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Independent cultural entrepreneurs driving artistic creation – International Seminar in the framework of Creative Tracks – 7/03/2017, Paris, France – Summary by A. Cotte

Policies for artistic and cultural development today will no doubt refer to the vital role of cultural entrepreneurship in supporting creatives. If this is a pre-requisite then it is no longer possible to reduce international artistic cooperation to the mobility of artists alone, which in any case, no longer reflects the reality of artistic project making today.

In order to develop and preserve free, fair and flowering cultural and artistic international exchanges, mobility of cultural entrepreneurs becomes a must.

In March 2017 the Roberto Cimetta Fund launched a mobility funding line for cultural entrepreneurs from the Euro-Arab/Middle East geographical zone in the framework of Creative Tracks an EU funded initiative of the EU Parliament, targeting global collaborations. Through this fund we supported twenty individuals.

The RCF also organised a seminar entitled "**Independent cultural entrepreneurs driving artistic creation**" held on 7th March 2017 at the French Ministry of Culture and Communication in Paris (cf. list of participants and programme).



The debates that took place investigated what the end result of cultural entrepreneurs' mobility would be, particularly in view of:

- the current trends in global market concentration and monopolies (mergers and multi-industry companies>financialization>standardisation) which question how viable local markets are;
- the capacity of institutions and civil society (in Europe, the Arab world and internationally) to support cultural and artistic development, particularly at local level.

In order to prepare independent cultural entrepreneurs for the reality of the market economy, we measured the influence that major global industries have on the distribution and selection of cultural and creative content as well as on the income attributed to authors of art works. Elodie Le Breut, Deputy-Director of AMI association in Marseille, presented a summary of current trends in global cultural markets. Her presentation referred to the Ernst & Young publication "Cultural times, the first global map on Culture and Creative Industries" (Dec. 2015) and AMI's report on Culture and Creative Industries (CCIs) in 2014 in the framework of the European project 3C4 supported by the EU MED programme. Interviews were conducted with Laurence Hugues, General Secretary of the International Alliance of Independent Publishers (Literature), Céline Kopp, Triangle France Director (Contemporary Arts) and Ilan Urroz, PRIMI General Delegate (Multimedia network in Provence, France). These interviews have broadened the perspectives revealed in her presentation, which is downloadable here.

Trends are first and foremost influenced by the progress of new technology, which changes the production, distribution and properties of cultural content. Strategies of the major multi-industry companies are transversal involving image, sound, media, entertainment, digital content, performing arts, education and information. The content industry that is emerging will probably become one of the first, if not the most prominent global economic sector in the next few decades.

The general trends affecting duplicated arts such as music, literature, film and multimedia as well as singular art forms such as live arts and contemporary visual arts are obvious:

- Hyper concentration and monopolistic effects around a few "mega-enterprises", particularly for distribution of art works;
- The growing role of investment funds in CCI financing (for example, Providence Equity, owner of Warner amongst other assets, 50 billions US \$);
- Exponential production of the content, opposing sometimes quantity to quality;
- A progressive withdrawal of institutions and cultural operators as experts and evaluators since fast, trashy, standardized consumables are replacing sustainable cultural diversity;
- An Asian market which has become the biggest in the world, although still functioning in a closed circuit (exception made of multimedia - video games, cartoons, action movies, directors' movies), but potentially able to overwhelm the global market;
- The crucial role of the public sector in supporting creative people, allowing European CCIs to keep being influent on the global market;
- The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South-Africa) and developing countries remaining dependent on the Western world, especially as far as distribution networks are concerned; although these regions are rich in content provision;
- Counterfeit and piracy put creative people at risk. There are still remarkable weaknesses on artists' rights protection and remuneration mostly in developing countries (but not only, since new forms of piracy are appearing in the Western world). Making sure the laws are respected is more problematic than the legal framework itself;
- Finally, part of this economy is still informal and represents a reserve for potential job creation. In 2013, informal job retributions were estimated at 33 billions US \$ for 1,2 million jobs.

Constraints as well as opportunities for creativity and investment exist within this big picture.

Emerging cultural and creative companies represent huge capacities, competencies and skills for artistic innovation. They are attentive to social dialogue, to the mushrooming of new ideas and encourage art, which escapes the radar of mass production. New, local markets nurturing rich cultural, creative craftsmanship of all kinds are not very visible; although the interest large companies show for these new markets should not be underestimated. Since they are constantly looking for growth, these corporations increasingly try to penetrate these markets, aiming at being an intermediary (managers or producers), in order to stay as close as possible to the content sources. However, they do not provide the necessary financial investments to these new markets, leaving this to public authorities (subsidies).

For local markets to be viable, to protect and strengthen their sustainability, we discussed and defined **issues that need to be addressed** notably in the MENA region (Middle East North Africa), in China and in West Africa.

We compared funding allocated to local art and culture producers in the Maghreb countries. Despite funding from the private sector to Morocco, public funds in Algeria or foreign donors to Tunisia, artistic production depending on these funds is not sufficiently in line with the expectations of local audiences. In market terms, the supply is not adapted to the demand. Festivals in Morocco are directed towards international audiences of tourists, or are aligned with international festival productions. The desire of local artists to obtain international recognition through these festivals is ignored. **Developing evidence and statistical data on the expectations of audiences and local artists** could spur market supply. Potentially dynamic sectors such as film, cultural engineering, book publishing have developed training courses in these countries but professional job opportunities are still lacking. **Encouraging financial investment in these potentially dynamic sectors** would support young or emerging artists and cultural entrepreneurs in their local communities.

In Egypt, the independent artistic scene thrived after 2011 funded by foreign donors, regional operators and crowdfunding, but this support didn't bring a stable income to cultural entrepreneurs, nor did it sustain their projects. Networking, long-term structuring, permanent markets were not developed. The informal economy flourished without interesting private investors. **Encouraging networking and long-term sustainability of cultural and arts organisations and projects** is vital for open and fair market viability.

In Iraq, youth are desperate for education and culture and challenges are numerous. Without spaces for art, culture and debate, without institutions to support art creation, without training, without exchanges with the outside world, it isn't possible to create stable and prosperous markets. In these conditions, **in order to develop a cultural economy, public action is an indispensable pre-requisite**. A cultural economy needs a policy that supports the diversity of cultural operators, artists and organisations.

Throughout Europe and the MENA region, the cultural economy could develop at an inter-regional level along the lines of the models suggested by the European Union amongst others. These decentralised models link territories directly between each other without connecting to poles of centralised decision-making and without the interference of monopolies, but we still need a few years before translocal cultural eco-systems and the public cultural policies that frame them, can adapt to this intra-regional global dimension.

In Lebanon, as elsewhere, virtual platforms/start-ups monetize artistic production of the emerging scene through online sales. These start-ups, which require investments in capital risk, generate exchanges within geographically homogenous cultural zones. Monetization connecting the European space and the Arab world is not yet a reality. The traffic generated via these platforms attracts brands, which make use of artistic creativity for their own merchandising, generating additional revenues. These innovative companies produce profit for investors and creatives but do not guarantee the renewal of aesthetics, nor the freedom of artistic expression. Indeed forms of censorship benefit commercial or even political gains. Clearly, **private investment as the only funding source becomes a major problem, encouraging censorship and self-censorship on cultural content.**

To escape this dead-end, artists and cultural entrepreneurs must widen their scope of partners and forge alliances. **Micro-business incubators** are also a means to guarantee the liberties of expression, artistic creation and entrepreneurship.

To forge these alliances, it will be necessary **to provide evidence of the positive impact of culture** on the economy, the environment, the changes and adaptations of lifestyle and social cohesion. The Agenda 21 for Culture amongst others **promotes multilateral action frameworks** that are particularly relevant for this purpose.

Thinking in global terms is the stuff artists, as citizens of the world, are made of as much as multinational firms. In Iran, the lifting of international sanctions provoked optimism in the creative circles; every day new cultural centres opened, Iranian artists travelled abroad and others returned. Cultural organisations and incubators were set up to respond to the demand. Censorship is present but artists remain creative and the connection with neighbouring countries is easier through cultural activities than through the political level.

In West Africa, the efforts of WAEMU¹ led to easier access for cultural entrepreneurs in obtaining bank loans, particularly in the film industry. For the film market in this region the supply matches the demand of local audiences. However, one of the perverse side effects of the alleviation of customs' restrictions for cultural products between countries of WAEMU is that it favours multinationals more than it favours local entrepreneurs in the cultural field, so it is high time **that stronger legal frameworks are provided to uphold the respectful implementation of the law.** This requires constant negotiations between all stakeholders.

The independent scene in China develops market mechanisms and is becoming international. To a certain extent, this movement is supported by Chinese cultural policy since it is a way of integrating new technology into cultural and scientific industries while at the same time ensuring a form of control on the market. Chinese websites, which allow you to buy and sell cultural products online (DBJ) free of charge, are typical **peer-to-peer cooperation model.** In exchange, users subscribe to fee-paying management services such as accountancy, communication, mailing lists of potential clients, etc. Soon the service will be available in English and will be exported outside of China. These industrial models need packable and downloadable products more than they need artistic creativity. Moreover, the artist-subscriber-user cannot benefit from intellectual property rights. We should thus ensure that any business respects author's rights; at the same time, remember and accept that the very nature of Art means that art practices will always be outside the frame, in a niche, or marginal, not conforming to current market paradigms.

¹ West African Economic and Monetary Union

In order to expand cooperation models between the major cultural and geographical zones (Euro-Arab, Eurasia, India-Africa...), individual competences must flourish via mobility, translation, debate of ideas through the Creative Tracks online platform amongst others...**Forging a common language** becomes possible via experimental and non-hierarchical co-creations reinforced by intermediaries and relays that already exist for international cultural cooperation and which can be furthered by Creative Tracks ambassadors. If public authorities would **commit to building cultural policy around artistic mobility**, then artistic production could radiate in diverse geographical directions linking not only urban areas (central) but also inter-regional or inter-local levels (peripheries).

Conscious of the control that medias exert on cultural rights and the repercussions that negative cultural perceptions have on mobility, it is important to avoid creating networks that are limited, including linguistically. Promoting cultural and artistic mobility funds should enable capital to be provided for local cultural development; each trip is a smart investment for the sustainability of cultural and artistic communities. In this regard, evaluating and selecting applicants for travel grants must go through the expertise of peers. International cooperation emerging through the spinning and inter-weaving of affinities are often multilateral (grouping actors of different nationalities) and transversal (many disciplines or sectors) and lead to the creation of cooperative and creative spaces of interaction and other fab labs!

Moreover, debate of ideas, collaborations between peers or between networks (one of the objectives of the Creative Tracks programme) build **solidarity** and facilitate co-productions, co-publishing, create the means for mutual and fair exchange, short circuits and other mechanisms of fair sharing of resources. Networks in particular should strengthen their capacities to support their members legally and politically to ensure greater efficiency in their advocacy. They must develop transversally. They must propose adapted business models for their members in each regional and local context. Staff-exchanges between different organisations are a useful tool for these purposes. Supporting translation into different languages would finally allow us to hear those that have been silenced.

Models of crowdfunding or micro-loans between peers allow cultural entrepreneurs to find **co-funding** for their innovative and federative projects.

This being said, agreements still have to be made country by country to expand these mechanisms and allow for more diversity in terms of financial flows. Lack of linguistic diversity in order to access these financial tools remains a well-known form of repression. In the meantime, it is interesting to note that distribution channels are gradually becoming funding channels, but the financial logic behind this serves to strengthen those that are successful when it is equally important to support those who take risks. To be capable of measuring the risk inherent in a cultural and or artistic enterprise, whatever it may be, requires sound judgement on the evolution of societies and the significance of art works produced or to be produced. At this point in time, such judgement is not part of the grading tools of rating agencies. Members of diaspora could play a useful and viable intermediary role in order to overcome such risk-assessment obstacles. European and Arab capitals of culture could act as catalysts or drivers, reinforcing the “renaissance” of Mediterranean regions in particular, backed by long-term cultural strategic thinking and development.

Affinities between people need to be developed in order to define common values and be capable of advocating together. A central strategy is to **build alliances between funding institutions and civil society actors** so that artistic and cultural, multi-directional and global mobility can be funded via intermediary organisations that are in direct contact with the potential beneficiaries.