

Measuring the
social impact
of culture:
Is it only about
numbers?

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**SPACE
FOR
CHANGE**

Where we are

- ◉ Dissatisfaction with GDP as sole measure of development/progress has prompted the Social Indicator Movement as early as 1960s.
- ◉ Sustainable development enters the debate from the 1970s
- ◉ The first decade of the XXI century inaugurates the era of well-being measures as ways to go beyond GDP

And Culture?

- Starting in the 1980s, a growing debate on the economics of culture claims for the sector a relevant role in the overall economy.
- The challenge of measuring cultural value
- Cuts to public expenditure, from the 1990s, and, later, the international economic crisis, lead to continued efforts to justify the very existence of culture.

Between instrumental and intrinsic

- Over the last 20 years, the main focus has been on the possible economic and social impacts of culture and the arts
- That goes hand in hand with a declining appreciation of culture and the arts per se.

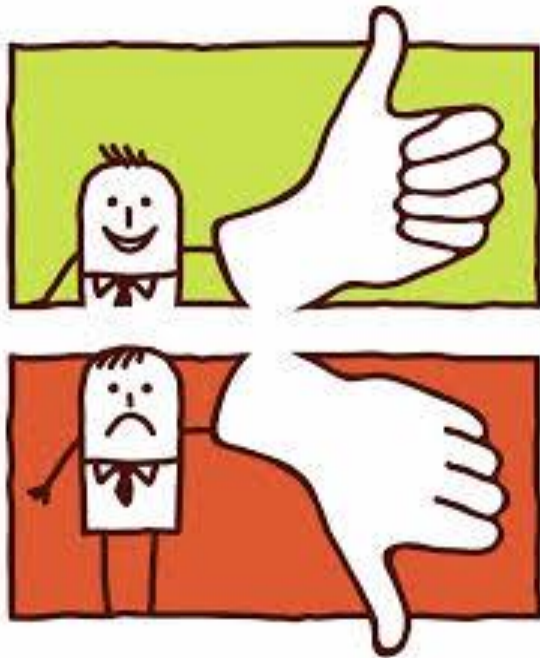
Culture and well-being

- The international effort aimed at producing measures of well-being represents an opportunity for reconsidering the role of culture and the arts in a different perspective.
- So far, however, the initial projects (e.g. OECD's Better Life Index) have granted very little role, if any, to culture.

A complex task

- Measurement of culture is by no means an easy task.
- Classical studies of its direct and indirect economic impact have faced theoretical and practical difficulties. Social impact in terms of well-being is equally difficult to pin down.
- Data are scarce, irregular and they differ from a sector to another, and the national profiles are hardly comparable

Diverging opinions



Are social impacts of culture measurable? The very question generates both scepticism and enthusiasm, both passionate. It is a serious question.

Form ifs to hows

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent

In the intersection of Culture and Society, there are things that can be measured, while other things can't, despite our efforts and the refinement of our tools.

Measurable things may be difficult to measure unless the proper instruments – existing or yet to be created - are used.

Alternatives

Non measurable things are open to a number of alternative treatments:

- They can be perceived
- They can be recorded
- They can be represented
- They can be communicated
- They can be rejected
- They can be transferred
-

Why should we measure?

- ◉ To evaluate our performance
- ◉ To assess the (social) value of our activity
 - ◉ To increase our legitimacy
 - ◉ To map the point where we are
- ◉ To discover unintended effects of our actions
 - ◉ To be fully accountable

Unintended beautiful effects of our actions



Mapping our progress along a chosen path



Different stories, different social impact



Monticchiello (Siena, Italy). Teatro Povero



Every year, in July, the entire village of Monticchiello perform themselves.

Monticchiello (Siena, Italy). Teatro Povero

From 1969 to date, Monticchiello's theatre scripts hinge on the collection of ideas and opinions of the community on the one hand, and on the other brings in aspects of a broader reality beyond that of the village.



Monticchiello (Siena, Italy). Teatro Povero



The ritual of stage performance evokes the village's problems more vividly, and stimulate a critical re-assessment of them from a historical and cultural point of view. Confronting the present by contrasting it with the past, a clearer view of current problems is reached.

Theatre fulfils a social purpose, constantly raising the collective consciousness, reinforcing the community's roots while still keeping in touch with present reality.

Roma, Italy: Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio



Roma, Italy: Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio

Eighteen musicians from ten countries who speak nine different languages. Together they transform their variegated roots and cultures into one single language, music. This is the Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio (OPV). Taking inspiration from each musician's background and traditional music, mixing and dipping into it with rock, pop, reggae and classical, the outcome is the unique sound of the OPV. Musicians leave and others arrive changing the sound of the orchestra but not depriving it of its initial aim bent on exploring new challenges and opening horizons the world over. A fusion of cultures and traditions; old and new sounds; little known instruments; memories; distant yet universal melodies; and voices from around the world.

Roma, Italy: Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio

- The idea of creating an orchestra of musicians from different countries and cultures grew out of a larger project in 2002: saving the historical Cinema Apollo in Rome from becoming a bingo hall. The Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio was developed within a project supported by artists, intellectuals, professionals and locals of the Esquilino district in Rome in order to enhance the intercultural characteristics of an area where Italians are the ethnic minority.
- The Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio represents something quite singular. It is the first orchestra founded on the financial support and contributions from people trying to provide meaningful employment and residency to professional musicians who have come from all over the world and have made Italy their home.

Bologna, Italy: Cultural welfare



In the forthcoming
Metropolitan strategic plan,
Bologna will launch a
Community of the Multiple Arts
for producing, researching
and testing new ways to make
the arts and culture meet
solidarity and well-being

Bologna, Italy: Cultural welfare

Based upon a long standing tradition of successful «Social interaction Theatre», where people in fragile and marginal condition are involved in the production of high quality theatre, Cultural Welfare represents a key action in the metropolitan strategic plan.



Bologna, Italy: Cultural welfare

Knowledge

Attitudes

Actions

Policies

Capacity

Discourse

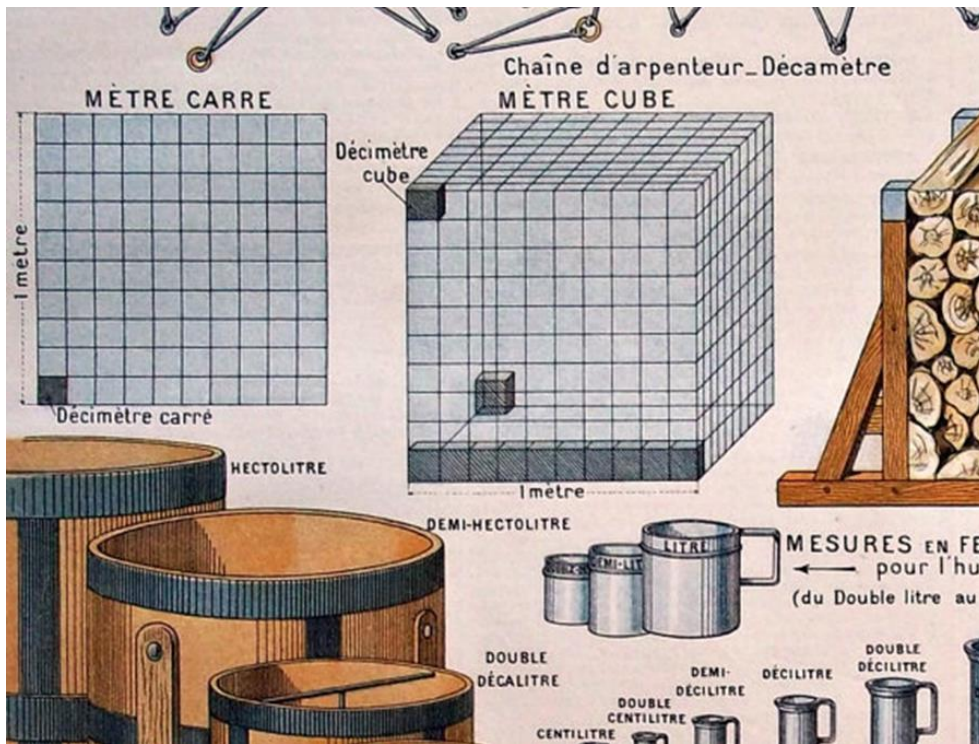


What do we measure?

A continuum of impacts on individual and social well-being:

- Increased knowledge, awareness, understanding;
- Improved relationships, communication, language, decision;
- New values, motivations, visions;
- Nurtured social capital, capacity and leadership;
- New reasons for participation and mobilization;
- Effects on systems quality, access, equity.

How do we measure?



Damned indicators...