

SESSION III

PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP IN DEVELOPING A HEALTHY CULTURAL ECOLOGY



What is an appropriate role for the private sector in developing cultural ecology for a city?

How should the for-profit sector engage and work with the city governments as well as artistic communities?

What are the risks in such a partnership?

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EVOLUTION IN FUNDING STRATEGIES

Susan K. Freedman — **New York City, USA**

There has certainly been an evolution in the support and an enlightened self-interest in the way corporations fund. We saw the evolution in terms of the whole mentality and approach; it changed not only how corporations felt about supporting art but how we had to present differently to them.

Governments and government collaborations are not all about funding.

Public Art Fund Projects

“When you work in public spaces, when you make four manmade waterfalls in the East River, that are 90-110 feet tall, you are in uncharted waters (literally speaking). It is easier to say no than to say ‘yes’. In New York City, there is a mandate to really ‘make things happen,’ and it has been a glorious time for us, especially working with the artists.”

In order to help artists realize their dreams, over 200 engineers were working on the waterfalls. We had a situation where there were not only people from cultural affairs, but someone sitting in the mayor's office helping us coordinate all of this. So it is a very different attitude.

Thus, again, it's not about the money, it's about the way of thinking and supporting the arts and empowering the government and agencies to do that. This is something I hope will continue, because it makes all the difference in the world.

There just aren't permits for things that require out-of-the box thinking.

There must be willingness for that, for example, when we built a living room around Tatszu Nishi. It was the first time with that we really had a gate to keep. And it made me nervous because, on one hand it was great, but you soon become very number oriented. I would just love to sit there and watch the diversity of people who were coming in because it was free.

The beauty of what we do is that we try to give people a way to see the city in a whole new way through the eyes of artists and artist-initiated projects. So people were seeing Christopher Columbus face to face in a way they never have before and never will again.

I can't tell you how many New Yorkers told me that they have never been on the water in New York City before the Waterfalls.

I have lived here my whole life and never been in the water.

People usually use City Hall Park as a transient space, and go through it. We have our art projects there and they stop to experience the space. So giving people a way to see the city differently can be very exciting, and then when we are in a location, trying to mine the people around them for support.

For example, we are right in front of the Time Warner building, so we went to Time Warner for support for Tatszu Nishi, and we went to the developers. We knew that they would benefit from these hundreds of thousands of people who were going to be standing in line and need a place to get something to eat, shop, or whatever. And they did support us. So we try to be strategic in collecting funds when we go after companies.



BMW GUGGENHEIM LAB

Maria Nicanor — Barcelona, Spain



I will begin with a background for context before delving into funding. I am representing a museum today and a very specific project. Within that museum, I have been working at the Guggenheim for almost ten years and I worked in a variety of exhibitions that were not directly related to cities but rather, were more traditional exhibition formats.

It was not until 2009, while celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Guggenheim Museum, that the BMW Lab would become the most visited exhibition ever in the history for the Guggenheim.

The fact that we got the numbers—which many of us around the table have to talk about—convinced the institution that talking about cities and talking about architecture was an important thing to do, and in that context, both my colleague David Van de Leer and I started thinking about what we could do. Although the institution has championed architecture in many ways throughout its engagement in the past, unlike the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum does not have an architecture collection.

So, it was in this context that a funder came to us. And we had to determine how to work around experiences that were not so passively contemplated, but being more participatory in nature because we did not have the space of the Guggenheim museum rotunda to play with. We needed to go elsewhere, so we started thinking about what we could do off-site. It was around this time that BMW, a car company came to the museum and asked if we would be interested in pitching a project to them that related to cities. That was the only information they gave us—it must be something related to urbanism. Luckily, we were able to put our own ideas into this participatory experience in cities to the service of this funder, and try to see how, what we originally thought was a subversive idea, could fit the parameters of what this funder wanted.

Why does culture matter?

To go back to the idea of museums in the case of this particular project—that is—addressing life in cities through programs and workshops, it mattered because it could address real life issues, and because it was doing something that our museum wasn't doing directly, which was getting out of the museum and reaching a type of audience that generally we don't reach and having people to look at cities in a different way.

In New York, we were not doing the project uptown on 5th Avenue but rather downtown on the Lower East Side; in Berlin at the Prenzlauer Berg in the Pfefferberg Complex; in Mumbai we were close to the Bhau Daji Lad Museum. We were looking for different kinds of people, those who don't visit our museum. So to talk about the project in terms of the way it was funded rather than the content—I will elaborate that this project was fully funded by BMW. That tremendously affected the impact that the project had around the world. It was heavily criticized in some places. It was, in my opinion, incredibly effective in most of the cities we went to.

BMW in Berlin.

An important example of the perception of the project, is in the case of Berlin, where the funder was being perceived as a 'big problem'—a German Car Company with a Nazi past—as we were reminded very often. The mayor of Berlin called a parliamentary session, to ask me in particular, why the Guggenheim was doing this project. Why was it a temporary pavilion that travelled around the world that had no walls and that had no art hanging from it? What was our intention? Were we trying to sell them cars? Or were we trying to gentrify Prenzlauer Berg. The questions were asked at a table like this. Many members of the parliament did not understand why this was important; why we needed to look at cities differently and why we could do that in a multi-disciplinary way. Why we were not only engaging artists and architects but also musicians, urban designers, urban farmers and poets.

So why the ‘funder’ was such a big problem, is the question, and it got to the very middle of the messaging of our project, and probably most projects like this. We became involved in a series of very result-oriented practices to find out the results of this process-oriented project were.

When we reported to BMW, they wanted to know what the KPI's (key performance indicators) were for this project, was there a tangible prototype of something that came out of it? How many people came? We were asked to present the quantitative usuals. It was a challenging process to change the mindset of the funder in talking about quality and process and messiness. Even so, they let us play. They did not get involved in the content either.

Who funds these projects?

I would like to conclude by saying that there is a huge level of hypocrisy when it comes to who funds these projects, and how these projects are read. There are many museums new in town that are funded by big corporations that have not named their projects with the name of their brand, and they have been incredibly successful.

Having said that, it is very challenging to get the message across and package the message of the project, when telling people how you are funded.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHPS

Sérgio Sá Leitão — Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



In Rio de Janeiro, we are involved in all types of public-private partnerships. We are trying to diversify all the programs that we have in order to face the complexity of the cultural environment of the city, to reach a broader area and a broader diversity in terms of cultural expressions.

We believe that culture is something that belongs to civil society, not to states or governments. So the role of local governments is to recognize, promote, and protect all the cultural expressions in the city. So, we have to act together.

So everything that we do, we do not do directly, but engage with our non-governmental partners. The protagonist is civil society and not the government. We think that culture is a powerful frontier of development. We deal with a development concept that includes more than just economic growth, it is far more complex than that. We respect these three pillars of liberty, diversity, democracy, which are essential for a healthy and sustainable cultural environment.

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Working with the Private Sector of the City

When we say ‘private sector,’ it’s not only corporations or companies, it is arts organizations, arts associations, everything that is non-governmental. We are facing challenges, of course. The cultural supply is concentrated. Access is not equal. The demands in some parts of the city are lower. We also face a low level of efficiency, in city hall. This is the reality we have to deal with.

To work in partnership with private companies and organizations is also a way of bringing efficiency in the process and to get better results; to be closer to what society really wants and really needs. The process is to engage and involve all kinds of social actors interested in culture and to establish a real public-private partnership in order to increase, to diversify, and democratize the ‘cultural supply’ in the city.

Cultural Vision

Another challenge we have is to have the cultural vision in what we do. The only way to achieve that is to work closely with people who work with culture and experience culture in all parts of city. So we incorporate the Socratic thought of “*We know nothing. We have to learn with society. And we have to enable what they want to do.*” We have experienced many types of public-private partnerships and we have talked briefly about them.

We have a cultural funding program in Rio de Janeiro where we directly fund all kinds of cultural projects such as training, education, theatre, circus, visual arts, dance, and others. We put money directly into companies, associations and organizations and those who really make these activities happen.

We have another way of funding, which is the cultural incentive law, in which private companies can put part of the tax that they have to pay to the city, toward cultural projects. It is a very interesting way to attract them to cultural environments and to make them more responsible in social and cultural terms.

It is a very successful instrument and they devise ways to put in their own money to fund cultural projects. In Rio de Janeiro, we have a large chain of public cultural spaces and we manage about sixty different kinds of cultural centers.

We manage them through public-private partnerships in order to make things more dynamic and to use private know-how. The key issue is, we, the government have to ensure that we take care of the public interest. We must play an active role in the kind of things that must be done or how things must be done, it is very important in a public-private partnership to establish rules and oversight, in order to attract private money.

KEY ISSUES AND QUESTIONS RAISED IN DISCUSSION

There is no free money.

Who is funding? There is a slippery slope of ‘value’ based philanthropy or strings attached when it comes to funding.

Where do lines get drawn regarding who decides what is to be done with the money? There is an uneasy hypocrisy involving ‘corporate money.’ In the case of Guggenheim Lab Project, BMW becomes a soft target. Is the corporate funder trying to buy ‘absolution?’ What is the value proposition of culture and do arts organizations underestimate the degree to which it is valuable? All money is not equal. Each kind of money allows different kinds of projects to happen.

What is the role of censorship?

Are governments innocent partners? If the role of government is to protect the public interest, what is the role of censorship in making decisions for private interest or greater public good? The positioning of ‘value’ is important. Culture has a value, and at what point does the economic and production costs cross a line that affects its ‘value.’

Freedom is not absolutist.

How can we have a partnership in the context of private-for-profit sector that makes clear for us what the intent is? How can there be an equal partnership between the for-profit and the non-profit sector? How do we negotiate the different sectors—private, public, corporations, individuals—whose funding and sponsorship gets used in the project?

How far does public money take responsibility? Is government money more susceptible to politics than corporate money? It is very hard to adjudicate morality when it comes to people involved in making money. We have to be very careful about moralistic terms.

Power is an aesthetic practice.

Power needs reproduction, to be reproduced in the imagination. It is also the buying of an imagination and a space. There are particularities. For example, German companies funding art practices and taking responsibility for public institutions.



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