



Cultural Institutions in Transition
April 13-15, 2002
Salzburg Seminar

Purpose

Cultural institutions worldwide face new challenges to their financial sustainability, their organizational structures and their social relevance. This is particularly true in the European countries and the former Soviet Union. While the political and social changes in these regions differ greatly, the effects of economic liberalization in its many forms have fundamentally altered the context in which cultural organizations operate. With this context in mind, the Salzburg Seminar proposed that the J. Paul Getty Trust and the Seminar might jointly explore ideas for a program that could meet the needs of European cultural institutions. In April of 2002, with the support of the Getty Trust, the Salzburg Seminar convened a meeting of some 20 cultural managers from Western, Central and Eastern Europe and Russia, to brainstorm and discuss whether a program for managers of cultural institutions in transition could serve the needs of cultural organizations throughout these regions, and whether such a program would be consistent with the needs of developing leadership and governance models for these European institutions.

Preparations

A broad representation of museum and cultural professionals was invited to participate in the symposium, “Cultural Institutions in Transition,” held at the Schloss Leopoldskron on April 13-15, 2002. Participants ranged from leaders of cultural networks in the former Yugoslavia and the Netherlands to foundation directors from Russia and Hungary, as well as museum managers in Venezuela and Spain. The Seminar commissioned three background papers from experts in the given regions, which examined the political, social and fiscal contexts within which cultural institutions – broadly defined to include institutions across the museum and performing arts sectors – operate in the United Kingdom, in Central and Eastern Europe, and in Russia. Participants received these analyses beforehand, along with a few articles about current challenges in the cultural sectors of Italy, France, Austria and Germany. Sandy Nairne, Director of Programmes, Tate, chaired the meeting and acted as facilitator of the discussions.

Proceedings

The symposium began with short presentations by each of the three authors of the papers, followed by commentary by others from the relevant regions. As discussion progressed,

the conversation shifted from professional training options that might address leadership and governance skills, to a conversation about the role of cultural institutions in a broader social fabric; the part that cultural organizations are increasingly expected to play in enacting governmental agendas for access and social inclusion; the accountability of cultural leaders; exchanges and networks that need to be developed across the cultural sector and throughout Europe; and “putting culture on the agenda” of the debate about civil society. The concept of leadership as it was used in these conversations extended beyond the confines of a given institution or type of cultural organization to the rightful place of culture in European society, in partnership with the public and private sectors.

The discussion was impressive and lively, often passionate. Again and again participants from post-Communist countries stressed that the access to professional training and concepts – marketing, audience, financial and accounting methods, and project management – was by and large not lacking. While these training opportunities need expansion and adaptation to local contexts, the representatives from those regions expressed confidence that such developments will take root. What is lacking, however, is the means of rendering these newfound skills more effective in the transitional contexts of these regions, forging professional opportunities that can pierce the ossified bureaucratic structures still under the control of political appointees in European cultural sectors, pushing the notion of individual responsibility to all levels, encouraging implementation of new methods, and creating a regional and sectoral forum that would leverage the value of cultural connections and networks.

During the course of the first day’s discussion, the following needs and common issues were identified for the European cultural sector:

- Adjustment from crisis management to long-term planning and strategic thinking.
- Dialog that cuts across organizational types and cultural sectors, drawing on mutual exchange (not an exclusive “Western” approach or didactic mentality); capitalize on local and regional expertise.
- Communication skills that develop skills of diplomacy and advocacy at multiple levels: with colleagues; superiors; bureaucracies; other institutions.
- Broader social discourse about culture – why culture *matters* (to society, to business, to politicians, to state institutions); lobbying, advocacy, and public relations; articulate the case for culture at multiple levels.
- An “ecology of meaning” – what happens to meaning when the emphasis is on management? Develop a sense of shared values about culture (or, at least, a coherent sense of culture’s “value”). How can we teach leaders to articulate their beliefs? How do you teach “vision”? Address the question of *values* and the purpose of cultural organizations.

- New professional *attitudes* – it is a question of how to change the *style* of professional relationships among colleagues, other cultural institutions, and state institutions. How to encourage responsibility and initiative at all organizational levels?
- Forum for the exchange of ideas about culture in international, cross-sectoral contexts.
- Address the question of integration and implementation – how to incorporate new ideas and knowledge? What are the strategies of integration and change? Need for “survival skills” as well as management skills; need to address questions of frustration, burnout and disillusion.
- Networks are crucial; should emphasize exchange of shared or best practices.
- Transfer of knowledge from the civic sector to the public sector; need capacity building in the public as well as in the NGO and private sectors. New joint models of cooperation among cultural institutions must be created.
- Challenges of applying the business-entrepreneur relationship to cultural institutions.
- Common problems or themes that could create broader dialogues among cultural institutions, such as urban regeneration or European identity.

On the morning of the second and final day, the participants were divided into two working groups. Sandy Nairne and Claire Fronville each facilitated one of the groups, which ultimately proposed two different yet not mutually exclusive models. One group emphasized the need to develop multi-national and cross-sectoral networks that would identify successful strategies and best practices, establish processes that could feed cultural organizations with the knowledge resources and social capital for their growth and flourishing, drive connections with government and industry, cultivate access to developmental resources and produce cultural products. The other group suggested that the initial approach should be to leverage the “competitive advantage” of influential organizations such as the Getty and Salzburg Seminar by convening a “summit” of high-level governmental, business and political leaders, and explore a conversation to place culture more prominently on the agenda of European governments. Second-tiered meetings might subsequently take place, involving mid-career professionals to develop processes and resources, much as the first group designed.

Both working groups emphasized the importance of constructing a base of information that would be available as a resource to cultural institutions throughout the regions, drawing on success stories as case studies of best practices and workable strategies for change and adaptation. Everyone agreed that it would be crucial to convey a sense of

cooperative ownership in order to avoid any sense of too few organizations controlling the agenda, the geography or the ultimate strategies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Rather than focusing on the narrow cultivation of managerial skills, in the end, “Cultural Institutions in Transition” addressed broader goals of cultural advocacy and communication in pluralistic societies. It was acknowledged that for the cultural sector to survive and thrive during the coming decades, the leaders of these institutions must understand the place of their organizations in the broader social tapestry and must develop the capacity to articulate a vision for the future. Thus, while the discussions extended beyond traditional notions of organizational leadership, the group was adamant that such issues are at the core of the professional development needs of mid-career cultural leaders or institutions in governance transition.

The salient conclusions can be summarized:

- A sustained forum for conversation about these issues would be very timely and critical for the development not only of the rich blend of artistic and cultural institutions comprising the cultural sector of Europe in general, but of European integration and society as a whole;
- Cultural institutions in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia should be included as central participants in this conversation, who have a serious and long-term stake in the European cultural sector. Institutions from these regions are not in need of training as much as they are in need of connections and networks to justify the role of culture in democratic societies and to develop the multiplier effect of culture as a positive social and political force;
- Participants expressed keen interest and hope that world attention to culture could be advanced importantly as a direct result of this initial involvement of the Salzburg Seminar and the Getty. These two institutions were encouraged to lend their prestige and international respect, bringing other institutions and locations equally into the mix, to elevate cultural issues and gain world political attention for the place of culture “on the agenda” of political discourse;
- A meeting of high-level European policy-makers, business leaders and cultural directors, might be a constructive and careful next step to place culture on a broader agenda, while dealing with concrete examples through case studies. This gathering might then lead to a series of meetings of pan-European cultural professionals who would continue to expand the case studies/best practices approach, build linkages with one another across international cultural sectors, and connect organizations to maximize their operational effectiveness.

“Cultural Institutions in Transition” clearly underscored that cultural leaders perceive a need for organizations like the Salzburg Seminar to provide a neutral forum for the exchange of ideas about, strategies for, and experiences of managing change in diverse circumstances. Everyone emphasized that next steps should be approached carefully and

respectful of the dramatic conditions facing the complex and diverse community of cultural institutions across Europe. Institutions in Western Europe would benefit from exposure to the dynamism and variety of approaches among different sectoral and regional constituencies, while organizations in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia, having tremendous potential, could advance markedly if they had greater access to colleagues with whom they could explore these seismic shifts in institutional leadership and governance. Development of these networks could produce more effective strategies of advocacy within their respective local political and social settings, potentially leading to greater civic responsibility and improvement. Combining subsequent meetings with follow-on visits in a variety of sites and including a sufficient mix of institutional participants could be a crucial way of recognizing the expansiveness of this expertise throughout the global academic and cultural marketplace.