

NETWORKING FOR CULTURAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC PERFORMANCE: THEATRES AND THE CHALLENGES OF ARTISTIC AND ORGANIZATIONAL COOPERATION

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Abstract

Cooperation in inter-institutional networks appears today as a relevant strategy to strengthen the capacity of arts organizations in two articulated domains: the quantitative and qualitative reinforcement of their programming activity and organizational capacities; the cultural and socioeconomic impacts of their activity at local scale. In the European context, as all over the globe, the recognition of the importance of network cooperation in the cultural sector justifies a set of policies and supporting measures aimed at stimulating the formalization of cooperative platforms envisaging both artistic and socioeconomic goals.

However, cultural and artistic cooperation in inter-institutional network raises complex challenges and issues. These challenges refer to at least 3 crucial aspects: the compatibility between the cultural missions and the artistic philosophies of the various cooperating institutions; the challenges to the organizational habits and routines of the diverse institutions; the compatibility between the artistic aims of arts organizations and the economic and social objectives that sponsors (both public and private) demand (e.g. impacts on the socioeconomic development of territories and the overall qualification of communities).

The paper discusses those challenges and dilemmas, taking as its starting point an original sociological study focused on 5 Portuguese Theatres located in various regions of the country. Over the past 5 years, those Theaters have been working as a cooperative network for the purposes of artistic programming, sharing of cultural and organizational resources and strengthening their capabilities to promote stronger impacts on local communities and territories.

Although referring to the Portuguese experience, the paper debates more broadly the potential and the critical issues arising from cultural cooperation in inter-institutional networks. A particular focus is put on three critical aspects: i) the cultural and artistic innovation processes enhanced by cooperation; ii) the difficulties arising in organizational and artistic articulation between institutions; iii) the dilemmas of combining artistic missions with the social and economic effects that are increasingly demanded to cultural institutions by sponsors and the community at large.