey 2005: 47). This resulted in institutionalization of independent sector: organization sought to gain legitimacy through isomorphism and by adopting the language used by the government and bureaucrats in order to secure the continuation of public funding for arts.

Collaboration and Networking

Different factors necessitated and encouraged the international collaboration for the independent organization: The European Integration and the reformulation of the discourse of ‘European identity’—particularly after the fall of the Berlin Wall—encouraged the arts

⁵ Though “there is no such thing as society,” (Thatcher) the neoliberals nevertheless have to deal with “it” apparently.

organizations to initiate networking and cross-borders collaborations to learn from each other's experience. By realizing the existence of mutual interest and common objectives, collaboration, knowledge-sharing and communicating became crucial. The independent artistic groups transformed into more formalized structures and learned from each other to do so.

The contingency theory and resource dependence theory are the correct analytical tools to explain this situation. **Contingency theory** argues that "the environment dictates the best form of organization" (Hatch 2013: 67). The arts organizations reacted to the environment by assuming an 'organic form' of organizational structure, a form of flexibility that made artistic mobility both a necessity and a strategic tool to resist the pressure. Organizations' dependence on environment is the result of their need for resources. **Resource dependency theory** maintains that network can help an organization to understand the power/dependence relationships that exist between their organization and the environment (Hatch 2012: 70). Thus collaboration can help to reduce environmental uncertainty through sharing of crucial resources and gaining knowledge.

In this sense the contradiction between environmental uncertainties vs. artistic independence resulted in an equilibrium adjustment that is manifest in *international collaboration, networking and knowledge-sharing through artistic mobility*. And it is precisely in the midst of this complex context that the Roberto Cimetta Fund operates.

Discussion

The modernist mindset *still* considers 'art' as what people do in their 'free time'. In *The Cultural Industry*, Theodor Adorno argues that in capitalist system where everything is functionally determined, "free time is shackled to its opposite" (2005: 187) because the 'free time' is exactly the workers recharging hours "where productivity of labor continues to rise, under persisting conditions of unfreedom" (ibid: 188). For the independent organizations in contrary, arts should not be a functional commodity for 'free time' but a platform for creative process and social learning through practice and exchange of non-standardized tacit knowledge. The independent art organizations are the yet unspoiled platform for such endeavors. As Silvia Gherardi pointed out "operational knowledge in organizations exists at a tacit level" (2011: 213). She asserts that "when the locus of knowledge and learning is situated in practice, the focus moves to the social" (ibid: 217).

This attitude is the very opposite of the neoliberal/modernist mindset that objectifies, instrumentalize and commodifies arts, by denying the importance of process and the context-dependency of creation and sharing of knowledge. The modernist perspective reduces arts to 'artifact and artworks' i.e. decorative objects that have a mere *function* during the 'free time' in the capitalist society. The opposition between these two contrasting mentality is the battleground between the modernist and postmodernist perspectives. On the one hand the modernist considers art organization as one fancy department of market economy, representing a controlled and static cultural value. On the other hand the postmodern perspective sees organizations as sites of power relation that it seeks to 'deconstruct' towards establishment of social justice and emancipation.

The contradiction lies in the fact that independent art organizations are nevertheless 'organizations' within the context of social relation of power and as such, heavily under the environmental pressure of the dominate discourse in society i.e. the modernist/neoliberal discourse (for the time being). Artistic expression is claimed to be the ultimate domain of

freedom and supreme manifestation of individual self-determination. Paulo Freire once wrote "freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift" (2005: 47). It is in the abovementioned struggle that collaboration, networking and knowledge-sharing are the important means of resistance against the market pressure on arts.

The Roberta Cimetta Fund, operating in the midst of this struggle, sees the need and feels the necessity for creating the platform for collaboration, networking and knowledge-sharing through supporting and facilitating artistic mobility.

Conclusion

Silvia Gherardi refers to Ulysses as "a metaphor for humanity in search of knowledge" (2011: 211). More appropriate to the context and the historical experience of the independent art organization, I argue that it is not the metaphor of Ulysses, but rather that of the Nordic god, *Odin*—who sacrificed an eye to gain wisdom—that expresses the true depth of experience of the independent arts organizations.

Independent art organizations such as RCF operate and try to survive in the contradictory context of artistic freedom versus the ideological pressure from market economy. Such organizations need to adapt to certain formal, accepted norms in order to gain legitimacy. They cope with this contradiction through negotiated order, made possible through collaboration and inter-organizational learning; artistic mobility being the most crucial element of this endeavor.

The very nature of artistic mobility, collaboration and knowledge-sharing is subversive. It evolves through 'communities of practices' as a social process that could transcend from the 'negotiated order' and become an opportunity "to turn free time into freedom proper" (Adorno 2005: 197).

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