

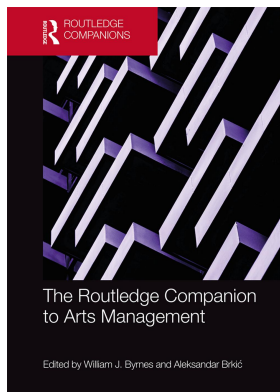
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12

ROLES OF CULTURAL NETWORKS IN THE TIMES OF QUANTUM REALITY¹

Aleksandar Brkić

Introduction: Times of “Quantum Reality”

... whilst we work tirelessly to reduce the amount of information in our reality, there is a fundamental argument that suggests that the amount of information in the Universe as a whole, if understood correctly, can only ever increase.

(Vedral, 2010, p. 11)

Vlatko Vedral proposes that the quantum of information in our universe is an ever-increasing fact. There has been, since Lord Keynes came up with the notion of an Arts Council in the United Kingdom, and the United Nations concerned themselves with the notion of collective culture, a proliferation of organisations which concern themselves with artistic and cultural practice and the way they intersect with national and international policy. This chapter will explore that notion in terms of organisations which have been set up to facilitate the international exchanges in the field(s) of culture/arts, mostly focusing on the arts management and cultural policy networks, and the roles they play in the field today.

Arts/cultural management, often joined together with cultural policy, is a field nurtured in challenging post-WWII geopolitical times that asked for a lot of efforts to connect the actors in the same field of practice on the international level. Challenges were numerous – lack of sources of information; high travel costs; limited ways of communication; political and ideological simplified binary divides (i.e. East-West; Developed-Underdeveloped; Communist-Capitalist); cultural and language specificities, and many other. Geopolitical seismological shifts triggered by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 have challenged concepts about the nature of our world, where these divides were very soon broken, and diluted rather than “fixed”. The world became much more interconnected, faster, closer and – unevenly balanced.

A new binary conundrum of parallel spaces rose to the surface – one cosmopolitan and other national. These parallel tracks, like siblings trying to find their own independence,

seem to be inextricably bound together and we observe how they play out in the distinct and different ways in which they influence our lives, creating something that we can metaphorically call a “quantum reality” (Vedral, 2010). On one side, there would appear to be an attempt on the part of the global elite to promote “methodological cosmopolitanism” (Beck and Grande, 2007). On the other, as an apparent counter-reaction, we witness a proliferation of nationalism and revival of “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002) on a global scale. The contradiction is inherent and yet not mutually exclusive, for we live in a world in which we can be at the same time in two distinct and different places. While networks were going outwards, national cultural policies were getting more and more confused, mostly going inwards. There are often different criteria of success from the perspective of global/cosmopolitan network communities in the field of culture compared to the priorities of national cultural and education policy agendas (i.e. the paradox of the Creative Europe collaboration projects on the level of EU, balancing between national and supranational success indicators).

Vedral’s proposition about an ever-increasing universe of information certainly would seem to describe the ways in which there is an ever-increasing rise of (cultural) networks. The emphasis he makes however is on “information” rather than “meaning”. Does ‘more’ mean better? Can those networks stay in the relatively same frameworks as the ones with which they started?

Mobility was always an intrinsic factor of actors in the cultural sector. In fact, mobility was one of the crucial strategies used by all ancient empires to both acquire and disseminate their ways of life (intangible elements), as well as to promote their cultural artefacts (tangible elements). This strategy expanded radically with the industrial revolution as new forms of increasing speed and scope impacted world trade.

However, since the 1990s, as the culture of individualism became more dominant than the traditional ideas of communities (shift from the traditional communities to so-called communities of interests), and the expansion of low-fare travel and democratization of the Internet, cultural exchanges became much easier. Low barriers to entry to the world of networking gave rise to a new generation of individuals-as-networks. This shift made it much easier for networks to expand in many different ways, and different kind of forms.

Just as the landscape for networks is complex, so too are the ways in which frameworks for cultural policy connected with the culture/arts, and the field(s) of arts management and cultural policy. These frameworks function on the local (i.e. city policies), micro regional (i.e. region within a nation-state), national, macro regional (wider regions beyond nation-state borders) and international level, with the networks ideally being positioned on the intersection of different layers of inquiry. Figure 12.1 demonstrates how these networks purpose interlock. These different levels on which cultural networks operate tend to cross over, and there is often a debate on the borders between the standards and priorities between them (i.e. local vs. national; national vs. international).

These overlapping spaces are far from being the only ones that make the context for cultural networks complex. As Colin Mercer was warning us, these spaces, described by Bruno Latour with metaphors such as levels, layers, territories, spheres, categories, structure, systems . . . as well as art forms, genres, and silo-based funding and policy agencies are now rather exchanged with a “fibrous, threadlike, stingy . . . capillary character” (Latour, 1997, p. 2; Mercer, 2010, p. 37).

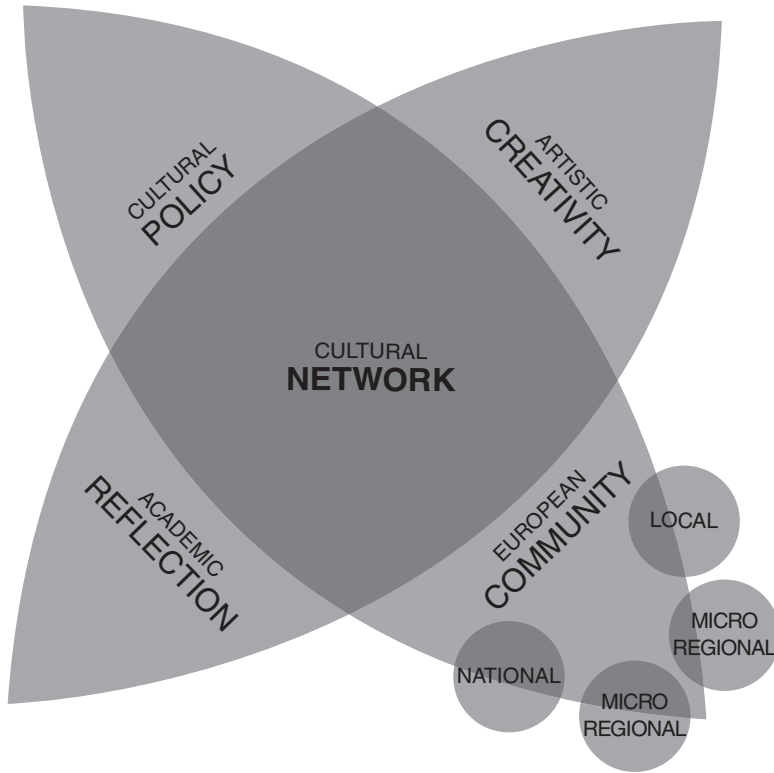


Figure 12.1 Positioning a cultural network in a European context

Source: Brkic, 2014

Exploring the labyrinth of cultural networking today

a network is a self-generating, self-organizing, self-sustaining system. It works through multiple feedback loops. These loops allow the system to monitor and modulate its own performance continually and thereby maintain a state of homeostatic equilibrium. At the same time, these feedback loops induce effects of interference, amplification, and resonance. And such effects permit the system to grow, both in size and in complexity. Beyond this, a network is always nested in a hierarchy. From the inside it seems to be entirely self-contained, but from the outside, it turns out to be part of a still larger network.

(Shaviro, 2003, p. 10)

It is not easy to define a cultural network today. Since Manuel Castells (2001, 2004, 2009) and Richard Florida (2012) published their highly influential, but from many angles contested work (i.e. Peck, 2005; Hoyman and Faricy, 2009), cultural networking and networking in general became a popular notion of academic discourses. At the same time, networking became an integral element of the “creative class” – mobile individuals with the high levels of social and economic capital (Florida, 2012), a concept that was used as the priority of number of cultural

policy documents around the world (i.e. The Arts and Culture Strategic Review – ACSR in Singapore, launched in 2010, giving the cultural policy vision, mission and goals for Singapore until 2025) (NAC, 2012). Everyone, everywhere, every day . . . is networking. Still, this is happening in the world filled with conundrums, and as Leger is saying in his polemical book – “someone can not network and continue to network in the same way that Marxist professors sell their books and anarchist artists apply for government grants” (Leger, 2018, p. 3).

If we define a network simply as a group of people interacting in a certain way with each other, we can then say that “cultural network is an organization of people and/or institutions of similar professional interest or role performed in their respective cultural communities or a given form of art” (Sternal, 2013, p. 8). Position of these networks has changed in the life of professionals in the field of culture/arts – from being one of the main sources of information and experiences from other communities, cities, countries, regions, cultural networks are now trying to position themselves in the space of information overload that is at the same time dealing with the problem of attention scarcity. There are now a number of many-to-many tools that are there to support cultural cooperation.

Pehn saw the cultural network as a “virtual place of exchange” that is creating a philosophy “out of the sum of its members’ philosophies, which must be reflected in it”, with “notions such as rivalry and competition as alien” (1999, p. 29). He listed these four features as most important for a cultural network as an organization:

- Strong interpersonal ties, which go beyond regular competence issues
- Non-hierarchical relations
- Openness for development and change
- Innovativeness of structure and activities

Entering a cultural network may resemble one’s experience in a labyrinth, balancing between the local, national, regional, global views. Pozzolo, Bacchella, and Augusto (2001, p. 14) discuss this kind of experience relating it to the myths deeply engrained in us:

In any type of labyrinth, from the one represented by Ariadne’s thread to Tarry’s Theorem, the strategies for finding one’s way through are characterized by the impossibility of attaining a global view. Decisions are conditioned exclusively by “local vision,” and are made one after the other (as in an algorithm) based on “local attention”. Even Daedalus, who was imprisoned in the labyrinth of his own design, managed to escape only after taking to flight. From above, he was able to recognise the structure of the labyrinth and to identify solutions to the problems which had remained unresolvable while he remained on foot.

Cultural networking can be a confusing process and it does take some kind of a system to be applied so that the individual or an arts organization can find the way through different potential paths. One of the pioneers of cultural networking in Europe, Mary Ann DeVlieg, defined cultural networks as “a form of organising and not organisations per se” (DeVlieg, 2001).

In that sense, conceptually, we can approach cultural networking through four basic categories:

- Organizational (institutional) model (*network as an organization*)
- Strategic direction of an existing organization (*networking as a strategic direction*)
- Form of communication (*networking as a trait or a skill*)
- A way of organizational behaviour (*networking as an ecology of an organization*)

Network as an organization is a legal entity that usually has its own structure, secretariat (centre), some kind of governing body, general members assembly and different kind of projects that are produced on an annual or periodic level.

Networking as a strategic direction is a way of operating in a highly connected world that one arts/cultural organization can decide to take for one or more strategic cycles. This decision can be a result of the impossible position that the organization has in a relatively closed local/national environment. By applying this strategy, an organization can still be active and influential on the local/national level, but getting its strength from the validation, projects, image and funding it received from the partners connected through the network.

Networking as a trait or a skill became one of the core elements of arts/cultural management as a field. It is on the one side promoted by the rapid technological developments and the concept of individuals-as-networks on one side and on the other by communication as a classical trait of arts/cultural managers.

Networking as an ecology of an organization became a way of functioning related to the culture of collaboration and co-creation instead of the culture of competition. It is a specific way of looking at the ecosystem in which the organization is positioned, in which every organization is a node in a network of potential collaborators and partners.

According to the statement, or “manifesto document” called “The Value of International Cultural Networks” (2016), signed by 20 cultural networks based in Europe,² cultural networks exist

to promote and facilitate all forms of international collaboration, and improve the access to arts and culture; build trust and nurture relationships across national borders; to connect and bridge realities, coordinate joint efforts (advise, host, mediate inside respective fields and beyond); promote cultural equity, defend the intrinsic value of the art.³

This kind of sharing produces a culture of shared awareness, shared creation and shared responsibility (Shirky, 2008).

However, because of the history of the development of organizations like ENCATC or AAAE, we are mostly thinking of cultural networks as organizations that have their “secretariat” and members. Depending on their motivations to be in these cultural networks, Vellani (2010) categorized members into Leaders, Participants, Freeloaders, Floaters and Cynics, emphasizing that the healthy network would need to focus on the active participants, trying to “minimise floaters and cynics, without maximising leaders” (p. 3). One of the questions that become important is: what really motivates the professionals in the field to be the Participants in the cultural/arts management education network today, compared to the period 1960–2000?

Most of the best known, highly visible and influential international networks, which concern themselves with education in arts and cultural management and cultural policy, such as for example Association of Arts Administration Educators (AAAE), The European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA), and European Network on Cultural Management and Policy (ENCATC), were initiated either in United States or Europe at the end of the “Age of Extremes”, in the fractured times of late 20th century (Hobsbawm, 2013). They became some of the most significant pillars of the ecosystem of what will later be defined as a field of arts/cultural administration/management and cultural policy education. These networks continue to be active today, although at this juncture in their history they appear to be jostling amongst themselves as they search for new ways in which to reposition their membership and reshape their frameworks from their Euro-centric or Northern Americentric beginnings towards a more global embrace and approach.⁴

Looking into the survey done with more than 50 cultural networks and organizations based in 32 countries in Europe, Asia Pacific, the Americas and Africa, as part of IFACCA’s “THRIVE:

Networking Culture Leaders” platform (Laaksonen, 2016), representatives of cultural networks defined the purpose of their organizations in various ways, that were summed in the report (Laaksonen, 2016, p. 20):

- Advocacy for the arts and culture and their role in building a sustainable, fair and harmonious society and transparent, accountable governance
- Accessibility of the arts and culture to all through education, training, awareness-raising, information sharing and creative experiences
- Building bridges and connections between sectors, disciplines and stakeholders
- Promotion of cultural diversity and values, understanding, peace and dialogue
- Promotion of specific art form sectors, cultural institutions, creative industries and national or regional art scene
- Strengthening and facilitating cultural dialogue, exchange and cooperation
- Resourcing and strengthening local communities, civil society and grassroots involvement
- Fostering sustainability, equality and harmonious co-living
- Supporting capacity-building, improving the working conditions of cultural professionals, and defending their rights
- Strengthening the role of members and serving their needs
- Strengthening communication and cooperation between cultural networks and other stakeholders

Most of these goals, directions, and strategies seem like elements of well-structured organizations, with clear and rooted missions and reasons for existence. Nevertheless, the fluid character of a network as a form, where members are continuously joining and leaving, make the cultural networks “structures of low formality, constantly under development” with the members having a number of options to choose from when it comes to the level of their commitment (Sternal, 2013, p. 9).

Examining the profiles of cultural networks across Europe in his insightful report for Culture Action Europe, Ivor Davies identified a number of general characteristics that are shared across the sector positioning them in different ways as:

- Learning spaces and awareness-builders – providing services to members and others, to increase understanding of shared issues – both internally and externally focused
- Meeting spaces for people with shared interests – providing physical (and virtual opportunities to enable members and others in their sector to meet, share new experiences and ideas and gain mutual strength
- Meeting places for people with diverse interests – as above but reaching out to connect with more diverse, interests and perspectives (e.g. culturally, geographically, disciplinary etc.)
- Event promoters – bringing together groups of artists from diverse backgrounds to make and share work internationally
- Intercultural resources – providing services and environments that enable people from diverse cultural backgrounds to interchange, build lasting relationships and cooperate in their practice
- Vehicles for inter/transdisciplinary practice – exploring and building connections with ideas and practice across diverse, complementary (or apparently contradictory) disciplines
- Partnership consortia – enabling members to work together to form partnerships based in their own specialist fields
- Project developers and partners – working centrally or with partners to devise, develop, and deliver cooperation projects

- Communication media (internal) – researching and disseminating news and information services for members and to their own specialist sector of interest
- Addressers of issues in or with related fields – seeking out and working with others, in order to connect with and impact on important wider social and economic issues
- Special interest mouthpieces (external) – being the voice of a specialist sector in wider debates about social and economic life, whether individually or collaboratively, as part of a wider ‘movement’
- Special interest “ears” (external and internal) – being an observatory that brings into and enhances the dissemination across the network of specific and wider intelligence, knowledge and awareness
- Advocacy agencies – devising and delivering strategies, towards and on behalf of their own specialist sector, to increase reach and impact, solicit support and recognition or argue for progress and change
- Self-promoters – pursuing own interests of growth and sustainability, by increasing reach and impact and developing sustainable organizational and financial models
- Non-profit distributing enterprises – providing a range of specialist services generating income that can, in turn, be reinvested into the wider objectives of the network (2016, p. 26).

These characteristics can be considered to be only invitations for further debate about the roles and the positions cultural networks have in the wider cultural/artistic ecosystem. Networks became an organizational form for collaboration in a complex and globalized world, and we will discuss some of the trending issues that come out from the roles they (can) play.

Trending issues for cultural networks

There are a number of trending issues that came out as a consequence of the lack of shared supra-semantics – the ways of understanding and defining, meaning and position of a cultural network in a wider cultural/educational ecosystem. Some of the most recurring ones will be examined in this section, and they came up from the author’s engagement as the co-ordinator (together with Audrey Wong) of Asia Pacific Network for Cultural Education and Research (ANCER) as well as from the activities of the “THRIVE: Networking Culture Leaders” conference co-organized by International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA), Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) and Asia Pacific Network for Cultural Education and Research (ANCER) in Singapore, 29–31st August 2015.

Lifecycles of cultural networks

When some of the cultural networks were formed, no one was thinking about their lifecycle. They were constantly evolving and were existing as flexible, informal and emergent structures (Staines, 1996). Now, for most of the cultural networks that are existing for more than 20–30 years, one of the prevailing dilemmas are related to the questions of their sustainability. And when the issue of sustainability is being discussed, very soon you understand that we are talking about a very tangible organizational sustainability – there are some employees, their families, offices, contracts, as well as the legacy of the founders. And in this struggle for survival and sustainability, a number of them start overlapping with each other, being forced to create alliances and partnerships with other networks (i.e. ENCATC and AAAE, TACPS and ANCER).

Who would have the courage to pull the plug, even if we all agree that the mission of the network has been fulfilled, or there are some other platforms, organizations, or networks that

are covering that mission better than us? We can even talk about a version of a “family trap” when it comes to some of the cultural networks, and the fear of failure in the face of the history/founders as well as the wider society that would see the closure of a network tragically, as some kind of death. This position takes us back to the myth of Atlas – a Titan condemned to hold up the sky on his shoulders for eternity. Some of the pioneering cultural networks are often having discussions about their position – if we stop existing will the world still be spinning? Can we walk away and stop holding the heavens “by ourselves”?

Another reason that triggers the self-questioning of the need for the existence of some of the cultural networks is the efficiency questions, so typical (and equally problematic) for the arts organizations. Cultural networks are criticized for not being representative enough, not having enough active members, not affecting certain kind of change, not having enough “outputs”. This criticism directed towards the lack of “strategic efficiency” misses the reasons for the existence of a cultural network – being efficient was never their primary purpose or strength (Davies, 2016, p. 17). Cultural networks should be able to rely on the “spillover” or “network effect”, kicking off and nurturing initiatives in a specific networking space, and then – let them go. Because of the way arts organizations are usually evaluated, and cultural networks often go under the same criteria, the main question remains – how do we monitor the “effectiveness” of the network and trace the impacts of the “network effect”?

The governance confusion and the institutionalization of networks

Cultural networks today can be found on different positions of this ‘scale’ – from ENCATC that is actively following Castell’s idea of networks becoming new institutional forms (Castells, 2001) to ANCER (Asia Pacific Network for Cultural Education and Research), that can loosely be defined as a goal directed, ‘serendipitous’ or tactical network (Uzelac, 2011). However, lines between the individual-as-network, network as a process and network as an organization are blurred and defining them became completely useless. Consequences of this blurred state can be clearly observed through the issues of accountability in the network – in these mixed structural spaces, who actually decides and takes responsibility for the governance structure or directions that networks will take? As much as we saw that cultural networks were from some point becoming new dominant forces (Provan and Kenis, 2008), it becomes more difficult to figure out the nature and real purposes of these forces.

More than ever, the question of the most appropriate models of governance that make international cultural networks more effective and sustainable are being asked. Whether the cultural network is a participant-governed, lead organization-governed or network administrative organization (Provan and Kenis, 2008), we get closer to another dilemma of cultural networking – when we discuss about the sustainability of cultural networks, are we thinking about the sustainability of the organizational model (Provan and Kenis, 2008) or sustainability of ideas (Antariksa, 2016)? Cultural networks came to a point where they are dealing with a number of issues connected with the stage of organizational maturity, they reached leaving behind the romanticised myths of organically created flows of people and ideas that most of them have in their stories of creation.

One of the questions that influence the governance models is the legitimacy of the representation of members. Who do the members represent – themselves as individuals/professionals, their organizations, cities, countries, regions, continents? This problem of so-called non-representativeness of members was raised by Fondazione Fitzcarraldo (IETM/Fondazione Fitzcarraldo, 2001) almost 20 years ago, and it seems that today nothing happened that helped to get us closer to some kind of resolution. There are some innovative examples of diversifying and delegating power and responsibility amongst the members of the cultural network that helped

the network stay relevant and dynamic (Višnić, 2007, p. 31). In this case, the members of the cultural network are only those that are active at that moment. They have all the rights and responsibilities. At the same time, any of the passive members can be re-activated and become a member with her/his engagement in some of the initiatives, platforms, or projects.

Another element of the reality of the everyday life of cultural networks is that most of the members are simply not interested in governance. And while they all support the democratic and participative ways of governing a cultural network, when the moments of participation come, only a small percentage of them are part of so-called active membership. And it is relatively easy today to coordinate a young network with the ambition to be part of some kind of imaginary post-hierarchical paradise, but problems start when the network starts growing – then the need for management and some kind of coordination becomes a reality (Leger, 2018, p. 54).

There are examples of organizations that started as projects, grew to become platforms and then some kind of version of a cultural network. One of those is “On the Move”,⁵ Cultural Mobility Information Network, that started in 2001 as a project of another network – Informal European Theatre Meeting (IETM) and funded by European Cultural Foundation (ECF). Project-based logic of governance is still at the core of “On the Move”, backed by the pressures to “survive” as an organization, as a structure, that needs to fund its existence, staff, website, and other costs. Model of networking in this case becomes a secondary issue, eaten by the tactics of the survival of the cultural network as a project-based organization. This fluctuation between the project-based organization and network, as a mode of operation, became one of the survival strategies.

Still, the question of redundancy remains – why are we calling some of them cultural networks if they are in their substance project-based arts organizations? One of the core differences when it comes to the (organizational) culture of these two different frameworks is that the arts organizations tend to be consensus driven institutions, while cultural networks should be the spaces of dissonance. Cultural networks are in their nature more tolerant when it comes to differences and are not there to strive towards the structural/organizational stability. As “learning organizations”, they are in a “constant process of change and adaptation”, making “constant readjustments to their working methods as the world in which they operate throws up new challenges and conflicts” (Staines, 1996). We need to constantly re-evaluate what are the initiatives/roles that are in the domain of the cultural networks and to distinguish them more clearly from the ones that can be better executed by the arts organizations. If not, some of the cultural networks may continue competing with some of their members for attention, funding and a place in the ecosystem.

Enhancing the voices: inside/outside paradigm

One of the important characteristics of the cultural networks in their earlier days, was that they were important validating/accreditation bodies for their members – either on the organizational or personal level. Membership of a certain network like ENCATC contributed to your professional reputation on the national or a regional level in the face of your stakeholders. In the same way as was happening at the Occupy Wall Street, cultural networks have a “human microphone” effect in the wider field – certain voices that would not be heard at the international level become more prominent, even if they are sometimes coming from the “small” nations or markets (Finland, Serbia, etc.).

From another angle, because of the exposure on the international networking platform, these voices are taken more seriously at “home”. The cultural network becomes a form of “accreditation body”, branding an individual or an organization as legit, validated and respected on an international level by the professional community it is a part of.

However, this aspect of cultural networking has significantly changed in recent years. Cultural networks became just one of the layers of the significantly expanded cultural field that now

consists of a number of actors that are playing this role – individuals, institutions, whole industries, online portals, mobile applications, new networks that are not necessarily “cultural”. These changes are calling for a serious re-questioning of the role that the cultural networks actually play in enhancing the voices of their current and future members.

Advocacy strategies

Today, the importance of the cultural networks as advocacy platforms is questioned in relation to the individual-as-network type of attitude nurtured by the “always connected” society. Here the question Eugene Tacher asked in 2004 becomes even more interesting – “are we connected because we are collective or are we collective because we are connected?” (Tacher, 2004). Unfortunately, even in the guidelines of “Creative Europe”, the flagship programme of the European union, there is no emphasis on advocacy as the criteria for funding successful applications. At the same time, very well-designed propaganda/cultural diplomacy/soft power initiatives delivered through the foreign cultural centres and EUNIC are still flourishing.

An individual arts/cultural organization is often not strong enough to lobby for a certain issue or a cause and mobilize people on the local, national, regional and international level. Throughout the whole 20th century, citizens were using different kinds of social networks, circles of friends, parties, associations, unions, clubs . . . to be able to share and more effectively deal with their problems/issues (Bennet and Segerberg, 2013).

One of the distinctions that is often blurred today is the one between the idea of promoting a cause and advocating for one. With the development of NGO’s, volunteer associations and numerous online communities of interests powered by the disruptive character of technology and new media, advocacy initiatives became significantly more spread out, effective and visible. This radical technological development also shifted the understanding of advocacy and the role cultural networks played. At the end of the 20th century, these networks were part of the “collectivist” movement, while we are still not sure how to understand the “connectivism” as a movement that is adopted by new generations that grew up with the new media and technology (Bennet and Segerberg, 2013).

Future of cultural networking

Maxwell’s demon: a hypothetical being imagined as controlling a hole in a partition dividing a gas-filled container into two parts, and allowing only fast-moving molecules to pass in one direction, and slow-moving molecules in the other. This would result in one side of the container becoming warmer and the other colder, in violation of the second law of thermodynamics.

—Oxford Dictionary, 2016

With arts/cultural organizations being consensus driven organizational models, networks should be representing non-spaces of dissonance that not only tolerate, but actively support and encourage differences. Cultural networks have the potential to be in the center of a new social framework that goes beyond the construct of nation (Anderson, 1991) and in a similar way like Maxwell’s demon from the perspective of quantum physics, play the role of the in-between-space that nurtures the dialogue between different players in the field. There is a large potential in a better interconnectedness of culture/arts with other areas/sectors, through networks as a communication channel (Brkić, 2014). Cultural networks will need to create more heterogeneous stakeholder alliances going beyond the like-minded individuals, organizations, institutions and agencies they have been confined to for a long time (Mercer, 2010, p. 32).

Low cost of communication in the times of “social media platforms as ideology” (Lovink, 2016) made the formation and development of new cultural networks “ridiculously easy” (Paquet, 2002). That is already leading towards cultural networks in the “clouds” in the wave of “mass amateurization” of the process of group creation (Shirky, 2008, p. 54). Being the creation of the 20th century, cultural networks as we know them are slowly fading away – “the transformation of very open and rather general cultural networks into more localized and more specialized ones is underway” (Švob Đokić, 2011, p. 28). Or, the transdisciplinary ones, such as Agenda 21 for Culture,⁶ related to the topics and agendas that are in a need for a different kind of approach to networking.

Will cultural networking become just one of the dimensions of digital networking, with all its social and political issues we are trying to deal with? Lovink (2016) cynically reflects on our current position:

Under this spell of desire for the social, led by the views and opinions of our immediate social circle, our daily routines are as follows: view recent stories first, fine-tune filter preferences, jump to first unread, update your life with events, clear and refresh all, not now, save links to read for later, see full conversation, mute your ex, set up a secret board, run a poll, comment through the social plug-in, add video to your profile, choose between love, haha, wow, sad, and angry, engage with those who mention you while tracking the changes in relationship status of others, follow a key opinion leader, receive notifications, create a photo spread that links to your avatar, repost a photo, get lost in the double-barrel river of your lifetime, prevent friends from seeing updates, check out something based on a recommendation, customize cover images, create ‘must-click’ headlines, chat with a friend while noticing that ‘1,326,595 people like this topic’.

To juxtapose this cynicism with the pinch of romanticism, there is a chance that the concepts of friendship and hospitality (Budhyarto, 2015) are a good new starting point for cultural networks, ‘to explore what it means to be part of a common that is not merely a resource management exercise, but an alternative to treating the world as a made up of resources’ (Hine, 2016). Although Lovink (2011, p. 164) believes that we need to “abandon the ‘friends’ logic and start to play with the notion of dangerous design”.

Maybe the existence of cultural network does not depend on the questioning of the format, structure or the way they are organized, but from the topics and debates they select to deal with in a world that has more of “one-way dialogues” than at the end of the 20th century (Davies, 2016, p. 57). The solution may lie in the focus on the “sustainability of ideas” (Antariksa, 2016), rather than sustainability of structures (Hagoort, 2016). These two roles, connected with activism and pragmatism are often in tension, and it is not an easy task to reconcile them, especially for a sector whose “core values embrace experimentation and innovation – in both form and content” (Davies, 2016, p. 80).

Davies (2016, p. 26) posed some of the questions that could be reflection points for most of the cultural networks today, to help them clarify their roles and potential future:

- How well do stakeholders understand this complex profile, why it is important and what brought it about?
- How well do networks’ own publics (members and users) understand their own profile, and why and how it came about?

- Which of these characteristics are driven, respectively, by internal demands (e.g. from members, officers, users) or by external pressures (e.g. from stakeholders, funders)?
- How does the complexity and level of responsibility attached to the profile match to the resources and financial structure of these networks?
- How do networks balance the competing pressures imposed by the relative demands of each within the whole?
- Who (outside 'the core group' of officers and board) really understands the nature and implications of this challenge?
- In a context of change, and of a receding public European investment, what strategies, if any, are available today to networks to address these issues?

Cultural networks are facing a serious challenge in the coming period and most of these questions need to be raised and discussed with some clearer strategic focus as a result. They will probably have to embrace and own the new technology that supports a dialogue and empowers the processes of co-creation. Some of the examples that are presenting the possibilities of the creative blurring of the lines between real and virtual space are collaborative platforms Hitrecord,⁷ co-founded by the actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Daisie,⁸ co-founded by the actress Maisie Williams. These platforms, which are connecting creative people from all over the world through the work on collaborative projects, could be interesting case studies that can be used for the new frameworks of the cultural networks. In some way, cultural networks need to figure out what this fluid space for encounters and collaboration can look like in the next period.

Because of the character of the world we live in today, where we are becoming more aware that information is in the center of our universe, as Nunes recently concluded – “whatever solution to organizational and strategic problems can be expected today will in all likelihood come from within networks” (Nunes, 2014, p. 11). Will they be informal or formal, virtual and viral? We will not have to wait for a long time to see. And participate.

Notes

- 1 This article partly came out from the research project “Ontology of Arts and Cultural Management Education” generously supported by Research Committee of LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore.
- 2 Cultural networks that signed “The Value of International Cultural Networks” document are: ARRE – Association of European Royal Residences; CAE – Culture Action Europe; ECHO – European Concert Hall Organisation; EMC – European Music Council; ELIA – European League of Institutes of the Arts; ETC – European Theatre Convention; EMCY – European Union of Music Competitions for Youth; Eurozine; Res Artis; OTM – On the Move; ECA-EC – European Choral Association – Europa Cantat; ENCC – European Network of Cultural Centres; IMC – International Music Council; IETM – International network for contemporary performing arts; TEH – Trans Europe Halles; RANN – Réseau Art Nouveau Network; FACE – Fresh Arts Coalition Europe; NEMO – The Network of European Museum Organisations; Triangle Network and RESEO – European Network for Opera, Music and Dance Education.
- 3 This quote is edited from the original document, which can be accessed at <http://on-the-move.org/files/last-%20The%20Value%20of%20International%20Cultural%20Networks%20-%20copie.pdf> (Accessed 16 Mar. 2017).
- 4 The oldest active cultural network in Europe is European Festivals Association, formed in 1952 in Geneva.
- 5 www.on-the-move.org
- 6 www.agenda21culture.net
- 7 www.hitrecord.org
- 8 www.daisie.com

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