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When the value of culture is being challenged.

by Mehdi Arfaoui (CEMS/EHESS)

My work focuses on the notion and category of *creativity*. In the past, I have observed how this category is employed and handled in the private sector, and I am now interested in how it appears to be used in the production of public policies, notably cultural public policy.

To say it simply, my research intends to explore the idea of a transition from what we've been calling since the 1950s "cultural policies", to what, after the years 2000, appears to be called more and more, "policies for creativity". As a matter of fact, the European program for the financing of arts and culture <SLIDE>, which constitute the main object of my PhD thesis, has been baptized in 2013, *Creative Europe*.

So for more than a year now, my reflection has been built around two intertwined questions, which are: first, why, since the beginning of 2000, do culture and cultural policies seem to be progressively redefined around the category of creativity? And mostly, how does the import of this category contribute to modifying the production and management of cultural policies as well as the financing of culture?

In order to answer these questions, I had the idea to look into indicators, frameworks and models produced and used by European institutions as they fabricate and manage European cultural polities. Indeed, European institutions spend a lot of time formulating and selecting indicators, statistical frameworks and theoretical models to define and evaluate culture. Started in the 1960s, the production of these tools kept developing, evolving and contradicting itself till today. And this is the reason why the answer to both of my questions is deeply linked to the topic of valuation and evaluation. Because those successive developments and contradictions in the

production of indicators and statistical frameworks show for themselves an important part of the processes of valuation of culture; actually they are the signs of a competition, sometimes a conflict, to define what counts about culture.

So, this very first version of my analysis, which would gladly receive your criticism and comments today, I want to present it through the ideal type of **3** *valuation approaches* that I identified when institutions attempt to define or delineate the value of culture. Those ideal types I built them by crossing several documents produced by the European commission, the European Council and the Parliament, or documents that were ordered by them to third party organizations or research groups.

1) Culture as an *activity*

<**SLIDE**> The first, oldest, and most institutionalized approach in the valuation of culture is one that considers *culture as a collection of sectors* which activity must be described and quantified.

Starting in the 1960s, the *European Economic Community* and *Eurostat* initiated the conception of sectorial categories of culture and the production of quantitative studies about cultural employment, cultural spending and cultural practices. These are called “cultural statistics.” Even though “culture” is not at that time a European competency, the ambition of Eurostat was to make “cultural statistics” homogeneous in between European countries, and thus to make cultural statistics fit in the *Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community* (NACE).

In 1972, the UNESCO joined the initiative by proposing, in coordination with the EEC, to work on the quantification of cultural activities in a report that would be named “*Framework for cultural statistics*” <**SLIDE**>. In a convention, the UNESCO and EEC agreed up on three objectives that would structure report: <**SLIDE**> (1) that the framework should consider both

the economic and social value of culture; <SLIDE> (2) that the framework should be compatible with frameworks already established nationally and in other sectors; <SLIDE> (3) that the framework should facilitate the planning of cultural policies.

The first actual framework for cultural statistics will then be released in 1986 by the UNESCO.

After “Culture” became a competency of the European Union in 1992, the European Commission launched several research groups in order to proceed from data that are more specifically European. The result of their work seems to have led to the circumscription of culture into 10 different cultural domains, 6 functions and 4 cultural dimensions <SLIDE> (*the 3 first dimensions are the dimensions intended to be the economic dimensions, and the last one, “cultural practice”, is the dimension intended to be the social dimension, which we could rather call sociological dimension*).

It is interesting to note that in the latest report produced in 2012 by the European research group, several methodological issues were raised concerning the use of the category of creativity. Even though the term creativity did appear in previous reports, it is one of the first time where its inconsistency was raised so explicitly. According to the group of experts, the use of the term “creativity” or “creative economy” would considerably modify the statistical system – intended to measure cultural expenditures, consumption and employment – and would actually make it less relevant for measuring the value of culture. As the report says,

<SLIDE> *The ‘creativity’ criterion – in the sense of the ability to create or invent – would seem too broad, since any kind of innovation implies by definition a measure of creativity, so that any industry whatsoever would qualify as being ‘creative’. [...] Most of all, creativity is not statistically measurable [...]. To sum up, it must be said that the creative concepts often have an economic justification for enlarging the cultural sectors to other sectors, which is not the objective of a statistical framework on culture.*

This shows quite well that the main objective, in this approach, is that the definition of culture is functional and describes the activity of a precise list of sectors. The UNESCO and the EU indeed meant their methods to circumscribe, normalize and standardize the frame of evaluation of culture, between countries, in a way that would allow States to take decisions and make previsions from the macroeconomic and administrative point of view.

According to my research, a second and a third minor approaches tend to contradict that first and dominant approach.

2) Culture as an *impact source*

<SLIDE> In the current of 2000, in reaction to the economic crisis, several NGOs, civil society actors and also critical researchers fearing and suffering successive cuts in the budgets for Culture, formulated that culture as an activity, was not anymore a sufficient argument for it to be subsidized. According to them, the legitimacy of Culture was in danger and it shall be rehabilitated in novel ways.

As explained in a report by Culture Action Europe (which is the main European Civil Society platform for culture):

<SLIDE> *“If culture is no longer justified per se, the entire sector suffers from a legitimacy crisis, and its existence theoretically and politically requires to be supported by a robust evidence of the benefits it generates. In other words, its perceived value resides outside itself.”*

The main idea given by those actors is that European institutions were too often monitoring and quantifying what was already given to be easily measurable, and that it would rarely attempt to measure the concrete impact of culture. This valuation approach criticizes that although there is an extrinsic value of culture, represented in GDP, employment and spending, the frameworks

of the EU should not omit, for example, the aesthetical value, or the cognitive and emotional impact of culture that can be observed as its intrinsic value.

The solution thus appeared to the Civil society that it should produce its own indicators to justify the usefulness of culture. A situation that tends to be paradoxical in some ways, as it obliges to acknowledge the immeasurability of arts and culture while admitting the necessity to propose indicators that measure their value. Indeed, if they refuse a process of valuation that is purely framed and standardized, those critics feel the necessity to admit the force and convincing power of numbers.

<SLIDE> *“We are aware that there are not such things as standard values, optimal performances in this field, and that each individual context produces its own unique interaction with cultural actions because of its specific history, social and economic profile, and background culture. Nonetheless, we expect that relative changes – positive changes – and impacts can be recorded and should be communicated and shared.”*

So in their intention to reconcile the “intrinsic” and the “extrinsic” value of culture, and give a new justification to the public support of culture, the defenders of this approach suggest a certain amount of methods and categories of valuation. In order to complete the dimensions of the “economic” value, and the “social” value of culture induced by the European Statistical Framework, they indeed incite European institutions to consider what they call the indicators of the “cultural” value of culture. The cultural value of culture would consider the wellbeing and the subjective experience permitted by arts and culture. **<SLIDE>** Here are some of the suggested categories by Culture Action Europe (the main platform representing the civil society in front of the European Commission). We can note that here too the notion of creativity appears. And it is associated to an impact of culture on the individual’s development.

The approach valuing culture as a source of impact encourages each organization to draw its own valuation framework. Its objective is thus to provide complementary quantitative and qualitative methods of valuation that shall be appropriated by the structure, from the bottom, to define and articulate the plural values of culture. (*Regarding the difficulty to implement such approach at the macro level, I have to say that I haven't not yet seen situation where the EU institutions would actually put it into action*).

3) Culture as an *input*

<SLIDE> The third type of valuation approach that I think should be described here, is one that values culture mostly as an input. This approach seems to emerge at the end of the years 2000, and to keep flourishing since the beginning of 2010. Its advent corresponds to the development of what is called “*creative spillover*” studies. Even though it is not yet much institutionalized, I think that this approach explains best the current movement of adoption of the notion of creativity in cultural policies.

So, brought from research in economics and management, the spillover theory induces the idea that above the direct value of culture (may it be “intrinsic” or “extrinsic”), there is an indirect value of culture that is created through crossovers and transfers with other fields and sectors. It suggests the idea that the valuation of culture should not be limited to a linear or sectorial perspective, where only the direct value of culture is considered, but be enlarged to a more dynamic or circular point of view.

So by substituting the “circular” logic to the traditional “sectorial” logic, this approach tends to displace the valuation of culture as an end activity or as an impact producer, toward the valuation of culture as a resource embedded into a more global productive and innovative environment. This is why, as opposed to the first “activity” approach, the “input” approach in its theoretical models and frameworks does encourage the use of broader concepts such as

creativity. Actually, according to this approach, the indicators of culture should be considered more generally as a sub-value of the value of creativity.

In 2009, for example, a consulting agency called KEA, often mandated by the European commission, produced recommendations for the European Union to adopt an indicator that they called the *European Culture-based creativity Index*. <SLIDE> As the agency said, “*a key goal of such Index would be to highlight the potential of including culture-based indicators in existing frameworks related to creativity, innovation and socio-economic development*”. Of course methods put in place to build this index use the cultural statistics produced by the EU. But the interesting shift is that it is translated into a benchmark tool for countries to compare themselves. <SLIDE> Here an example with the Global Creativity Index, built by another consulting agency in Canada called the Martin Prosperity Institute.

In this context, the measuring methods and tools brought by these consulting agencies and experts, encourages actually not to multiply indicators of evaluating culture, but to include them into a broader evaluative system of creativity and economic innovation. As the KEA report says, <SLIDE>

*“it is important to acknowledge in policy documents that boundaries between **business, science and technology** as well as those between **consumption, research&development and production** are increasingly blurred. This implies that in today’s economy innovation emerges as a result of business collaboration//, the utilisation of new technologies in diverse domains//, (including the use of creativity)//, and the engagement of users in the creation of new products and services. Creative individuals, and companies from the cultural and creative industries//, should be considered as partners in the quest for innovation. EU policies on innovation need to recognize the cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary aspect of “creativity” which mixes elements of “artistic creativity”, “economic innovation” as well as “technological innovation.”*

In the “input” valuation approach, it appears that the value of culture neither resides in its objective representation as a social or economic *activity*, nor in the multiplication of means to perceive the *impact* of its intrinsic and subjective value, but rather in its ability conjugate with its environment and for its indicators to aggregate to more global indexes and benchmarking tools that assess cities or countries as a whole.

As a conclusion, I think that arts and culture, as many fields and domains that are allegedly considered difficult to value by the public sector constitute an interesting object of study to observe the way the public sector equips its action and qualifies its decisions. In order to see more clearly where all that leads us to, let’s maybe sum it up. <SLIDE>

Again this is a very first draft, but it appears clearly that each approach is produced and distributed by different actors, through different tools, and that their value perception and their interest may also be different.

Part of my work now wants to consider in parallel situations in which the implementation of these different valuation approaches can be observed, notably regarding the impact of their normative force on the modes of financing culture. My intuition is that, different valuation approaches, as they interact, participate in the legitimization of different modes of financing and accompany the transformation of cultural policies.

<SLIDE> The field research that I led during the past year, for example, shows that the recent evolution of the evaluation modes in European cultural policies responds to the normativity contained in the “input” approach. Indeed, while in 1997, programs financing culture and arts were split into 4 – each program financing and preserving the specificity of each sector – European cultural programs are since 2013 built around one program called *Creative Europe*. Simultaneously, the question of the specificity of each cultural sector seems to actually have often been replaced by the question of the specificity of culture as a whole.

<SLIDE> As a matter of fact, in the application forms of the *Creative Europe* program, projects applying for a financing are evaluated according to 3 priorities: “mobility”, “capacity reinforcement” and “public development”. In practice this means that what will count to evaluate cultural organizations is their ability to integrate and transfer value to other fields (*mobility* and *public* development), and their capacity to slot in new technologies and innovative business models (*capacity*). The European Commission itself insists on the fact that it is not a “cash-drawer”, subsidizing this or that cultural sector, but that it is an investor of innovative and creative projects which must, in some ways, answer the strategy of the European Union.

At last, I think that the analysis of processes of valuation of culture can partly explain the dynamics and evolutions of European cultural policies. Undeniably, it is not so surprising to notice the emergence of novel valuation approaches in times of budgets scarcity. And these evolutions may also be seen as part of a larger process of reconfiguration of forms of government in the European Union.

No need to say again that these first conclusions, especially the link I attempted to draw between the “input” valuation approach and the transition to policies for creativity, would necessitate more in-depth research, and that it will be one of my preoccupations in the next months.

Thank you for your attention.

APPENDIXE

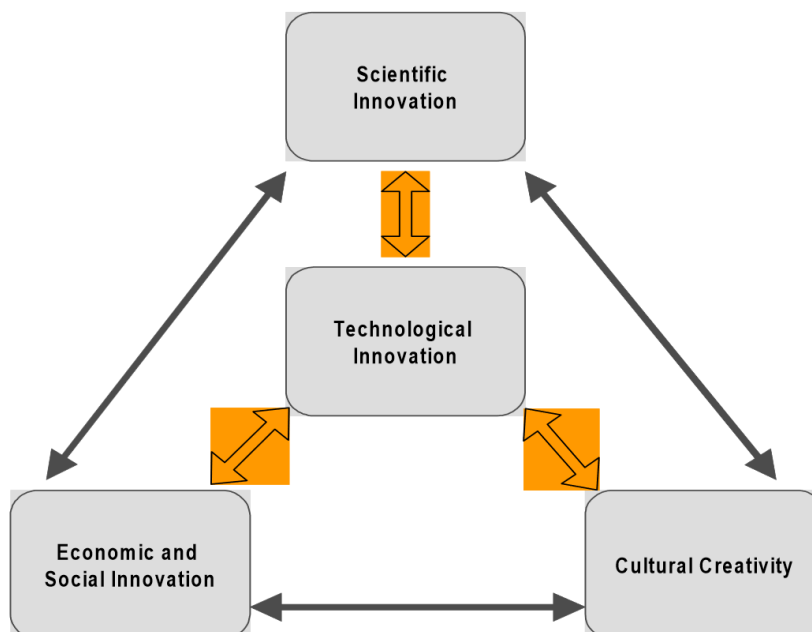
APPENDIXE 1

10 cultural domains	6 functions	4 cultural dimensions
Heritage	Creation	Cultural expenditures
Archives	Production/Publishing	Cultural employment
Libraries	Dissemination/Trade	Cultural consumption
Book & Press	Preservation	Culture practices
Visuals arts	Education	
Performing arts	Management/Regulation	
Audiovisual & Multimedia		
Architecture		
Advertising		
Art crafts		

APPENDIXE 2

On the collective level:	On the individual level:
Liveability of places	Development of independent, critical thinking
Social inclusion	Development of creative, out-of-the-box thinking
Cultural diversity, recognition and tolerance	Self-esteem
Empowerment of specific Social groups	Identity and sense of belonging
Social capital	Satisfaction for one's own leisure time
Knowledge as common good	Increased capacity of Self-expression
Cooperative action	Sense of physical well-being
New forms of income generation	Sense of psychological well-being
New occupations	

APPENDIXE 3



APPENDIXE 4

