

NOTE: This is an unfinished paper. I will send the full version of the paper until 7th June.

When Administrative Systems Meet Creative Processes

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In every country in which there is state support to the arts, regardless of the encompassing governance system ruling the transference of funds from the state to privates or the exact system ruling the attribution of grants to the arts, there is a moment in which administrative and creative processes cross their paths. In this moment, the grounds upon which the state is based are confronted with the principles that are foundational to artistic creation.

This paper aims at exploring the way in which this confrontation affects both the public administration systems and the creative processes. I will start by exploring the relationship between public administration and public policies for the arts; then I will develop the issue of how arts managers have been adapting to the system of public procurement in general terms; then I will speculate on potential consequences of public administration systems moving away from the traditional values of public administration and adopting a more flexible approach, and from creative processes distancing from their own values and adjusting to those of public administration.

Public policy for the arts and public administration

Artistic entities often depend on public grants to pursue their activities. The systems that frame the attribution of grants vary in terms of the nature of the organizations that are in charge of the selection of the entities (arms-length organizations, direct public administration institutions...), the bureaucratic steps that are required to gain access to the grants, the relative weight of the grants provided in the average total budget of the artistic entities, the kind of jury and criteria used for the selection, etc.. But they all share the common feature of having to make the

objectives of the state compatible with the objectives of, not only specific artistic entities, but mostly of the artistic scene of a country.

Alan Peacock (1991) states that “[i]t is a truism that before we can decide whether or not a set of cultural policies has a consistent pattern, it is necessary to specify the policy objectives. In order to specify the objectives, we have to go back a stage and identify the set of values which enable these objectives to be identified. Then we encounter further difficulties. Values differ from individual to individual, from group to group, from political party to political party.” (p.1). The issue that Peacock points out in this paragraph affects public policy formulation in general, i.e. how to obtain consensus in matters that are directly connected to values, how to translate those values into objectives that serve society adequately, and how to create institutional structures that fulfill those objectives. Public administration bodies as executive arms of Government policies are those institutional structures that are ultimately responsible for the realization, in actual practice, of the values that underlie the whole process.

Peacock’s solution to the problem of having values involved is not specifying the set of values and relying on the principles of consumer sovereignty (p.2). My opinion, however, is that to state that “the individual is the best judge of his own interest” is a value judgment. Erasing values from consideration is virtually impossible and, furthermore, not useful for the proper appraisal of public policies. When we analyze differences among different systems of support to the arts it becomes clear that not considering values can undermine our capacity to understand the why and the how of the observed system.

The first value that underlies public policies for the arts right from the start is the affirmation or the negation of the worth of the arts for society. In dictatorial regimes it is usual that art is considered an instrument of propaganda and other kinds of artistic expressions are repressed. Public policies in these regimes tend to encourage the production of works of art that centered on personality cults and on ideologically marked messages, and to censor any kind of deviation to the approved themes or any kind of experimentalism. This type of public policy is, of course, put in place via extreme measures of conditioning of the freedom of expression, and these are unacceptable to anyone who believes freedom in artistic production is a

fundamental value. Still, the worth that is recognized in the arts has consequences at the level of the public policies that are constructed to regulate the sector.

In countries where the arts are unquestionably an activity that is to be stimulated and promoted freely for society, i.e. where the arts are considered added-value for the development of a good society in their many shapes and forms, subtler differences in the values underlying public policies are revealed. When we compare public policy for the arts in Europe and in the United States of America, it becomes clear that European countries tend to base their policies on values associated with the state provision of fundamental goods and services to the population, whereas the US value civil society action rather than state intervention. A consciously limited attempt at translating this into core values could be that Europeans emphasize equality, while Americans focus on freedom.

The leap from values to objectives is crucial and it moves away from the conceptual sphere into a more practical field. Parties have to present their proposals when they are campaigning and they have to materialize those proposals when they become Government. Proposals put forth in campaigns may or may not be informed by the workings of public administration bodies, so they may or may not take into account the realities with which these organizations have to deal every day. Proposals constitute intentions based on values that parties present as their own for public scrutiny, so it is not necessary that they incorporate practicalities and everyday conditionings. Information coming from public administration organizations is, without a doubt, extremely relevant when these proposals have to turn into actual measures.

At this point, greater values appear again; in this case, the values that are non-political and the guide civil service and public administration. For example, the Portuguese Code of Administrative Procedure states as general principles: legality, the accomplishment of public interest and the protection of the rights and interests of citizens, equality and proportionality, justice and impartiality, collaboration, participation, decision, non-bureaucratization and efficiency, gratuity, and access to justice. All these are values that ground and condition the acting of public administration bodies, and that are conducive to specific ways of implementing public policies.

In this context, prudence in the way in which the state acts is of paramount importance in public administration; so administrative processes are built, first and foremost, bearing in mind the necessity of avoiding suing and the consequent overturn of any administrative acts perpetrated by an institution. This is legitimate and it ultimately protects the community in the sense that it ensures fair treatment of all and good continuation of usually lengthy processes that will provide much needed funds for artistic organizations.

This prudence, however, may have the consequence of creating a number of procedures with the aim to prevent all kinds of possible perversion of the system. These procedures may, in turn, constitute a barrier to the exposition of all the interesting features of an artistic project or to the attribution of funds to the most artistically deserving artistic entities.

The relationship between the state and granted artistic organizations has been conceptualized in different ways; still, there is certainly a relation between what the state, or a specific government as the acting body of the state, designed for society in terms of artistic offer and demand, and the way in which grants are provided to artistic entities. So, public policies for the arts (as for any other area of intervention) are, generally, elaborated by specialists that are aware of the needs and impacts that are desired for a given arts scene; nevertheless, the implementation of public policies depends on public administration mechanisms, which in turn are guided by public administration principles.

Arts management and public procurement

The creative process has been, since long ago, accompanied by professional managers whose expertise is to adjust the reality of the artistic creation to the demands of the economy. Since fund-raising is part of the job of arts managers, the relation to the public administration is one of the most fine-tuned ones in countries in which the state represents a relevant fund provider. In these cases, arts projects use rhetoric and concepts that are most adequate for the purposes of a public administration institution. Yet, within public administration, these projects are often

read by people who are a lot more sensible to artistic values than to the strict mechanisms ensuring the legal safety of procedures.

I have elsewhere (Graça, forthcoming) described the contrast between the visions of practitioners of performing arts and that of economists. In the context of this research, I reached the conclusion that regarding several crucial concepts for economics and for the production of the performing arts these two groups did not match their views. In my profession as director of a department of the General Directorate for the Arts – the funding body for the arts in Portugal - , however, I have come across many artistic projects and realized that they have been adapting their arguments to the economic jargon, trusting that this will be a better fit for the evaluators.

References

Peacock, Alan (1991). 'Economics, Cultural Values and Cultural Policies', in *Journal of Cultural Economics*, December 1991, Volume 15, Issue 2, pp 1-18.