
Culture and its Role in the Volatile Environment of Knowledge and Creative Age in View of Crisis

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Abstract. We live in the Knowledge Age, which is based on the implementation of knowledge for the further development. In addition, in the last decade a new phenomenon was highlighted – the Creative Age (Florida, 2002), in which the creative labour has been recognized as a vital force for the future development. In view of culture there is a certain antagonism between the advocates of these two approaches. However, Kelemen et al. (2007) point out the unprecedented intersections between culture & the arts, the science & research and information technologies resulting into a new space – so called cyberculture. But how does the continuing recession change our view of the role of culture in the nowadays world? Recent studies have shown (Keegan, 2008; Tajtakova, 2012) that people do not abandon cultural participation in times of crisis. Moreover, Kloudová (2010) explicitly suggests that the way out of crisis lies in the new style of life where the consumption of spiritual assets prevails over the struggle for material property. The aim of this paper is to discuss different facets of the role of culture in a volatile environment in the era of knowledge and creative economy with a particular regard to the crisis.

Key words: culture, knowledge society, creative society, economic development, crisis

1 INTRODUCTION

Besides the important social role which culture plays in our civilization there is a new focus – relationship between culture and economy – which has been increasingly analysed in the last decades. In particular, the attention has been paid to the connection between culture and economic growth and culture and regional development. The new perception of culture which ceased to be an economic burden and becomes an economic engine is evident also in the initiatives of various international organizations like UNESCO, World Bank, European Commission, etc. Starting in the 90s of the 20th century these organizations have been underlining culture as an important factor of social and economic development, especially in retarded regions. For instance, UNESCO considers culture and development as interconnected areas with mutual influence (Unesco, 2008). Similarly, the World Bank highlights culture as a significant element in the process of social and economic development in individual countries (World Bank, 2003, 2004). Finally, the European Union considers the growing importance of culture to be closely connected with economic development trends. Already in the 90s of the 20th century the European Commission within its statements towards a cohesion policy acknowledged that the expansion of culture is related to modern society development from traditional industries towards a service sector. The consequent changes in life style and the increase of free time of European citizens enhanced the demand for leisure activities, including culture (European Commission, 1996). Moreover, Tubadji (2009, p. 180 –

204) emphasizes that culture should be regarded as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, besides economic, social and ecological pillars.

As a result of these trends in the second half of the 20th century the arts and culture have got on a more optimistic trek towards their revalorization in our society and economy. Hence, after the period of marginalization – which started already with Adam Smith – we finally witnessed changes in perception of the role of culture within the economic context. However, has this role changed because of the economic crisis? Or should we just address the arts and culture from a wider perspective encompassing a new post-crisis model of social and economic development in view of knowledge and creative economy?

2 CULTURE AND ITS ROLE WITHIN KNOWLEDGE AND CREATIVE SOCIETY

The gradual development of human beings passed from the periods of agriculture, flourishing industries up to services, information and knowledge-based society. Kelemen et al. (2010, p. 34) defines knowledge society as a society where knowledge is a primary production resource instead of capital and labour. However, according to Andersson et al. (2010) the knowledge revolution has contributed to the rise of economy which has proven to be unsustainable. The authors claim that “the greatest challenge we face in the knowledge economy age is to connect meaningfully with knowledge innovation agents to enhance their capacity to handle innovation as the process of putting knowledge into action”.

Recent studies have identified another stage of development – the creative society. Kloudová (2010, p. 117 - 118) highlights the creative economy as a new trend arising from the platform of completed industrialization, high technologies, advanced schooling and information gains in well-developed economies. The creative economy is based on creative industries such as the media, movies, music business or industries associated with culture, design, art, architecture and research. It recognizes the creative labour as a vital force for the future development encompassing not only the arts and culture but also IT sector, marketing and even all kinds of productions with an emphasis on design (Kloudová et al. 2010). The creative sector nowadays generates increasingly higher revenue, involves higher number of employees leading to the emergence of a new labour class, a so-called creative class (Florida, 2002). According to L’Echo (2002), already in 2002, creative industries – comprising both non-for-profit and commercial activities – employed 3,5 % of the active population. The workforce creativity is nowadays identified as the main source of economic growth (Kloudová, 2010, p. 123).

However, what is the role for the arts and culture within the parallel existence of knowledge and creative society? On the one hand, there is a criticism of the “techno-economic orientation of current knowledge economy”, which is seen as “an impediment for the humanities and creative arts” (Bullen et al., 2004, p. 4). On the other hand, Kelemen et al. (2007, p. 11) points out the unprecedented intersections between culture & the arts, the science & research and information technologies in the knowledge economy resulting into a new space – so called cyberculture. Nevertheless, there is one thing in common for both the knowledge and creative economy – the crucial role attributed to the innovation in economic and social development. In this case, the innovation, understood as the *transformative* mode of knowledge transmission, could equally well be experienced in, or exemplified by, any field (Edelstein, 2010, p. 17), obviously including culture and the arts. From other perspective, Nivin and Plettner (2009, p. 33) claim that a creative environment drives innovation which drives economic development. Finally, according to Stam et al. (2008, p. 119) creativity may also be particularly useful in knowledge-based economies, where creativity is required to convert scientific and technological knowledge into market value.

Human creativity is thus becoming a crucial economic resource enabling to higher the living standard of nowadays society. The creative activity of human beings – as the supreme

contents of culture – has enabled to modify and improve conditions and quality of living, explore vast possibilities of education, sciences, and the arts and at same time create so called “Public Good”. The economic importance of creative industries represented by creative arts, cultural heritage, audiovisual and print media together with publishing, design, architecture, fashion, sports, games, nature and environment (Throsby, 2008) has been on increase. A growing amount of governments have already realized and identified the contributions of creative activities to the knowledge-based society and economy in terms of both job and GDP creation. On the other hand, still many governments are sceptical in terms of prioritizing the creative sector and providing it with an appropriate support. Yet, according to Scott (2010) culture, following high technology, industry and services represents the four pillar of economy as more than half of workforce in the biggest capitalistic countries participates in intellectually creative and cultural work forms. Initial activities of Lord Chris Smith, a former British Minister of Culture, Media and Sport, as a pioneer of mapping processes within individual segments of creative activities, should be developed to effective statistical methodologies to help economists, cultural experts as well as policy makers in order to coordinate supporting national and sub-national actions related to creative industries.

3 CULTURE AND THE CRISIS

3.1 A historical perspective on the role of culture in times of crises

Associations connected with the term crisis usually evoke in our minds a political, financial, economic, moral, personal crisis, etc. It is needless to mention that most of these connotations are negative, confusing, unwanted and threatening. However, dealing with the etymology of the original Greek word “krisis”, we should not notice only meanings related to struggle, unbalance, conflict, controversy, conviction, but also to such equivalents as justice, judgment, decision or clarification (Hlopková, 2012). Actually, there were numerous examples in the history when the crisis inspired the supreme expressions of humanity through culture and the arts or revealed new paths for further development.

For instance, after a damaging fire in Chicago in 1871 which left more than 90 000 people homeless and destroyed the property of 200 million USD, a new architectural movement called Chicago School was established. The Chicago School created new constructing techniques using steel and glass as a protection against fire. A new American style of metal-framed skyscrapers emphasizing vertical lines with gentle Art nouveau decoration enabled the erection of higher buildings equipped with electric elevators and gradually turned the city into the center of world architecture. Rebuilding the city from its ruins also meant significant development of other industries, the arts as well as the population growth (The World Book Encyclopedia, C-Ch Volume 3, 1996, pp. 434-435).

Another critical stage of human history was the WW1 in the years 1914-1918. 60 million soldiers were involved in destroying conflicts and women had to replace missing men in factories, means of transportation or post services. Young, ambitious and courageous French woman Gabrielle – called Coco Chanel – was able to fill the gap in the clothing industry even in such turbulent period and at the same time contribute to the movement of independent women. How many European businesses or shops were successful in 1915? The one with the letters CC definitely was a prosperous business, which transformed a need into a new style of fashion (BBC Motion Gallery, 2010).

Further, in 1937 a tragic event preceding the WW2 – the bombing of the town Guernica by the German army within the Spanish Civil War – inspired Pablo Picasso to create his masterpiece Guernica. The message of the painting, which was first presented in the Spanish pavilion of the World Exhibition in Paris in 1937, was to protest against the war conflicts (The World Book Encyclopedia, P Volume 15, 1996, pp. 448-449) and it still represents one of the biggest anti-war symbols of the 20th century.

Finally, the blockade of Leningrad during the WW2, which lasted almost 900 days and caused the death of more than half of the population of the city, did not prevent people from engaging in the arts. Almost through the whole period of the Leningrad blockage the citizens were able to provide the performances of the Leningrad radio, theaters and museums. In August 1942, nearly a year after the beginning of the occupation, the premier of the 7th Dmitri Shostakovich Symphony sounded around the crowded philharmonic hall as a powerful symbolic gesture of the people whose culture cannot be defeated (Grass, 2006). It is said the queue for the tickets was longer than the one for the bread.

These historical examples provide evidence that regardless the level of development, economic prosperity or freedom, culture has always been an elementary need of humanity. Hence, the current global economic crisis resulting in similar symptoms in the majority of European countries and having frustrating impact on culture and the arts is nothing new in the history.

3.2 Challenges and constraints of culture in a nowadays crisis

The cultural sector, which has always been considered a risky sector of products with high, but subjective and symbolic value (Throsby, 2008) has never been at the top of priorities for governmental funding. Within a nowadays crisis we witness a reduction of both public and corporate contributions to many societal activities. The arts and culture are usually among the first areas where the budgets are cut. Moreover, in some cases the crisis has been used as an excuse for a complete abandoning of cultural initiatives and resulted into the closure of several cultural institutions across Europe and US. Just to mention a few examples: the 25 % cut of artistic activities in Netherlands, 9 million USD shortfall in the famous La Scala opera house in Milan in Italy, the abolishment of Portugal Ministry of Culture or closing of the U.S. Connecticut Opera House after more than 60 seasons (Rother, 2012).

In addition, Bonet and Donato (2011, p. 8) point out the misperception of current economic crisis which is considered as a temporary and external constraint. They explain that people in the arts are waiting for the end of the crisis and for the recovery of the previous levels of public funding. Instead, the authors suggest that we should see the crisis as a structural one and we should face it through a radical change of the strategies and management systems.

Nevertheless, the crisis and consequent restrictive policies did not influence only the functioning of cultural organizations but it had also a negative impact on the field of cultural consumption. According to Eurostat (2011) the cuts of public contributions during the crisis have directly caused a reduction of cultural productions and activities, and indirectly a decrease of cultural consumption. However, the decrease of cultural consumption may be just relative. The research conducted by Tajtakova et al. (2011) revealed that people did spend less money on culture during the crisis, but they did not significantly reduce their arts participation. Actually, the results of the research were consistent with a general belief that people tend to seek entertainment and cultural activities as a part of an escapist therapy in recessionary periods (Keegan, 2008). The findings of Tajtakova (2012) suggested a shift in consumption patterns towards a more frequent attendance, however, at less expensive arts events during the crisis. Based on the above mentioned studies we believe that the cultural consumption is sustainable even in times of economic recession, although, the consumption patterns are transformed with regard to the frequency of attendance and the price of attended arts events (Tajtakova, 2012). According to Kloudová (2009) the consumption of non-material assets such as art and culture – as the benchmark of our living standard – will greatly influence our economic wealth. Thus, the arts consumption and particularly the sustainable arts consumption should be regarded as an engine for future economic growth based on new consumption patterns.

However, in the conditions of ongoing economic crisis it is important to assess the cultural issues and their contribution to a further development from a wider perspective in search of a new post-crisis model of socio-economic development. According to Bonet and Donato (2011, p. 8-9) the crisis could be overcome only through a radical change in the current governance and management models in the arts and culture. The change is requested both at an institutional level (policy) and at an organizational level (management). In parallel, Kloudová (2010, p. 123-125) suggests that the way out of crisis lies in the new style of life and new values where the consumption of spiritual assets in the form of art, culture, design etc. will prevail over the struggle for material property. The author argues that a new model of prosperity should be based on creativity and consumption of culture and the arts rather than on material asset, which should also result in higher economic benefits in future.

Yet, the economic crisis changed many deep-rooted models and status quo and we face a challenge to look for new paradigms. The stimulation of the further development through a specific cultural potential can be considered as one of the solutions for the crisis (Tajtkova, 2010, p. 448). To conclude, we believe that the culture should no longer be regarded as an unnecessary superstructure in our lives belonging only to the sphere of leisure, but it should be seen as the essence of our society and the condition of development and survival of our civilization.

CONCLUSION

The period we have been recently facing is affected by turbulent changes crossing the entire spectrum of matters related to oscillating efficiency of economies, stability of currencies, falling regimes and governments, social and climate changes but also new discoveries and improvements. Specific components of culture are able at the same time to connect particular communities and nationalities, but also to distinguish and make them unique. Specifically Europe, but also other geographical and historical units are aware of uniqueness and immense value of cultural traditions. Human talent, invention and creativity are prominent and inspiring and therefore, it is our responsibility to keep in existence, support and make accessible all values transformed in culture and the arts.

Through its existence, humankind has been able to overcome war conflicts, epidemics, natural disasters, various crises and transformation processes thanks to seeking new opportunities and ways. Examples from the past demonstrate that the will to survive, courage to express opinions and demonstrate constant inspiration and progress led to the creation of unique art works even during wars and occupations. The incredible force of people who had courage to present Shostakovich 7th Symphony in the period of Leningrad blockade or Picasso who painted Guernica after bombing the city give us hope that the future of mankind does not reside only in homo economics. Hopefully, current governments together with all involved – sponsors, donors, non-profit organizations, volunteers as well as the public – will consider their privilege and responsibility not only to preserve our cultural heritage for present generations but also create new art pieces and values for those to come.

In conclusion, we should look back to the etymology of the original Greek word “krisis”, particularly to its overlooked meaning of “justice, judgment, decision or clarification”. From this perspective the crisis may appear not as a threat but as an opportunity to change. This view is advocated also by Bonet and Donato (2011, p. 10) who – within an optimistic approach – interpret the crisis as a great opportunity for a structural change of the cultural sector, both at the policy and the organizational level. Eventually, one of the most frequently used expressions both in mass media and common conversations – crisis – besides all visible negative impacts might reveal new, alternative ways and solutions, especially while considering that a need is the mother of invention.

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