

Understanding the Nonprofit and Commercial Arts: An Update

By David B. Pankratz

In 1997, I wrote “The Nonprofit and Commercial Arts: Understanding Future Options” for CultureWork. At the time I was an independent scholar in the Los Angeles area and could easily cite local examples of cross-over interactions between these sectors involving artists and producers, arts and entertainment organizations, professional service organizations, and arts and entertainment decision-makers.

Further, arts and entertainment leaders, in a 1997 American Assembly report "The Arts and the Public Purpose," recommended that "partnerships among the commercial, not-for-profit, and unincorporated parts of the arts sector should be developed and expanded, to enhance its capacity to achieve public purposes.".(1).

At the same time, I proposed research on the extent and character of interactions between the commercial and non-profit arts, in several phases:

1. basic research on inter-relationships between the non-profit and commercial arts and their impacts on artists, arts providers, and public engagement in the arts
2. national, regional, and local dialogues around the results of the basic research
3. field experiments of new collaborations in the non-profit and commercial arts
4. assessments of the feasibility and advisability of new such collaborations

Alas, this research initiative never took place.

These days, research on cross-sector interactions is increasingly placed within larger frames—those of 1) the “creative industries” and 2) place-based economic development. These inquiries focus on inter-relationships between multiple clusters—including, yes, the Fine Arts and Entertainment, as well as Communications, Data Sciences, Hardware and Software, and Support Services.

Along these lines, colleagues of mine in Greater Pittsburgh and I are planning the following research project. Its goals are:

- to explore links between the presence and activities of artists and arts entities and beneficial neighborhood, community, or regional impacts, and
- to explore whether and how multi-sector inter-connections impact talent attraction and retention, leverage diversity and inclusion, and enable arts and technology cross-overs and spill-overs.

Specific hypotheses are:

- whether and how place, including artistic venues and opportunities, is a magnet to attract and retain knowledge workers, free-lancers, creatives, and tourists, thereby benefitting the regional economy, and
- whether a diverse arts sector helps generate multiple perspectives to innovation-related activities

Research, we expect, will feature complete detailed case studies of selected cultural entities varying in size, facility type, location, artistic discipline, organizational structure, life cycle, and financial stability. The research will also focus on: 1) distressed neighborhoods under pressures of gentrification 2) the area's transition to an innovation-based economy, and 3) the capacity to attract and retain creatives and free-lancers.

Our ultimate goal, based on aggregated and analyzed data from these case studies, will be to develop and test new methodologies to reliably measure impacts of the arts on innovation and regional economic growth.

This research is a next step that recalls earlier inquiries detailed 20 years ago, while forging new perspectives on the role of the non-profit and commercial arts and other sectors in innovation-based economies.

NOTES

1) "The Arts and the Public Purpose," the report of the Ninety-Second American Assembly held May 29-June 1, 1997 in Harriman, New York.

The author is Research & Policy Director for the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council and a lecturer in the Master of Arts Management program at Carnegie Mellon University.