

Cultural leadership from a European perspective

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1. Introduction

When we talk about cultural leadership, people often picture famous, ground-breaking pioneers in a particular discipline, for example Harald Szeemann, Franco Dragone, Herbert Von Karajan, or Gerard Mortier. People who inspire, who stamp their mark on the arts worldwide and who, one way or another, had the entrepreneurial spirit and the political insight to achieve their goal. It goes back to the romantic notion of the genius artist/leader who dedicates his life to Art. But in a changing, 'VUCA' world where goals and trends are volatile (V), money is uncertain (U), stakeholders engagement is complex (C) and strategic issues are ambiguous (A), can this model of the sole leader – or to use the more negative expressions, 'le roi soleil', or the 'imperator unicus' – still exist? The assumption is that in extremely changeable contexts with increasing challenges, leadership should be more shared (Pearce 2004; Pearce & Manz 2013; Schrauwen & Schramme 2016).

2. European context

Cultural leaders today deal with a different world than the one we experienced 20 years ago. Globalisation, technology, digitalisation, and migration have a huge impact on daily life. As Löfgren and Dalborg write in the introduction of the FIKA publication, 'there is no longer a separation between the local and the global. The world is here and everywhere.

International relations are increasingly becoming intercultural' (Dalborg & Löfgren 2016:27).

These evolutions are also affecting the conditions under which art and culture exist today: some authors are even talking about a 'global art world' (Carroll 2007; Vogel 2010; Léger 2012; Verhagen 2015). But not all artists, countries or regions are responding in similar ways to these challenges. According to Carroll, the arts world is not yet global, but 'transnational', wherein discourses are more likely to be shared at an international level (Carroll 2007).

This evolution affects also welfare models in Europe causing a decline of systems of funding, and the result is that arts and culture are no longer seen as an important pillar of Western society. The value of arts and culture for society has been questioned in recent years.

Established cultural institutions are not confident of continued governmental funding and are having to look for alternative financial resources. Leadership in the cultural sector is intimately connected with change.

The European Union in particular is being challenged like never before, and has had to deal with a multitude of crises in recent years, not least, the recent Brexit vote. It is clear that the concept of the European Union can only be sustained if it is built on a strong foundation. Culture has the potential to be one of the most durable elements of this foundation, but so far its role has been limited compared to economic and legal issues (Beugels 2003; Gielen & Lijster 2015). At times like these, it is important to remember that Europe is more than a geographic area or an economic project. Since the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) Culture has been included as a competence of the European Union, but it is only since the early 2000s that culture has become a vital aspect of the European project. Before this, the actions of the European Union in the cultural field were very limited (because of the principle of subsidiarity in the Maastricht Treaty). Since the conference 'a soul for Europe' in Berlin in 2004, the cultural dimension of Europe has become a factor for European strategies concerning integration and cultural identity, and related discourses in the European Union (De Boodt in Gielen 2015).

Europe therefore strongly needs cultural leaders who can grasp the revival and renewal of European cultural awareness. The successful realisation of participatory governance of cultural organisations (or any other cultural-political goal) depends on the willingness and capacity of people to translate a transnational discourse into local commitment and action (Kolsteeg 2016). For Kolsteeg, this 'translation' is a vital point of attention because it illustrates the paradoxical nature of the relationship between discourses on the one hand, and a negotiated political and cultural practice on the other, while respecting cultural diversity of contexts and practices in Europe.

Due to historic differences and political decisions, there are vast differences in practices of cultural leadership across Europe. Kolsteeg pointed out that in many of the former Soviet countries, for example, culture and art tend to be much more ideologically laden than in some of the older member states of the European Union. Therefore research on cultural

leadership should according to Kolsteeg thematise differences in practice that exist throughout the European Union, for instance in relation to themes such as internationalisation, cultural citizenship or education (conversation Kolsteeg 18 august 2016). Research should include both a comparative and a narrative perspective, leading to a framework that can be used to exchange and disseminate knowledge of different sense-making practices of cultural leadership across Europe (Kolsteeg 18 august 2016).

3. What does cultural leadership mean?

At the start of this article we saw that cultural leadership is often related to an artistic leader with a strong vision and artistic reputation. In the nineties, with the arise of cultural management as a discipline, the ideal model seemed to be a dual leadership, in which the artistic content and the management of the cultural organisations were split up between different persons. But is this approach still valuable? The question is not so ever what cultural leadership 'is' but rather what cultural leadership 'can' mean nowadays. Cultural leadership is not only the implementation of concepts and theories from the business world into the cultural sector, but – like the concepts of cultural management and cultural entrepreneurship - it has also to do with the creation of social value by artists and organisations and how to balance managerial effectiveness with artistic value for society.

Cultural leadership emerged as part of the terminology of cultural policy in the United Kingdom at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Price 2016a). Price describes how at that time there was a strong sense of managerial crisis at a national level in the cultural sector. From about 1997, a string of major organisations (including the Royal Opera House, English National Opera, the British Museum and the Royal Shakespeare Company) had encountered serious organisational and governance difficulties. This leads to the realisation of a central pervasive problem, this was that these institutions were somehow failing to develop and retain individuals with sufficient business and relational skills to meet the evolving needs of these iconic cultural organisations (Price 2016a). Similar questions arose in other European countries and were put on the political agenda. But it was clear that the traditional discourse was still dominating: a strong individual with the right management competences needed to be attracted and then the problem would be solved.

In parallel, the emerging field of the creative industries brought also a different interpretation of leadership. For these industries, the leader would be inventive, entrepreneurial and a communicative collaborator, who can deal with risk and uncertainty in a flexible way. This entrepreneurial style has increasingly become the new model for the cultural sector to follow (Kuhle, Schramme, Kooyman 2015).

However, some critical observers emphasize the distinction between leading a creative small enterprise whose aim is to generate a financial profit, and more public oriented cultural organisations whose main desire is to create social, cultural and artistic value. The latter must also comply with politically determined terms of reference and regulations. Others have their base in the civil society or the voluntary sector, chosen so that they could create art, have some fun, or change the world (or do a bit of each).

So when we talk about cultural leadership it is important to realize that the cultural sector consists of organisations and activity that differ widely in terms of juridical status, market orientation, size, financial resources, reputation and/or age. There is no one model that fits all solution.

But the new impetus comes according to Dalborg and Löfgren not solely from the private sector. 'Since the counterculture of the sixties the voluntary sector has seen the emergence of other, more participatory, democratic leadership ideals for artistic and cultural activity' (Dalborg & Löfgren 2016:21). Even now this search for new, more democratic models continues and – although the old ideals of authoritarian, charismatic leaders still exist in the traditional cultural institutions such as national theatres and state art museums – Sue Kay found out that medium sized and small cultural organisations who are naturally at home in civil society, are constantly looking for innovative ways to cooperate and this opens up the option of 'sharing', without labelling it 'leadership' (Kay 2015). By exploring new forms of social entrepreneurship, they also want to bridge the classical opposition between culture and economy.

Within this, the exercising of leadership is according to different authors, like Dalborg & Löfgren, not restricted to a post or a person. 'According to the notion of 'shared leadership'

responsibilities, roles and tasks are assumed and fulfilled by different workers at different times. Thus, it is not about a formal position, nor a set of attributes, but rather a professionalism characterised by processes, participation, and capability' (Dalborg & Löfgren 2016: 21; Price 2016a; Carson 2007).

Accordingly, we need to be aware that cultural leadership is an umbrella term and therefore brings together a range of practices and settings with a corresponding diversity of purposes and/or business models (Price 2016a).

The creation of public value requires the application of cultural leadership and ways of working from three perspectives: personal, relational and contextual (Dalborg & Löfgren speak about the operational dimension instead of the personal dimension. They focus more on the tools and skills needed to use these tools.). In my opinion the personal dimension relates to the vision and the style of the person who has the final responsibility over the organisation. It is about vision, but also about tools needed to enable the cultural leader to work professionally. The relational dimension is about the team or organisation. Questions like: 'How can you ensure that everyone participates and is involved? How can leadership be shared as much as possible internally and externally? How does an organisation manage conflict and mediate stress? The contextual dimension requires an analysis of the context in which the activity takes place, and that influences it (a context that it may to some extent be seeking to change)' (Dalborg & Löfgren 2016:21).

Until now, the perspective of the artist has often been underestimated or overlooked in leadership (Price 2016a). Nevertheless, the artist has a crucial position in the artistic field and has to fulfil different roles nowadays: besides their artistic work, they need to be an entrepreneur, a social worker and if it is possible also a political thinker or activist, who is very much engaged in society. The romantic image of the artist as a poor and lonely eccentric who lives in a garret, on the edge of society, and who devotes their whole life to their artistic work is now a distant memory!

The artist is sometimes an organisational leader, but may sometimes lead in other ways. According to Price you can make a distinction between 'entrepreneurial', 'generous' and

‘public’ characterisations of action (Price 2016b). These understandings are important for the coherent development of the many cultural leadership courses and training programmes now in operation worldwide. They are also relevant to artists and other cultural sector actors considering their relationship to cultural structures and the public realm (Price 2016).

3. Education programs

So what qualities does a leader need to possess in order to lead a cultural organisation in line with the above insights? Few social players in a capitalist society are as ideologised as the leader, a fact that has given rise to a veritable industry both within academia and for consultancy and publishing. In the self-help literature of popular science, leadership is presented as the route to social and financial success.

Therefore some national governments decided at the beginning of this century to support some cultural leadership programmes in order to make the cultural sector more resilient in this VUCA world. The first cultural leadership programme was developed in the United Kingdom in 2004 in London and based on the Clore Duffield report on cultural leadership (2002). It was a private initiative and developed at a local level. In 2006 Arts Council England also took the initiative to develop a Cultural Leadership Programme at a national level. Since 2007 cultural leadership programmes have started in other parts of the world, like the Advanced Cultural Leadership programme in Hong Kong in 2009 or the African Cultural Leadership Program (2009-2014). Since 2013, the Dutch government has supported a programme on cultural Leadership, the LINC program, as a response to their own big cuts in the national cultural budget. The programme became a huge success, with 700 applications in three years. All these programmes were developed on a national or local level. In 2014, the first European project on education in cultural leadership, the FIKA project, was funded by EC Erasmus+ programme for a period of two years. It was initiated by Nätverkstan Kultur (Sweden) a cultural management school and publishing house, in collaboration with ENCATC (the European Network on Cultural Management and Policy Education), Olivearte Cultural Agency and Trans Europe Halles.

During the different seminars organized by Anne Douglas, Chris Fremantle and Jonathan Price about ‘Cultural Leadership and the artist’ in 2016, we had several discussions on how

an education programme in cultural leadership should look like. We found out that an education programme in cultural leadership should address at least some of the following critical questions:

1. How should training provision for the cultural sector respond to definitions of leadership that go beyond the individual within big cultural organisations?
2. Can leadership education accommodate questions of social and cultural value as well as organisational effectiveness?
3. How can we learn to connect local practices with the international context?
4. How can we create an awareness about language and transmission of values within Europe and outside Europe?

Managing the valuation and transmission of culture through policy, entrepreneurship, and education in the public realm, as well as across generations, is a key responsibility for cultural leaders in a sustainable society (conversation Kolsteeg 2016). Regardless of how and where these challenges emerge, indisputably leaders will be required for the cultural sector. The cultural sector now has little choice but to respond: The present challenges of new media, changing audiences, dwindling public funds, and a decline of historical awareness are merely the next steps in this continuing pathway.

Footnote: This article is based on the publication of *The FIKA Project. Perspectives on Cultural Leadership*. Nätverkstan Kultur (2016) and the Programme 'Cultural leadership and the place of the Artist' (okt 2015-nov 2016), organised by Prof. Anne Douglas, Chris Fremantle and Jonathan Price in the framework of the project On The Edge, Gray's School of Art/the Robert Gordon University (Aberdeen), and funded by the UK's Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and in partnership with Creative Scotland, The Clore Leadership Programme and ENCATC. The references to Dr Johan Kolsteeg (UGroningen, The Netherlands) made in the text are based on a conversation with him on 18th of august 2016.

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