

Cultural Leadership - a non-Western perspective*

One of the most common definitions of Cultural Leadership is the ability to hold a balance between the immaterial human expression and the material economic results of arts organisations. But this definition is seen critical by a lot of cultural professionals especially from the Global South. This is the case not for considering the concept negatively, but to underline the necessity to implement new factors, adapting them to our times.

By Carmen Jaimes Aldave

In the last twenty years, the term cultural leadership has appeared in the cultural sector, especially in the Global North (Keohane; Nye 1977), to express the necessity to mix two spheres that long used to seem incompatible: arts/ culture and economic/ administrative aspects. The first one, concerns about all kinds of human expression pushed by creativity or the necessity to express the humans' ways of seeing and feeling the world; and the second one, recalls the economic need in order to lead cultural institutions to the best-possible processes, auto-sustainability and profitability.

Cultural Leadership in the Global North

Those who embrace the term in a positive way come especially from countries where they have been able to develop the perfect balance between cultural and managerial skills. Most of them are placed in the Global Northern – United Kingdom, United States of America, France, Germany, Spain and Italy can be some examples. The majority of cultural institutions from these countries are led by professionals that understand and manage their institutions following the guidelines of the Creative Economy (Howkins 2001).

During my years as an arts and cultural management student in Italy, where I had lived for 23 years, I learnt and applied all necessary processes to lead and manage a cultural institution; and I also had the opportunity to work

*Special thanks to ICM-ASH, PUCP, EPU-USMP, Ankawa Internacional, MCPeru, SPP, Unicatt and RomaTre.

and collaborate with different film and music festivals, where artistic quality was the main mission, but another and not the last one were the economic results. At least, the balance had to be in the break-even point. So, based on these experiences a cultural leader is a sort of a tightrope walker between quality pursuit and economic and financial results. But is this perception the best approach to guarantee success in the arts around the globe? Can this culturally influenced system of arts management and leadership be applied and be expected to bring the same positive results in every arts institution, especially those not belonging to the Northern sphere?

“While community-led factors have been developed and have been most important in the Global South in the past, current changes in Global North societies currently show a growing need for such approaches.”

According to my experience, there are other factors that can make a stronger difference especially in countries from the Global South (for example from Latin America and Africa), where communities voices are gaining importance in society and are attempting to have a direct influence on cultural policy and its institutions.

At present, also countries considered “first world” are dealing with social, economic and cultural issues. Consequently, economy cuts in national cultural programs are evident both in Europe and the United States, forcing cultural institutions to use their budgets more effective and efficiently with the help of a managerial strategy. But this is not enough. While community-led factors have been developed and have been most important in the Global South in the past, current changes in Global North societies currently show a growing need for such approaches.

Towards Cultural Networking

There are parts of almost each country’s population – the minorities and small or medium communities – that don’t see cultural institutions as an accessible environment since they feel excluded from the institution’s plans. This could be the case of Latin-America, where economic inequality is still a social issue in the national agenda. There is a part of the population as well in the Northern Global doesn’t feel as to be part of cultural decisions mostly

made by the "elite" (whether political or intellectual), without consulting members of the public for whom cultural projects are planned.

According to my point of view and my experience as cultural agent in Europe and Latin-America, the term Cultural Leadership expresses a hierarchical way to do and promote arts and culture. Cultural managers, or I would rather say cultural agents, should instead mainly work for Cultural Networking and restart the concept from a horizontal point of view: cultural projects in which minorities and different communities take part in order to remark the cultural diversity of territories in the Northern as well as in the Southern Hemisphere, and making people aware of its importance and value, especially in times where diversity and immigration are considered a global threat.

I would point out four factors for a Cultural Networking from a Southern point of view:

- **Value:** culture as transversal tool for social change
- **Empowering:** creating, offering and empowering people through cultural activities
- **Impacting:** producing social impacts and benefits as the spiral effect (graphic below)
- **Connecting:** building bridges between private and public; institutions and educational centres; local and national governments; and villages, cities and countries Especially, connect people from the same community that in most of the cases is a fragmented one.

These four factors can't be reached from today's Northern cultural leadership's perspective. They are only possible through a participatory community culture which requires a previous investigation of cultural indicators of work contexts, an accurate analysis of the feasibility of community projects, an alliance with different partners and actors even if they are considered "competitors"; and especially a cooperation with the communities where the action will take place.

The difference between Cultural Leadership and Cultural Networking thus is that while Cultural Leadership focuses on profitability and a specific target, Cultural Networking instead puts the focus on transforming and improving a geographical environment by creating benefits and impacts to the public and connect all actors. The first concept is based on the traditional Western understanding of management, and the second one on an under-

standing of innovation that considers the importance of networking and the relevance of gradual impact from the micro to the macro level, focusing to resolve problems at the roots and being more appropriate in inequality situations which affect interchangeably the Northern and the Southern sphere.

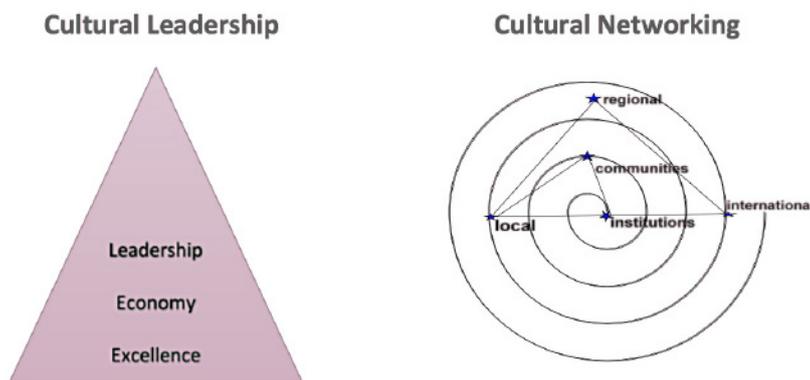


Fig. 1: Differences between Cultural Leadership and Cultural Networking on a structural level

Definitely, it is a plus to have cultural management knowledge to adapt for Cultural Networking. Related to this, I would like to mention my enriching experience as teacher of a Cultural Planning seminar from 2014 to 2017 in Lima. Some of the participants worked with minorities' and communities' representations and had registered to the seminar due to a lack of managerial knowledge in the cultural sector. Among the most common difficulties were named: strategies of fundraising for self-sustaining financing, search for stakeholders, evaluation and monitoring of organisational processes, draft writing, and strategies for the promotion of cultural events. In most cases, participants only had to be guided to a strategy to be able to carry out their projects. Learning to plan and putting down something on paper was a challenging goal in a society where in most cases projects used to be improvise or organised without considering time and financial risks.

Value

Cultural agents have the responsibility to work for a social change and this is possible only if values are well defined during a project. During the Cultural Planning Seminar, the participants opened up my mind by showing me how sensitive and committed they were to the community they were working for and asking questions like: Do we include our community into decisions making processes? Or, do we just design projects according to

statistics and indicators? Some of them had made the experiences of collaborating with multinational companies that on the one hand cause damages to a specific geographical area, but at the same time finance cultural and educational programs. This is a complex situation not only because of the question of taking or refusing the money, but because the funders don't see the long-term needs of the addressed communities but prefer simply seeing that "some action was done" with the budget in terms of corporative cultural responsibility.

Here, one can remark the valuable and pluricultural communities' perseverance of minorities such as the Afro-Peruvians and the 55 other different [groups of indigenous population of the Amazonas and the Andes](#) who are reaching to be included as an active part in political and cultural decisions. The work of the Ministry of Culture to create acknowledgement and inclusive projects in their favour as a fundamental factor of the pluricultural nation identity is notable.

Empowering

People demand to be part of social change and gain equal opportunities. Related to this, I had a significant experience in 2017 as assistant of a Cultural Heritage workshop in Vilcashuamán, a small town located on an ancient archaeological site in the Andes called "Qhapac Ñan", an over 23.000 km long Andean road which once connected Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, and is an [UNESCO World Heritage Centre](#) since 2014. The workshop was part of a socio-cultural project organized by the Ministry of Culture Peru together with the local community in order to sensitize the young local population to the importance of cultural heritage and strengthen their sense of cultural identity and belonging. The idea of the Ministry was



Workshop assistants explain the importance of the Inca Palace of huaytará during the Qhapac Ñan project 2016 (left).

Participants of the Cultural Planning Seminar 2014 with guest speaker Miguel Molinari, Executive Director of Sinfonía por el Peru at USMP (right).

to foster acknowledgement, inclusion and empowerment of the minority communities as a fundamental factor of a pluricultural national identity. It was interesting to see how proud and responsible the young people became as cultural promoters to local people as well as to visitors regarding a heritage that was previous unknown to them and not valued on a national scale at all.

Impacting and Connecting

In order to produce benefits and positive impacts for the communities, cultural agents should not compete, but collaborate. As cultural coordinator for the Film Archive of the Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru (PUCP) I learnt to work as a connector between the public and private sector, national and local governments, political and cultural institutions, and was building alliances with cultural institutions that had the same mission and, in some cases, were competitors. A challenging goal! Culture leadership there was about collaborating and networking in order to create an impact in the communities on a local, national and international level. It was about transforming the idea and the modality of the cultural sector to offer experiences that could empower people. An example is the European Film Festival organised by the Film Archive of PUCP in Lima: Financially supported by the Delegation of the European Union in Peru, logistically hold by the embassies of the European countries, and organized together with the different local cultural managers and promoters who represent public and private institutions all over the country. The film festival represents a constant evolution of cultural networking.

Of course, the economic balance has to be considered; but in cases when projects implicate a big networking of social capital they can be supported locally, nationally and internationally. In these cases, economical risks decrease.



Children of the Sinfonia por el Perú projekt in 2011.

Finally, I can report a successful case of one institution that has been able to implement arts and cultural management knowledge into a cultural networking: [Sinfonia por el Perú](#) was founded by the tenor Juan Diego Flórez and is oriented towards teaching music and thereby transforming the life of children and young people from vulnerable communities with few economic resources who are exposed to violence, criminality and discrimination.

Conclusions

In my opinion, thinking about the economical aspect behind the arts might be positive but not when it causes the closure, centralization or hierarchization of arts institutions and converts them into elitist circles. It is important for cultural agents to bear always in mind that we are part of a network and that thinking as a community is always a big challenge. I would therefore conclude by underlining the importance of implementing Cultural Leadership with a focus on networking and participation of all who try to foster social-cultural change.

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