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Cultural education organizations and flexible individualization of taste

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# Cultural education organizations and flexible individualization of taste

Cultural  
education  
organizations

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to identify and discuss structure, essence, and quality of a current organizational frameworks for the arts and culture, institutions, NGO's and enterprises that are core playgrounds for flexible individualization of taste, cultural literacy, individuals' expressions and their cultural identity.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Paper design initiates with an analysis of the organizational landscape of cultural sector, including special focus on cultural education. This subject will be studied with a use of a case of cultural education organization leaders. The paper epilogue brings to the discussion inspirations from aesthetics and marketing studies.

**Findings** – In cultural education organizations, there is: an urgency: for more hybrid and flexible organizational forms; cross-sectorial synergy; for more focused leaders competencies fitting into expected categories of: managerial, communicative, sensemaking, and entrepreneurial.

**Research limitations/implications** – The paper is a stimulus for further research within cooperating disciplines of organization studies, cultural policy studies, marketing, and aesthetics.

**Practical implications** – The text has practical implication for public administration, cultural policy makers and is an insight for cultural organizations leaders from public, private, and civil parts of cultural sector.

**Originality/value** – The topic of flexible individuation of taste in relations to cultural education institution practices, is reflected in a complementary approach, from triadic perspective of cultural policy, marketing and aesthetics, bringing new insights for organization change research and practice.

**Keywords** Organizational change, Aesthetics, Cultural education, Cultural policy, Flexible individualization, Taste

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Cultural sector is inhabited by strangely, diverse types of organizational animals. This variety of operational modes and management styles are recently discussed and researched under the umbrella of creative and cultural industries (Poettschacher, 2010; Florida, 2002; KEA, 2006; Bilton, 2007). Design and architects studios, music labels, dance and theatre companies, publishing houses, radio brands, art galleries, film schools or theme parks and other entrepreneurial activities in the arts are reorganized and managed to fit individualized needs of crowds of consumers. Leaders and inventors of these businesses are strategically focused on keeping clients time and attention with their diverse narrations and well packed values, new services and tools constructed from cultural and art-like content. Creativity and talent development, ecology and sustainability, spirituality or slow-food, memory and local or other cultural identities are magnets for crowds striving for passion and sense of life. Not surprisingly, cultural and iconic branding (Holt, 2004), cultural strategies in marketing communication (Holt and Cameron, 2010), creative consumption (Bilton, 2007) or experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) are leading recent believes of corporate brands holders of any sort. That is a playground for



global competitors who supply the content for individual and flexible identities of clients. Their public is paying not only with their money but free time they have and want to spend, the most precious currency they have as humans of twenty-first century societies. However, there are other, less business-oriented types of organizations, that are providing much more individualized content and are not taken into consideration as a creative industries engines.

The aim of the paper is to discuss processes of change in organizations that' mission is to provide an access to cultural education and personal development of a serious type. Organizations in focus are public, civic and private players that are selling not purely cultural products or dreams, but deal with cultural and art competencies, cultural literacy, individuals expressions and their cultural identity. Where creative processes, passion and talent enablement, choice, quality, and aesthetic experience are buzzwords. Providing narrations on values and self-development of their clients, supporting individual arts amateur and professional virtuosity, crystalizing real content and sense of their clients' passions. Sometimes manipulate, but mostly manage their memory and sense of identity. That is why cultural education organizations, such as cultural houses, libraries, museums, theatres, art schools and art institutions focused on long-life learning activities, debate and community centers, NGO's, free-lance non-profits and many cultural institution bureaucracies are boldly located on a map of our interest when reflecting organizational change and flexible individualization.

In 2013 professional activity of individuals, organization's leaders, who were perceived by local communities as successful leaders of cultural education were researched in selected urban communities of all 16 regions of Poland. They were representatives of three parts of the broad cultural activities sector: public, private and civil organizations located in 48 Polish cities of different size. The paper will use some outcomes of that nationwide research on competencies and organizational conditions of most talented leaders in Polish culture sector, that performs in the realm of education and influence local communities members in the country that is experiencing now 25 years of a dynamic economic, social and cultural transformation, since a fall of communist regime.

There are several subjects of reflection that are to be raised in presented paper:

- (1) Structure, essence and quality of a current organizational frameworks for the arts and culture, institutions, NGO's and enterprises that are core playgrounds for flexible individualization of taste in its all possible variations.
- (2) Relevance of harmonious synergy of organizations from different sectors: public, private or civil, where the prize are customers or perceivers attention, appreciation and loyalty, and finally the mandate to manage clients memory and cultural identity.
- (3) Roles and competencies of cultural education organizations leaders impacting cities they are active in, supporting change.
- (4) An urgency for more hybrid and flexible organizational forms for processing cultural education, corresponding with clients growing expectations for more multifunctional, multimedia and multi-sensual experiences.
- (5) Aggressive interventions of marketing and branding players, who are to take over aesthetic expressions an perceptions, when employing massive cultural and art content to sell products and services, that have nothing to do with cultural artifacts and creative processes.

This last issue is an example of a further possible implication for much more popular audiences, than arts sector itself. Consideration of the present and possible role of cultural education organizations and an emerging issue of flexible individualizations of tastes, leads us into unavoidable dilemma expressed by Chris Bilton, who in his chapter *Aesthetics in Marketing* (Bilton, 2007) raised a crucial question: are we taking part in a mass process of “corporate takeover of cultural expression, or the aestheticization of commerce”? Is that a future direction taken by global corporations: from artistic processes to cultural branding, from artwork to iconic brand? Are culture institutions going to take active part in this game. Will they creatively defend the side of arts and disinterested expression of taste, or defenseless, join creative consumption mainstream? Cultural branding is challenging meaning and practice of audience development as we see the growth of a role of aesthetically informed branding in shaping our cultural identities and our standards of aesthetic values, claims and decisions (Holt, 2004; Puntoni *et al.*, 2010; Schroeder, 2009). The quotation from classical author C.S. Lewis (1960) sounds familiar once again:

The human mind is generally far more eager to praise and dispraise than to describe and define. It wants to make every distinction a distinction of value; hence those fatal critics who can never point out the different quality of two poets without putting them in an order of preference as if they were candidates for a prize.

The structure of the paper will follow the logical sequence from an analysis of the organizational landscape of cultural sector as framed in a cultural policy studies, to particular issues of cultural education organizations as central spots of cultural public spheres, where flexible individualizations of taste are negotiated. This subject will be studied with a use of a research case of cultural education leaders from organizations working with urban communities in Poland. The paper will terminate with an epilogue bringing the reader the conceptualization to the central issues of flexible individualization of taste seen from the neighboring fields of aesthetics and marketing studies.

### **Organizational landscape of cultural sector**

Considering the role of organizations as impacting cultural public sphere or striving for culture as a public interest, we need a content that is far more complex and multidisciplinary than rather instrumental and political talk on cultural and creative industries. At one level we need to get into art practices and cultural activists work, at another level, this is a central problem for the relatively recent field of study that is cultural policy research. The range of topics covered by this domain is as broad and unlimited as meanings of the word “culture” itself, expanding raw tri-partite division drawn between “culture” as a form of Platonic ideal, “culture” as recorded experience, and “culture” as “a way of life” (Williams, 1958; Gray, 2009). The problem of definition, causality, measurement and attribution of culture are impacting corresponding dimensions in re-thinking and proper use of cultural policy as a concept and practice of research (Gray, 2009; Bennett, 1998). Nevertheless there is no doubt that for now, there is no better perspective of studying cultural organizations and cultural management in dynamic process of change, than a meta-level of thought offered within recent cultural policy studies. Organizational landscape of cultural sector as seen from that perspective is dealing with such a wide range of subjects and approaches as: audience development, cultural city planning, arts policies, managing heritage and memory, cultural diplomacy, culture and development, cultural education, cultural industry, cultural economy, intercultural dialogue, language policies, intellectual

property, cultural marketing, music or film industries, book market, theater policies, arts and health, social impact of the arts, culture and democracy, measuring quality in the arts, cultural intelligence, culture and sustainability, culture and technology, creativity policies, censorship, media policies, culture and value, community and cultural development, citizens participation, cultural infrastructure, local identity, minorities policies, arts education, etc. The list is expanding as cultural practices and people's "way of life" getting more and more diverse, flexible and individualized.

Culture reflected only from sectorial, economic perspective, could direct us to the limited, narrow and unfair understanding of culture as an industry or service, or another market with clients, products, offers, employees activities and employers competitive actions. Culture seen from the side of purely public administration and public, social service approach would also lead us to wrong and far too claustrophobic perspective of solely non-for-profit, mission-driven institutions, offering culture as a tool of social change and at the end, political influence. Culture perceived in cultural policy debate is far more open-ended. After all, we are thinking of a cultural sector as a specific service with an aesthetic value-oriented content and clients, that are co-creating cultural public sphere (McGuigan, 2010).

Cultural activity is seen in cultural policy studies, not only as a system of provisions, resources, regulations, institutions and distributive mechanisms, but also as a market, a privileged platform of identity representation, a battlefield of ideas, styles and interests, and finally, a laboratory of collective imagination (Klaic, 2007). This is even more clear when the object of study interest is a cultural organizations' landscapes of countries in transition, taking as an example transformation of cultural sector organizational landscape in post-communist countries in Europe (Inkei, 2009; Ratzenböck *et al.*, 2012). Three dimensions of cultural value as understood by John Holden: intrinsic, instrumental and institutional (Holden, 2006) get much more relevance there.

#### *Breaking through Bermuda triangle of culture*

Making things more transparent when describing organizational landscape for culture, we could use Dragan Klaic model of what he informally called "Bermuda triangle of culture": where a dominant position takes: cultural industry or global oligopolies, covering mass production of cultural goods, with their devices, platforms and formats, copyrights maximization of profit, power and appeal; than contemporary creativity, fragile and nomadic art activities; and finally cultural heritage, vulnerable and endangered (Klaic, 2007). All components of the triangle are generating content, styles, conventions and accompanying values, and all deal with cultural competencies, literacy, knowledge, taste and inter-generational transmission of values as a core and basic fundament. The only integrator of the triangle parts is cultural education, let us say, located in a triangle centre to communicate dispersed interest and separate vocabularies of three parties of the sector. Practice of recent decade shows how essential and missing element cultural education is, as a gate for crowds to all three triangle ends.

Cultural organizations of twenty-first century have to be considered in relation to consequences of globalization and digitalisation processes. More or less unlimited transmission of cultural content, mobility of cultural objects, artifacts, texts, meanings, symbols, narrations, and interpretations involved a crowded field of new players, occupying new spaces, inviting new public. And the whole market here is not only about money, but also more precious currencies, like time, that consumers are eager to invest in particular cultural offers.

*Organizational metaphor of cultural policy as a three legged table*

Cultural policy is not anymore a domain of public administration, governments and municipalities, it rather brings into mind a table with three legs. One leg is not enough to keep the balance. Today we have at least three types of players influencing shape and function of cultural organizations and policies for cultural expression: public sector with cityhalls, ministries, public institutions, stressing public interest in culture; private sector, including both cultural industry, and small initiatives of individuals like artists, entrepreneurs and cultural activists with no institutional badge; civic sector, consisting of non-governmental organizations, bottom-up initiatives, communities of interest with non-for-profit approach. The table metaphor is just a raw model, every national or local community table is different, due to history or present performance "in situ". Cultural policy tables have legs of different length and shape, most tables in post-communist countries have a huge and long public leg, and much shorter and thinner private and civic leggs. Such a table does not bring a prospect of sustainable growth. Some nordic tables keeps harmony in legs size and length. Than the table position is secure and functional. Keeping table metaphor for a short moment, not only length or size of the leg and the balance between three legs is important. What is essential is the shape of the leg, that is sometimes curved, deviating, looking public but turning its shape into proximity with private interest, or private player disguised as a not-for-profit civil organization and consuming public grant to pay his bills. There are also private enterprises having a strong ethical concerns and working for public interest without profit. These deviations are not only pathologies, but also a main drive for an organizational change.

*Cross-sectoral synergy of cultural organizations*

Three-sectorial model brings a very new quality to organizational relations. All three scenarios of:

- (1) competition;
- (2) cooperation; and
- (3) a synergy are exciting, with a last type of relations as a most promising for constructive organizational change.

Both differences and potentials for synergetic complementary actions are well illustrated by Milena Dragičević-Šešić (2006). The table brings some stereotyped accents, positions, motivations, values, goals or tools for each sector of cultural activity. It also shows what is weak and strong point of each sector, that should inspire when looking for a possible potential for synergies (Table I).

*Cities as a fore playgrounds for cultural organizations*

The cultural turn in public policies started in urban policies contexts. Culture was re-thought, and taken into optimistic considerations as an integrating perspective to support human development and sustainability in urban communities, to improve economic growth and livable environment, to help in public-private partnership, re-humanize urban planning failures, to improve quality of life, participation, democracy, to increase intercultural sensitivity and dialogue with tools from art education or community arts initiatives (Bianchini, 1996; Bloomfield and Bianchini, 2004). For city administrators cultural activity is a tool for enhancement of civil society, or an instrument for city promotion or city branding. This instrumental approach to

**Table I.**

Three sectors organizations oversimplified characteristic including: interests, values, effects, threads crucial for cultural policy making

Public	Private	Civil
Theatres, operas, philharmonies, museums, libraries, (art)schools, cultural houses or centres, etc.	Music agencies, producers, publishers, art studios, film studios, marchands, dance schools, media, etc.	NGO's, associations, foundations, non-formal communities, groups, clubs, local or virtual initiatives, projects, etc.
Traditional values	Modern values	Social values
Academic knowledge	Pragmatic knowledge	Collective memory
Identity building	Risk orientation	Inclusivity
Appreciations of old elites	Elitism and leadership – narrow interest	Equality – wide social interest
Institution building	Organization building	Movements
Past	Future	Present
Professionalism in cultural sphere	Professional standards in management	New standards in methods of operating
High standard routine	Innovation	Social experiment
Oeuvre/artwork	Product	Process
Culture as value <i>per se</i>	Culture as economic investment and job provider	Culture as a tool of a social change
Sclerotization	Consumerism, commercialization	Propagandism
Bureaucratization	Oversimplification	Amateurism (diminishing of professional standards)

**Source:** Dragičević-Šešić (2006)

culture resonates in organizational cultures of public institutions, that aim is to use art and cultural activism to resolve problems that are going far beyond aesthetics and audiences creative response (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008). The example of such a concept is 2005 *Eurocult 21* project report with its final Four E's as Rationales in Urban Cultural Policy, that are: enlightenment, consisting of such a categories as: insight, knowledge, education, reflection; then economic impact, including image, tourism, recruitment, job-creation; entertainment with four elements mentioned: leisure, play, fun, recreation; and finally empowerment with identity, inclusion, cohesion, diversity as a keywords.

### *Cultural balance*

Hopefully, there is a good solution to overcome a purely instrumental meaning of culture, without exclusion of such a concepts as recalled Four E's. We could think seriously of such a approach only to the extant, that it could be a programme pillar for a real synergetic existance of cultural organizations of different types. Organizations in culture sector are facing constant change, that needs a very open-ended definition of culture as a human activity within society in the form of: expression, entrepreneurship, creativity directed from individual satisfactions to responsibility for social development and quality of cultural public sphere. Following public interest in culture means keeping cultural balance as an ideal state of cultural policy, when progressive is not vs but continuous with conservative, critical with traditional, left with right, social continuous with commercial, aesthetic with ethic (Berger, 2005). The systemic responsibility of public cultural sector and its organizations is to keep attention and facilitate access and balance. Not eliminating, or taking for granted, frictions of polarized tastes and approaches in cultural expression. Cultural organizations should keep this balance that is probably, the only guarantee of culture development.

*Organizational framework of cultural education – soft underbelly of cultural sector*

Looking for best insights into how culture organizations are impacting, shaping, stimulating taste individualizations, choices and preferences of a certain flexible quality, we have to analyze organizations of a very specific interest that are a kind of soft underbelly of cultural sector: cultural education organizations, that suppose to facilitate access to arts, support amateurs in the art, educate by giving access and basic creative or critical skills to general public in local communities.

Ralf Dahrendorf (1990) introduced a nice picture of three clocks metaphor when considering change of a size of a transformation of whole nation or society, writing that:

It will take six months to reform the political systems, six years to change the economic systems, and sixty years to effect a revolution on the people's hearts and minds.

Last Dahrendorf's clock is a most demanding and proper field of cultural sector activities. Cultural education players are the most predestined and highlighted organizational actors of social and spiritual change, where talent, creative process, aesthetic choice are the keywords, where cultural pessimism or optimism are key, culture-driven attitudes (Bennett, 2001; Bennett, 2015).

One could remind of some spectacular projects of social change leaders who were or grew to become successful culture educators, changing lives of cities young inhabitants. Let us recall a famous *El Sistema* project in Caracas, and an individual leadership role of Jose Antonio Abreu, who using cultural education tools and music instruments, changed life conditions and future prospects of thousands of Venezuelan kids, inhabitants of poorest city neighbourhoods – the story presented in a film from 2008 by Smaczny and Stodtmeier. We can also think of another case shot in 2004 by Grube and Lansch in documentary film *Rhythm is it!* an educational, social change project done for young German capital city inhabitants with Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra led by Sir Simon Rattle, done in cooperation with British choreographers: Royston Maldoom and Susannah Broughton. This is the power of taste that is changing both individuals and organizations. Here we are entering the deepest meaning of both change and education processes, that involves serious individualization of taste, as expressed by Antoine Saint-Exupéry de (posth. 1952) in his unfinished work *The Wisdom of the Sands*:

You can live only by that which you transform and whereby, since you barter yourself for it, you die a little day, by day [...]. But those whose appetites you set out to glut, for what can they barter themselves? [...] Giving is not enough. You need first to build up him who receives.

**Research case of cultural education organizations in Poland**

The purpose of the research done in Poland in 2013 and coordinated by the author of this paper, was to investigate professional activity of individuals recognized, perceived by local community members as leaders in effective, visible, substantial, vibrant cultural education for local social environment. The people in spotlight of the project were individuals working within the structure of public institution, civic organization, and private enterprise in cities of three types of size. Researchers were investigating quality of cultural education leaders interaction with their "clients", and they were looking for an appropriate set of leaders competencies in cultural education practice. The qualitative study was oriented to find existing organizational models of those who are impacting their cities, when bringing an offer of an individualized content for local inhabitants cultural identities and taste. The main body of research was done with 48 deep interviews with leaders and 48 observations of their working days



“in situ”, 500 questionnaires addressed to culture and education professionals in researched towns and 18 focus interviews with opinion leaders and experts in capital towns of all 16 regions of Poland.

*Research findings and discussion*

There is a profile of a successful cultural education organizations leader that is emerging from this research. It is a type of a person who is: experienced; involved; passionate; a project entrepreneur; modest but selfconfident; open to new experiences, initiatives and people; and communicative. Those recognized as such, selected in a method of a narrowing corridor, pointed by local communities opinion leaders were representing mostly: NGO's, cultural centers, theatres, museums, and festivals.

A set of cultural education organizations leaders competencies revealed in the research is divided into four general categories:

- (1) managerial;
- (2) communication;
- (3) sensemaking; and
- (4) entrepreneurial.

The managerial component shows leaders features circulating around talent for inspiring, stimulating, and leading team formation and performance. Same category contains an issue of transparent and effective power distribution, effective involvement of external partners, proper context recognition, persistence, patience, autonomy, and passion. Communication competencies pointed in the research outcomes deals with: empathy and dialogue, meeting and talking with people, using recent current communication, social tools.

Less obvious category, highlighted in respondents answers is the one of sensemaking, that involves: managing values in cultural organization, providing values to clients, including narrations for clients self-development, support for individual amateur talents and young art professionals. Another description of this category is to provide content and sense to clients passions, including “managing” clients memory and sense of identity. This is one of the key responsibilities of cultural education orgniazation, and a strong, trustworthy leader, when facing dilemmas in programming content for public perceptions. When deciding to follow arts canons or demographic and socio-economic changes, or moderating ethnic minorities – majorities relations within urban communities. There is a crucial question in focus, how organizations are managing or react to the problem of content or approach clash that originates in a conflict of multiple individualized taste. Are any polite standards of conflict resolution satisfactory to keep high level of arts quality and freedom of expression? The decision, or a choice of collective consideration is made by the organization leader.

Last category cristalized in the research is the one of entrepreneurship, connotated in respondents answers with inventor-like behaviour, a talent for experimenting with multidisciplinary approach, or an alternative way in managerial performance (Poprawski, 2009). The essence of this quality in cultural education leader set of competencies is purely change management in organization and through organization. The last category is directly linked with such a qualities of the leaders behaviour as: transparency, ability to build permanent trust in managed team, and finally a success in powergames with cityhalls, governments and other bureaucracies influencing organizations performance. Another talent mentioned in this last and most busy

category is constant ability of the leader to involve and orchestrate creative content and people “in situ”, for organizations goals and projects.

There is a clear correlation of a last category of leaders competencies with strong respondents concerns that there is an essential demand for new cultural education organisations, taking alternative turns and players who propose non-conventional ideas for the content, method and organizational form of cultural education. There is a crucial need for more hybrid, alternative and flexible organizational forms for processing cultural education, based on cross-sectoral synergy, or close cooperation of existing organizations. Only such organisation will be able to impact local citizens, having effect on a quality of cultural literacy, civil participation, social dialogue and local community trust. One of such a type is a public library, that thanks to investments from national and international programmes are today much more than reading room. It plays a different, rotating roles: inviting civil organizations activities, being sometimes cultural and social oasis in a busy shopping center, providing access to the performing or visual arts, or another day becoming real space for art education or social networking, keeping books and aesthetic artifacts as a background.

The research outcomes of presented study, confirm that there are at least four urgent domains for change in cultural education organizations:

- (1) more transparency in actions and motives;
- (2) crossing arts disciplines and mixing media of art;
- (3) including, integrating new groups of “clients”; and
- (4) cultural intelligence services, employed to research individual demands and potentials of clients, and in reciprocity influencing their individualized tastes.

One of the most intriguing moments in Woody Allen’s comedies, is the scene with Robin Williams in “Deconstructing Harry” of 1997, playing a role of an actor who is physically losing his sharpness in the picture. The background, and other people are sharp, but no lens can get a proper focus of actors body. He is blurred or soft, and frustrated as not being ready to work anymore, losing his physicality, visibility, expression, self-confidence, and identity. Looking through findings of a presented research one can have an impression that this could be a good metaphor for art and cultural education institutions that are perceived by majority of their potential clients as blurred, soft, not located in a right communication channel. One of the cardinal sins of cultural education institutions is not expressing clear message of their sense of existence and offers. This is contrasting with a full potential of a content that this organizations are offering, mostly of a highest intellectual and aesthetic quality. This is the case of an attractive product packed in a wrong, not interesting way. Every lady or gentlemen shopping monday morning can explain exactly the content, essence, and meaning of such a formats as talkshow or talentshow. Only few knows where local cultural education institution is located, who is waiting there for them with talent enablement long-life learning programme, or what attractive creative activities are adjusted to individuals like him or her. Cultural education organization will not bring back their sharp edges in public perception, unless it re-think and rearrange its mission, function, performance quality, and a general perception of what creative and developmental content it provides. It has to refresh methods of communication with existing and future clients to secure its positions in local community of curious individuals. People have to know why they should trust cultural education organisations and invest their valuable time in cultural practice. Visibility of cultural

institutions in a highly competitive environment of creative industries is a first task to be considered by organizations open for change.

### **Epilogue: flexible individualization or the power of taste**

#### *Aesthetic turn in marketing*

Considering the role of cultural education organizations in processes of flexible individualizations of taste, we need a fast look into the power of taste used within recent trends in marketing theory and practice. Classical author in marketing research, Sidney J. Levy, already in 1963 noted an unusual definition of marketing as a process of providing customers with parts of a potential mosaic from which they, as artists of their own life styles, can pick and choose to develop the composition that for the time may seem the best (Levy, 1963). This concern could be seen after 50 years, as a one of the key definitions of this field of study and practice with more and more advanced involvement of specialists from cultural studies and other humanities including semiotics, aesthetics, narratology, performance studies. Chris Bilton brings a new, critical component of marketing use of cultural expressions writing that:

Marketing provides “open texts” which allow space for viewers, readers, and listeners to negotiate their own personal readings, even if (especially if) these readings seems to “deviate” from or “resist” the encoded message of the advertiser (Bilton, 2007).

Flexible individualisation of taste gets into new dimension with the help of branding experts who are selling a brand with an open-ended approaches, by inviting brands perceivers to construct their own messages. Marketing as such become than, an aesthetic project in its own right, with advertisers using the full armoury of cultural artifacts, from festivals and art galleries to short films and art education projects. Finally, marketers and consumers have turned consumption into a creative act, with its processes of art production, performance, individual perception and public, social resonance. Brand has become an aesthetic experience adjusted, calibrated to fit into flexible and not permanent individualizations of taste, invading the land previously occupied only by artists, taking a move of a kind of corporate takeover of cultural, artistic, and aesthetic expression.

Cultural education intellectuals and practitioners should take seriously this diagnosis, that indicates exactly where today the spotlight of consumers attention is directed to. It is the cultural expression, the former exclusive domain of cultural sector people, who for many centuries provided the content, and interpretation of its meaning, managed access, and judgements of individual tastes. Now it is much better packed and adjusted to demands of flexibility. But we need much more to bring real freedom to peoples lives, we need critical competence, and organizations that will teach it and provide a disinterested field of practice to train critical thinking, a gate to honest expression. Cultural branding is in its mass of examples a fake art, a substitute and a kind of distractor in our real aesthetic experience, we used to have before drastic aestheticization of commercial communication, that we are engaged in, today.

#### *The power of taste*

The relevance and urgency of cultural education, critical thinking approach and the power of taste applied in institutions, organizations, and societies, is expressed in one of the most insightfull and valuable books of early twenty-first century, written by Stanford academic, art historian, philosopher and musicologists, Karol Berger. In “A Theory of Art” he intruige us with several key questions that are shaping our

attitude to taste and moral decisions. He pointed that: “the refusal to discriminate among the voices one hears, to compare and evaluate them is not only a practical impossibility, it is also wrong for deeper reasons. It is a form of aestheticist detachment whereby we allow the voices that we hear to entertain us, but not to challenge our most fundamental assumptions and thereby to change our lives”. Berger argues that aesthetic values are not identical with moral or political ones but they are continuous with them. The making of distinctions when evaluating art supports and trains the habit of making moral distinctions. The fact reminded here is that an artworld consists of fictive representations, and one of the unique uses of such representations is to “allow us to compare the actual world with the world as it might be and thus to make us consider ways we have not yet taken. Art produces experiences of actions and passions that might be subject of justification and thus offers examples for how we might, should, or should not, act and feel. Ultimately it helps us to find out who we are and how we should cope” (Berger, 2005).

The era of a passive, monumental and exclusive cultural institution is gone. Cultural policy makers and cities leaders are waking up and seeing that cultural branding is aggressively challenging meaning and practice of audience development, impacting cultural sector itself. We all see the growth of a role of aesthetically informed corporate practices that are shaping our standards of aesthetic values, claims, and decisions. Influencing individual taste and offering a “mosaic” (Levy, 1963) for cultural identity, they are also impacting the processes of citizens’ formation and our sense of public interest. Cultural educators have a serious homework to be done. Following and responding to individualized demands of taste and identity they have to strategically change their organizations.

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