

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF CULTURE IN ECoC ITALIAN CANDIDATE CITIES

by ANNALISA CICERCHIA*

1. Are the social impacts of culture accountable?

Along with the economic, social impacts of the arts and culture are a recurring topic in the literature of last two decades or more (Matarasso, 1997; Reeve, 2002; Holden, 2004; AEGIS, 2005; Mirza, 2006; Radbourne et al., 2010; Crease, 2013; Cicerchia, 2015a/b). Scepticism, in various extents, about their measurability coexists with an increasing accountability demand, and trust in quantitative score-based methods, as in SROI (Social Return On Investments) (Ratti, 2015), as well as in purely qualitative narrative-based techniques, as in MSC (Most Significant Change) (Cicerchia, 2015a) to provide decisive evidence. If some observe that the discourse about impacts of culture is mostly anecdotal and hardly developed to a methodological maturity, others contest that in other scientific fields, like epidemiology, anecdotal methods are considered to be orthodox and reliable.

From two opposite standpoints, Francis Matarasso (1997, 2012) and Eleonora Belfiore (2006; Belfiore and Bennet, 2009) have questioned the very idea of measuring culture's impacts on society, both coming, despite their profound differences, to the conclusion that traditional quantitative approaches are not able to grasp the essential nature of those impacts. This leads Matarasso to suggest alternative, qualitative approaches, and Belfiore to more drastic conclusions.

On the practical side, the EU and its Member States trust in the development opportunity offered by cultural projects to regions and cities: in 2007-2013, the Structural Funds supported cultural projects with 6 billion euros, while the sectorial Culture EU programme barely reached 400 million (Iglesias et al., 2012). In Italy, in the same period, out of a total public ERDF funding of 30 billion, 3.3% went to culture.

* *Associazione per l'Economia della Cultura, Via della Dogana Vecchia 5, 00186 Roma, email: acicerchia@istat.it*

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