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THE ART OF VALUING

between evident and evidence-based

Opening speeches

IETM Satellite in Brussels, 17-18 February 2015



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The art of valuing: between evident and evidence-based

DAY 1

Opening speeches of prof. Pascal Gielen, University of Groningen (the Netherlands) and Mieke Van Hecke, former Flemish Secretariat of Catholic Education (Belgium)

*IETM Satellite Meeting in Brussels,
17-18 February 2015,
Flemish-Dutch House deBuren*

IETM and **Flanders Arts Institute** gathered representatives of Ministries of Culture and Art Councils from Europe and beyond for a two days **Satellite Meeting in Brussels on 17 and 18 February 2015**. The meeting focused on the analysis of different **models for measuring and demonstrating the values of culture and its impacts on societies**, as well as the role such measurements play in informing **national cultural policies**.

The first day started off from the very broad perspective of what is the role of arts and culture in society. In his opening speech, Pascal Gielen, Sociology Professor of Arts and Culture at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, presented the main insights of his research report "The Value of Culture". Following to that, Abigail Gllmore (Manchester University), Péter Inkei (Budapest Observatory), Mercedes Giovinazzo (Interarts Foundation) shared their views and opinions on the topic during the panel discussion, moderated by Diane Dodd (IFACCA).

The second day delved into details of how art is being evaluated and by what indicators it is being measured. Wendy Were (Australia Council for the Arts), Laurien Saraber (FPK - The Netherlands), and Madeline Ritter (Tanzfonds Erbe

- Germany) presented models for evaluating and monitoring arts practises from their respective countries, which were later discussed by all participants.

Nan van Houte, IETM Secretary General, opened the meeting by reminding the participants how the evaluation discourse evolved. For the last decade the term "measurement" has entered and even dominated discussions in arts and cultural policies. We have measured the number of audiences, we have counted the representation of lower income groups, cultural minorities groups; we have calculated the economic impact of the cultural industry.

According to a Dutch expression, "Measuring equals knowledge". The current Satellite Meeting is going to explore whether the yardstick is indeed the best instrument to deepen our knowledge on culture and the arts and if we use the right indicators and the right methodologies to get to know the right impact of our cultural life.

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Keynote speech No Culture, no Europe



Pascal Gielen (keynote speaker) is director of the [Research Center for Arts in Society](#) at the Groningen University (the Netherlands); he wrote several books on contemporary arts, cultural heritage and cultural politics with a focus on the institutional contexts of the arts.

Pascal Gielen's keynote speech evolved around core concepts of his recent research report "The Value of Culture" (some sort of inventory of all kind of evidence-based research done throughout Europe) and the soon to come "No Culture, no Europe" book (an objective-subjective debate on the value of culture related to politics) and focused on two main topics: what is culture and how to measure its value.

You may watch the whole keynote speech [here](#). (28:30:00 – 1:01:00)

The first thing with which to start any research on culture is to define what culture is.

So, what is culture?

A basic anthropological definition of culture is a "way of life": daily routines, habits etc. that are given from birth and introduced by parents, education etc.

Giving meaning to human existence in society: this function of culture is regarded by Pascal Gielen as the main important one. A broad anthropological concept should highlight three main functions of culture:

- **Socialization** (enculturation) – "bringing people in a social order", social integration, which starts from the birth of the individual, in the family, or later on, as it happens with migrants: they learn the language, the habits and the attitude of the adopting new culture. *Culture teaches people existing ways of acting and being within a particular society and in doing so it lends meaning to people's lives in that society*¹.
- **Qualification** – another important function of culture. This is the process of comparison (for ex.: this person dances better than the other), canonisation (saying what is the best), hierarchisation. *Education plays an important role in the process of qualification. Qualification defines in relatively measurable terms the skills, knowledge and competencies that are required to be part of a culture or at least be able to function reasonably well in it.* Qualification is also the process of prioritising what to subsidise, in the case of a programme board or a jury reviewing artists' applications.
- **Subjectification** – touching people in their existence. This is what the arts are all about: giving a sudden twist, a new perspective towards the self and the world around. The subjectification process is also applicable in cultural heritage projects: people can view their history in a different perspective through a different approach in presenting their cultural heritage. Subjectification, by contrast, does not refer to integrating individuals into an existing or dominant cultural order, but on teaching them to take up a self-reliant, independent or autonomous – sometimes critical – position within that order. A process that might refer not only to the individual but to groups as well.
- **Reflective design of what 'living together' is:** reflecting on socialisation, qualification, subjectification but also reflecting on how we live together, what is society about, how can we signify the society; what are the important values we want or don't want in this society.
- **Measure and dismeasure of culture** (dialectical). To 'dismasure' means to bring in another measure, a new thing in the way we were used to measure things. Measure and dismeasure that culture brings in our life are in dialectical equilibrium and this is a very important function of culture (and the arts, cultural heritage, etc.)².

² In "Culture - The Substructure for a European Common" Pascal Gielen and his colleagues delve further in the subject of dismeasure by introducing art as its trigger. Art introduces dismeasure in culture as well: "It is this debate that has become an important aspect of the artistic domain ever since the modern age: to show that there can always be different views, opinions and interpretations and, very rarely, even different ways of living together." (p. 16). The concepts of the avant-garde, in a historical perspective and of creativity on functional level are reviewed as arguments in this connection.

'In a nutshell, what culture is doing is at one side, giving people measures to measure their life, and on the other side, especially the arts but also cultural heritage field, is trying to dismeasure this world.'

¹ Gielen, Pascal et al. Culture. The Substructure for a European Common. summary in English. 2015, p.8

What is the value of culture?

(inventory of researches and assumptions of value)

By making an inventory of research practices of how the value of culture is being measured all over Europe, Pascal Gielen and his colleagues were able to distinguish five thematic areas in which evidence for the effectiveness of culture was being presented: cognitive effects, health effects, experiential values, economic effects and social effects.

- **Cognitive effects** – what is the effect learning music has on your skills in mathematics, for example? There are several researches that provide for some evidence that culture and especially music has positive effect on cognitive processes.
- **Health** – research on participation / practicing the arts has shown positive effects on mental and physical health and an increase of the sense of well-being in general. There is a research providing evidence that people who read books recover from illness more quickly than those who don't read.
- **Experiential value** is the value that participants of art, culture and cultural heritage ascribe to visiting the theatre, museum, library or gallery, to reading books and so on. Besides the social advantage of meeting people, of experiencing arts together, people seem to recognise and prize that culture and the arts give them the opportunity of being surprised or moved, or to gain knowledge and insight; in other words, of bringing *dismeasure* in their lives.
- **Economic effects** concern the impact of the culture sector on the economy and is measured in several ways: size of the direct employment within the cultural or creative sector (jobs); growth in cultural cluster businesses; additional spending of culture events visitors; influence on the image of neighbourhoods or cities, etc.
- **Social effects** – there is evidence that participation in culture is in a certain way improving social cohesion and social integration. Social cohesion can be defined in two ways: one is *bridging* (getting open for the Other), and the second is *binding* (looking at yourself and your own group). There is evidence that people confronted with art that is new, strange, that brings some kind of *dismeasure* in their lives, are likely to experience improved bridging social cohesion, i.e. to get more open to the new and to the different. On the contrary, art confirming the already established standards in society does not have such effect.

‘There is evidence that people confronted with art that brings some kind of dismeasure in their lives, are likely to experience improved bridging social cohesion.’

What happens with ‘value’ in evidence-based policy?

Overall, the results of empirical research on the values of culture support the hypothesis that the experience of art, culture and heritage contributes to realizing socially sought effects such as cognitive development, health, social cohesion, technological and economic development. Yet the causality of this relationship is sometimes questionable and in reality, the effects cannot so easily be separated from one another.

The important questions that evolve from these limitations are: what is the effect of the research of the effects of culture? What are the restrictions of what is measurable and what is not? And furthermore how does this research change the notion of the value of culture?

Empirical research: causality-doxa.

When we focus on empirical research, in pursue of empirical evidence we would inevitably impose certain restrictions to our object. First of all, there is ‘the causality doxa’ (common belief in causality), i.e. the assumption that there is an agent which causes a certain effect.

In the field of culture, this means the research is bounded to a certain event: a theatrical performance, an exhibition, a festival, etc. The researcher measures before the event takes place and after the event.

Therefore, this kind of research always bears **a restriction in time, which is in contradiction with the essence of culture:** habits on the long term, conservation of habits. A research that takes into consideration the longevity of cultural phenomena (i.e. longitudinal studies) would be rather expensive and it is doubtful whether any government would pay for a research for 20-30 years.

The isolation of an event, which is the usual case with researches, imposes **de-contextualizing of culture**. Measuring before the event and immediately after the event can capture certain immediate effect but what actually matters about culture is the embedding of patterns over a lengthy period of time. Indeed, the measurement is done but it cannot capture the experience in the long run.

Due to the restriction in time and the isolation of the event, in almost all researches **the value of culture immediately becomes systematic function, it is reduced to a function**: what does [the piece of culture] do, while value is actually something that matters for a long period of time. This is a kind of quantification through reduction of those values. Using analogy with the words of the cultural philosopher René Boomkens, it is like reducing sex to reproduction; it is like counting only the kids while omitting the whole spectrum of feelings, trust, pleasure, etc., associated with sex.

‘There is no evidence for evidence-based research and we need to study culture as a sense-making process.’

Furthermore, all the researches are actually not about the value of culture but about what people say the value of culture is. A process of **reduction of values to cognitive/ (self)-reflexive competences** is taking place.

Therefore, to measure is not to know.

To measure is a specific way of giving sense to culture, which produces culture of its own. The course of action towards evidence-based policy and evidence research gives completely new specific meaning to culture and produces its own new values of culture. Michael Power in *The Audit Society* (1999) asserts that the act of auditing brings new culture to the organisations where it is implemented and

similar observations are made in the system of education. Bearing in mind all the limitations, we might say that there is no evidence for the evidence-based research of culture when comparing to other research fields.

What is the meaning of culture?

How can you measure sense, how can you study the sense-making process of culture?

Pascal Gielen referred to the coming book *No Culture, No Europe* where he and his colleagues have tried to explain that the **European crisis is in fact a crisis of sense-making, it is a crisis of culture**. They regard the political crisis, the lack of trust for the governments and EU institutions as a cultural crisis, since trust is a cultural

value. Democracy is a cultural value as well so it might be argued that policy is indeed culture. In the field of economics the general distrust between Member States might be regarded as a result of the crisis in culture. Ideology, for example, neoliberalism and the so-called Rhineland economy, are both sense-making processes and therefore are culture and create culture of their own.

Photo on screen: BBC©



Giving an example of the sense-making aspects of culture³, Pascal Gielen reminded the audience of the 2011 London riots. He argued that not having place in society and not having an option to subjectify oneself through participation in culture, especially for groups of people, would probably lead to some kind of rupture: be it an artistic act of breaking the rules or, like the case of London Looting 2010, a riot. Politicians like David Cameron⁴ and the mainstream

media called the loots “senseless violence” and immediately used ‘the moral finger’ to condemn this senseless violence and to demand for more morality, values taught to children nowadays and so on. Not making sense of something does not mean it has no sense. Many philosophers, researchers, etc., Zygmunt Bauman for example, stood up and say there is a meaning of this violence. First of all, they pointed out the economic crisis and then they stressed on social and economic inequality as an explanation for this kind of violence⁵.

³ *The assumption that art brings dismeasure and opens up new common spaces for new culture is reviewed in detail in “Culture - The Substructure for a European Common” (pp. 14-21).*

⁴ *The definition David Cameron actually used was “mindless violence” which is a bit different but in the media and within the speeches of other politicians, but especially in the public discourse that attributed sense to the riots, the term “senseless violence” was well circulating.*

⁵ *“These are not hunger or bread riots. These are riots of defective and disqualified consumers.”, thus Bauman’s (2011) article begins.*

‘Culture is a kind of reservoir of sense that can give you the possibility to sign yourself, to give significance to yourself.’

It is important to point out that economy and the growing gap between the rich and the poor is not the only explanation to this violence. There is an established solemn trend that some of the richest societies - in terms of GDP - register the highest suicide rates as well. Apparently, there is no direct link between economic welfare and human well-being. We may then presume there is something missing in the explanations to the riots and the violence provided so far and that the missing link is the notion of culture. Culture is a kind of reservoir of sense that can give you the possibility to sign yourself, to signify, to give significance to yourself. Therefore the investment in culture is so important. Culture provides meaning to people, gives them signification.

Furthermore, what art is doing is to put in the reservoir of culture even more ways to signify. By introducing “dismeasure”, art creates new meaning, new signs.

Another issue with the London looters is the feeling of not being recognised by / not finding their place in the mainstream society. Culture and cultural policy could contribute with a solution to this problem by providing and making new recognition and signification regimes possible for new groups and individuals.

It seems that culture and cultural inconsistencies are more serious reasons for the riots than the economic ones. We might therefore say, reverting Marx upside down, that **not economy, but culture is the substructure of society. Culture is the fundament that gives signification to our lives and society but also to economy and politics.**

Politics and culture: the Idea of ‘Commonism’

An interesting fact to mention is that both communism (Marxist theory) and neoliberalism consider economy to be the substructure of society. In *No Culture No Europe* Pascal Gielen and his colleagues try to argue that the current model should be inversed and that culture is the basis of society. If we want to build a “strong Europe” it should be based on a kind of commons.

Common culture would serve as a steady substructure of society beyond Rhineland or the neoliberal models.

“Common culture” does not mean a shared culture but rather a field that encompasses diversity and allows people to meet, to argue, take positions, debate identities and cultures. Such a common place is of great importance for building Europe’s cultural coherence. Culture feeds dissent through the processes of subjectification and commons defines the dynamics of culture.

Therefore, the potential of culture to build such commons and to enhance social cohesion is to be regarded as the main and fundamental reason for investments in culture.

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‘We need to convert the economical thinking into cultural thinking.’

Learning to learn, learning to do, learning to live together, learning to be



Mieke Van Hecke is a former MP in the Flemish Parliament, a member of the Committees for Culture, Media and Sport and an alternate member of the Committee on Education, training and science policy. From 2004 till 2014 she was Director General of the Flemish Secretariat for Catholic Education (VSKO), and one of the most influential persons in the Flanders' education policy.

You may watch the full speech of Mieke Van Hecke [here](#) (1:01:55-1:09:42)

Due to its specific target group, children and youth, education is extremely sensitive to changes in society. The educational system is constantly being challenged to make room for new realities but also to review critically and even to stand against some social currents.

Learning to learn, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be⁶: these are the main tasks of education. While the first two, transfer of knowledge and teaching of skills, are immediate educational tasks, the second two, **learning to live together, and learning to be, lay in the intersection between education and the domain of culture in the broad sense.**

In "learning to live together" educational institutions become training grounds for preparing young people for a democratic, tolerant, and inclusive model of society. In "learning to be" the goal is to contribute

⁶ These are known as the *Four Pillars of Education* and are still in wide use in the UNESCO educational policies and programmes. As Mieke Van Hecke mentioned in her speech, they were formulated in the mid-1990ies in: Jaques Delors, 1996, *Learning: The Treasure Within, Report to UNESCO*, (highlights of the report: [here](#))

to the overall development of the person: from resilience, leadership skills, and creativity to the discovery of beauty, being open to the wonder and the quest of giving meaning to their own life. From her professional experience, Mieke Van Hecke shares the observation that certain social trends inhibit or even prevent the implementation of these two tasks.

First of all, a rather market- and **economy-based approach towards education** was undertaken in the last decades due to the preoccupation of the European Union with economics and to setting the goal on maximum economical achievement. In curricula, the stress was put on knowledge transfer and competitive skills development; only programs that could guarantee immediate usefulness were accepted. The personal development elements were reduced or excluded.

'The real richness of education is very often not measurable.'

The second impediment comes from what Mieke Van Hecke calls "**the number fetishism**". Only what can be measured and captured in objectively measurable criteria is accepted as an element of quality. Positive test results (for schools) or high scores on the publication index (for universities) guarantee positive assessment of the value of a program or an educational institution. We love lists and rankings so much, especially when we are at the top. The real richness of education however is very often not measurable.

The so-called neutral society which puts quantifiable prosperity as an absolute goal ignores the **carving** need of children, youth, and adults **for frameworks of meaning making**. "Learning to be" aims to take children and youth to **a tour through the major philosophical and religious frameworks**, to guide them to assess those frameworks with critical spirit, to invite and even challenge them to make their own choices, to identify differences and make them visible. When differences are no longer named, indifference prevails and **indifference leads to relativism and populism** because people allow themselves to uncritically be taken up by the delusion of the day.

"Learning to live together" and "learning to be" are not only tasks of education but are also a responsibility of the whole society. The conscience of society springs from engaged art and artists, and other bearers of culture. Therefore, education and culture should work together starting not tomorrow, but from today.