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Art, Science and Organizational Interactions: Exploring the Value of Artist Residencies on Campus



View on campus, University of Stirling, Scotland. Image courtesy of University of Stirling

Overview

The study examines how an artist residency at an aquaculture institute within an university setting creates value. **Dr Boram Lee** and her team found that the residency, initially regarded as ‘risk-taking’ by both artist and the institute, created **unexpected opportunities stemming from the synergies between art and science**. The team found that ‘new ways of seeing’ aquaculture science resulted in the creation of aesthetic, emotional, environmental, educational and social values embracing the intrinsic, instrumental, and institutional, on both personal and organisational levels. We also found that the lack of available time from academic staff and financial support for the artist, however, need to be addressed in order to achieve the residency’s full potential. In addition to the arguments for art-

based initiatives generally, the team suggests that artist residencies, if planned thoughtfully, have the potential to create an innovative and creative culture on campus and beyond.

Motivation for research

The case study sparked from my first visit of the exhibition, 'Aquacultural Encounters', which was presented by the artist, Fanny Lam Christie, who at that time held a residency at my university. There was a series of glass sculptures of specimens, a video of her experimental process, such as pouring glass onto salmon skin, to make a sculpture, in addition to many other bronzes and bogwood-based sculptures which were all produced during her year-long research residency at the aquaculture institute. It was so enlightening to see how science can become so transparent through the medium of the artist's lens. Some of the aquaculture research themes which underpinned stories of her artworks were truly fascinating. It was such an eye-opener for me. I enjoyed the exhibition so much that I visited it numerous times. I was able to similarly witness other staff and students appreciating the exhibition; they were talking about the exhibition and enthusing about certain pieces of the artworks; it somehow created a stimulating and exciting atmosphere within the building. As a researcher interested in cultural value creation and retention, I was duty-bound to capture and share the impact that the artist created as a result of her residency. I thought this was one way by which I could contribute in order to support and promote artist residencies. I, then, started to retrace the steps of the artist, curator, academic staff and students as well as whoever else encountered the artist residency.

Contribution to the field

Governments and policy makers are clearly concerned with the allocation of scarce resources, and art has often been valued in fiscal terms by politicians and economists worldwide. The ability of arts to transform people, however, should be central to cultural policy and practice. With the intention of capturing intrinsic values created by the residency, we undertook dialogue-based approaches by placing the experience of the individual at the center of our evaluative process. Artist residencies have the potential to create emotional experience in the organizational environment. Interested stakeholders can be introduced to new contexts and new knowledge. Some of the comments we received from undergraduate students were totally mind-blowing. Comments included, 'This was great as I have never been greatly enthusiastic about art but this exhibition in particular, certainly cultivated my interest', and 'I think art is a really good way of thinking about things differently and showcasing things in an unusual way, which helps people to understand and visualize concepts better'. One commented 'I think that the exhibition provides students with such a good daily dose of culture.' I would have never expected to receive such comments.

Key learnings

Innovative and creative thinking cannot be taught, but artist residencies, for example, could serve as a catalyst in providing campus culture that can potentially stimulate the innovative and creative thinking of students as well as leading them to the next stage of engagement with the arts. I really enjoyed reading the work of Steven J. Tepper, especially his argument on the creative campus. He stresses that universities should play a significant role in arts ecology by commissioning, employing and training artists in addition to merely celebrating the arts. In that way, universities could prepare

graduates to be flexible, imaginative, empathetic, and entrepreneurial.

Dr Boram Lee is Lecturer in Accounting and Finance at the University of Stirling in Scotland. Her PhD was in Behavioural Finance investigating psychological influences on financial decision-making. She has also a wide range of research interests in cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary studies, covering the valuation of arts and culture, creative fundraising, art and conflict, and artists' well-being. Her life-long interest is in theatre, festivals and the visual arts sectors which led to her current active research interests in the cultural and creative industries.

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