

# **ENTERPRISING CULTURE**

**9 propositions for  
investing in creativity  
as social capital**

**Giles Lane**



**proboscis**

researching, developing and facilitating creative innovation

## **Nine propositions and reflections on the relationships between an industrial economy of material things and an economy based on the energy of human inspiration and creative endeavour:**

### **1. CREATIVITY IS THE FUEL OF INDUSTRY & ENTERPRISE**

Perhaps the simplest description of the goal of industry would be the development of new markets for existing products and the development of new products for existing markets: in short sustainable growth. A vital factor in this equation is creativity and imagination: it is creativity that generates innovation, that gives rise to the inspiration that stimulates the application of products to uses often unintended by their designers. Such creative and productive *misuse* is one of the most powerful tropes in modern culture. The arts, and in particular the experimental arts, are prime initiators of this type of cultural development, and their impact on society and economic growth is phenomenal, especially in the areas of the information (or knowledge) economy and commercial outlets such as music, television, advertising and cinema.

### **2. CULTURE IS THE KEystone OF SOCIETY**

Culture encompasses and binds society and societies together – it enriches us through similarities and diversities, it is the glue. Creativity is the keystone of 'culture' – it is the generative force that both creates specific cultural 'objects' as well as inspiring the creation of others.

Beyond subsistence economies, trade is predicated on difference – without it there would be little incentive for the exchange of goods or knowledge. Culture is more than just the material objects we trade, it is the value systems which entreat us to trade with others, that create the ethical basis of human relations and govern the codes of exchange and transaction. Culture is both what we are and the recognition of difference, its appreciation and even assimilation.

### **3. RETHINKING HERITAGE**

Creativity and the experimental arts and design are not just an add-on decorative gloss, but are crucially entwined in the development of the society and culture in which we all live, defining the future. The traditional concept of 'heritage' has become limited to a Nostalgia and results in stagnation. A radical new approach is needed that understands contemporary society and culture as the Heritage of the Now: not to be preserved in aspic, but transmitted to the future as a dynamic force.

### **4. INVESTMENT NOT SPONSORSHIP**

Corporate support for cultural activities will be best placed if the investing partners see their role as broader than a simple one way transaction. Investment rather than sponsorship offers opportunities for corporations to actively develop a cultural role in society, a role that seeks to develop and enhance the environment in which that business operates, not simply for its own short-term benefit (as sponsorship might deliver), but as a wider practice of integrating itself into communities, and placing itself in relation to other corporate, public and charitable bodies with social and cultural remits.

## 5. KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

Knowledge is bestowed upon us – it is a gift. It may also be the fruit of long application and sustained effort, but fundamentally it comes to us from elsewhere, it is not self-generated, but sought after, and occasionally received. But what do we do with knowledge once we have received it? There is an inexorable shift from traditional economies based on the exchange of material products towards ever more complex economies where the knowledge transmitted by a 'product' is more valuable than its material shape. But is it just knowledge that we really value? Is it not also experience – the application of knowledge that is built up over time, that leads to crucial insights – which we truly value?

The emergence of knowledge and experience economies is being built not on a simple relationship between producer and consumer, but upon participation. Where it succeeds it anticipates and recognises the need inherent in growth for an ever wider spiral of engagement, of interdependence between markets, of understanding that a business indeed has something to learn from those it sells to, as well as those it buys from. Economies are built upon exchange: a consumer may devise an entirely new use for a product – this knowledge or experience in turn becomes a tradeable 'object' that the producer may wish to acquire to extend the capabilities of their products. How we come to value such objects of exchange will determine the shape and speed of socio-economic growth. Those corporations who choose to limit the application of individual knowledge to the use of their products through the exercise of draconian intellectual property laws are the ones who will miss out on new opportunities. Their short term gain, may well spell a longer term downturn in their fortunes as their products and services become increasingly irrelevant to those who wish not only to consume, but to participate.

## 6. RECIPROCITY AND THE COMMON GOOD

The truisms of our age dictate that private ownership is more efficient than public ownership. But this is not always the case, and there are many examples where private interests have sequestered knowledge away from those who would seek to use it to accrue more to the general store of knowledge than was previously in existence.

Another model we might take to again is trusteeship – where a group of persons are elected or selected act as trustees of an entity and to manage it best for its beneficiaries. Key areas of knowledge might be better held in trust for all people rather than being owned by individuals or corporations.

Capitalism does not engender democracy nor does it strive for open, competitive markets. Its participants often yearn for pre-eminence, if not outright monopoly in product type and service capacity. The adherence to market forces is often lip service to regulation, whilst armies of lawyers do their utmost to shore up de facto monopolies through extensions of patent and copyright laws – seeking ever to extend their time limits and stifle rivals. The patent system is particularly heinous in the way it can be used by a larger player in a market to squash smaller competitors through legal means, either by attrition through suspending a product sales until patents are disproved or through the threat of costly litigation. In this way it is often only the incumbents of a market or industry (or more likely, their bankers and bondholders) who are able to compete in the development of mainstream products, as the threat and exercise of litigation far outstrips the resources of smaller entities and individuals.

## 7. THE COMMONWEALTH OF CREATIVITY

Unlike material goods, of which there is ultimately a limited supply, creativity is super-abundant. It exists within a wholly different economy in which every human being can partake at many different levels. There is no one alive whose does not possess the ability to be creative, but what structures our understandings of creativity is how we apply and ascribe use-values to it, as well as our measures of its value.

We are moving into an age of rapid growth in the ability to communicate ideas, to devise scenarios for their use and create material outcomes. A global economy whose values are based on rewards for knowledge and experience gained and communicated opens up the possibilities for greater inclusion and sharing of wealth beyond the current system of inheritance and inequalities based on accumulating and hoarding capital.

More and more we need to sidestep the limited ambitions of 'embedded futures' proposed by governments and corporations themselves terrified of innovation, and embrace dynamic systems that are open to evolution. Simplicity and the creative use of limited resources are also crucial to such development. In this change our reliance upon the institutions of democracy will be great and our need to safeguard and protect democratic rights from plutarchs and oligarchs will remain a fundamental priority well into the twenty-first century, and perhaps beyond that too.

Economic growth is subject to many forces, some of these are social and cultural. In the United Kingdom, the Welfare State of the post-war period did much to invigorate a better educated, more healthy and culturally served population, but this now needs to be refocused for the twenty first century. An excessive reliance on state-sponsored patronage of the arts results in top-heavy bureaucracies and under-investment in actual artists and cultural producers. This ultimately has an adverse effect on the quality and quantity of output in those industries which rely on the research and development conducted initially in the experimental arts: design, architecture, music, creative technologies, cinema, television, advertising and many others. Investment in culture thus provides a whole new arena for the stimulation of creative enquiry and innovation – something that has wide ranging benefits for companies.

Businesses are also made up of people, of members of communities, of culturally active individuals. Corporations need to see that they are also bodies that act in society and culture, and have as much responsibility for maintaining and developing local, regional, national and global cultures as individuals, communities and governments. Businesses do not exist independent of cultures and societies but both draw their workers, their customers, their raw materials (intellectual and physical), the markets, their suppliers and their identities from them. In addition, they affect people's lives and influence the cultures and societies that are constantly in development. Their influence can be both benign and malign – and their operations in different places may not apply the same ethics or business practices. Where we can develop these nested relationships is in developing greater partnerships between users, distributors and producers.

## 8. PARTNERSHIP

Innovation is fostered by breaking out from traditional boundaries – by rethinking what constitutes 'art' and 'creativity' and, by introducing the public to stimulating and challenging artforms, could we stimulate a culture of innovation and dynamism of thinking?

The partnership of creative producers, businesses, public and private organisations to promote a culture of creative enterprise could have long-lasting effects on society. Not trying to introduce a

hierarchy of knowledge, but broaden those which are understood to be critical to social and cultural development. The application of business knowledge, skills and technical expertise to complement the partnerships that already exist between creative producers and public bodies.

## **9. AGENCY**

An economy of knowledge and experience should be looking for agents rather than passive consumers, for people who feel empowered to participate, not just in consuming culture and its products, but in creating it too. Such an economy should make the role of creativity in everyday life a key part of citizenship and a conscious activity. This would be a fundamental building block of a sustainable growth economy that also serves a democratic society.

The history of democracy in Europe and North America has shown us that people who believe themselves to be agents in their culture and society are able to make changes in their social and political structures that benefit wider and wider circles of people. It is not always a rosy picture, but the widening of the political franchise to embrace an ever larger proportion of the populace has led to greater tolerance and appreciation of difference and the benefits that it brings.

Giles Lane is the founder and a director of Proboscis, where he leads the SoMa (social matrices) research programme.

*Proboscis CULTURAL SNAPSHOTS are brief cultural analysis documents published alongside ongoing research projects. They are intended to provoke comment and debate on the contexts in which research by Proboscis is carried out.*