

5 ottobre 2021 15:44

[Welfare Culturale] Progettare con sensibilità ed empatia: l'arte come risorsa di benessere



L'edizione 2021 di [ArtLab Bergamo](#), che ha avuto luogo dal 22 al 25 settembre, ha posto particolare attenzione – in una dimensione cross-settoriale e internazionale – ai temi del welfare culturale, del ruolo dei settori culturali e creativi nella rigenerazione delle città e dei territori per lo sviluppo sostenibile, del ripensamento dei luoghi e delle organizzazioni, e del futuro delle politiche e delle professioni culturali alla luce della nuova programmazione europea e degli interventi previsti dal PNRR. In tale occasione abbiamo incontrato Anne Beate Hovind, urbanista norvegese di fama internazionale che sviluppa da oltre vent'anni progetti di rigenerazione urbana a base culturale.

Oltre a realizzare aeroporti, ospedali e altre infrastrutture pubbliche, ponendo l'esplorazione al centro del proprio lavoro, Anne Beate Hovind cura anche importanti progetti di arte pubblica, come la Future Library di Oslo conosciuta in tutto il mondo. Otto anni fa, Hovind in qualità di direttore artistico di Bjørvika Utvikling – una organizzazione responsabile della costruzione di tutti gli spazi pubblici nel quartiere Bjørvika di Oslo – ha commissionato all'artista scozzese Katie Paterson la realizzazione di un'opera d'arte pubblica. Paterson ha proposto la realizzazione di una "biblioteca del futuro" composta da 100 opere inedite, che saranno scritte nell'arco di 100 anni (dal 2014 al 2114) da autori di diversa nazionalità, età, genere letterario. Mille abeti rossi piantati nella foresta di Nordmanka, alla periferia della capitale norvegese, forniranno la materia prima per stampare i

manoscritti, che saranno pubblicati e resi disponibili nel 2114. Per comprendere meglio il suo metodo di lavoro e le opportunità offerte dall'arte e dalla cultura quali importanti risorse di benessere per gli individui e le comunità, le abbiamo posto alcune domande per aiutarci a immaginare gli spazi pubblici del futuro. Per Hovind, "l'arte è parte integrante dei processi di cura e benessere, e se vogliamo che le persone siano davvero felici dobbiamo essere interessati a loro e ai loro bisogni, progettando servizi e infrastrutture con sensibilità ed empatia".

The WHO Health Evidence Network synthesis report 67 represents a milestone in the field of arts and health, founding evidence from a wide variety of disciplinary approaches and methodologies for the potential value of the arts in contributing to health and well-being. In line with this, from your point of view, what are the main effects of the arts on health and well-being not only in terms of prevention and promotion, and management and treatment, but also in terms of policy considerations?

When this report came it was interesting, even though I am a bit critical of having a functional or an instrumental view of the arts. I have been involved in art projects in hospitals and it is obvious that the environment where people are sick, like the hospitals, is not very always beautiful and that it is important to have nice experiences that make people feel better. When you have done good research - as the WHO has done - to go through all the science research and find that art has effects on health and well-being, this is a very good motivation for developing new projects and collaborations, for thinking about how art and art methods can be implemented in education and other fields. It is a really positive development both at structural and personal levels.

From an international perspective, what is the state of the art of the relationship between arts and well-being of individuals and communities?

Like I said, I am very happy that now the evidence is there. We do not need to argue anymore. Art has effects. But we have to understand that there is a lot to do, and we have to discuss how to implement at all levels, both national, structural and personal levels, and also at treatment levels. It is just a start of this development, even though we have always known that different forms of art have an impact on our feelings: art can make you happy but it can also make you cry because reminds you something. Arts is obviously an important part of our lives.

In Norway, the Government has instituted health law and a cultural law, with both emphasizing the importance of arts in health promotion and care. As an urban developer, you are involved in a variety of ambitious art projects in public spaces and infrastructures such as hospitals. Can you tell us more about your work and activities in health care sites?

I would like to start with airports because airports are very stressful and emotional places, either you greet somebody or you say goodbye for ever. Most people are very stressed when they go to an airport. I have been working with services' design and passengers' experience at the airport, in Oslo, and what I learned is that before the security control people are massively stressed. We want passengers who are relaxed and happy and, even at an airport, we think "how can we calm people down? How can we provide them with spaces where they can feel much better?". When it comes to airport as a public space, it has been a relevant aspect to think of well-being there, and I worked with art to provide people with a shift of perspective and

more emotional kind of experiences.

Speaking about hospitals, it is even more obvious that good hospitals, beautiful hospitals should offer contemplative works where people can relax. Now we are working on a big new hospital, outside Oslo. Some time ago, we have had a workshop where we have collected experiences from different other hospitals and what they found is that there was a lack of colours. Many of new hospitals are so beautifully designed but they are very minimalistic, at least in the Nordic countries. People were missing the colours, so we have by purpose selected artists who will create colourful works. We want to greet the patients with colours and artworks in combination. But when you are in a very vulnerable public space as an hospital, you have to consider that you cannot select artworks that are provocative, you have to think differently about children or people with mental illnesses, you have to think about different religious, taking all these aspects into consideration. All has to do with empathy and as long as you design your services with sensitivity and empathy the patients will feel it.

As you said, I have been involved in several art projects, two of them are really extraordinary. The first is a public space, in Oslo, which became a farm. It is a permanent work and the artists involved have been selected because their works are very participatory. This place was a no place and now it has become a very vibrant, green urban farm. The wonderful thing about this artwork is that it proposes something that nobody thought of that could exist in a city. It is a farm and, at the core of this work, there are the [Flatbread Society](#) and the bakehouse [1]. This is a public baking facility housed within an experimental architectural structure that offers various types of bread baking and public programs. The Futurefarmers, the art collective that has proposed this project, has done a really beautiful and empathic work, so welcoming and inclusive. We also have a group of people with dementia. They come there and take part in a public space work with ordinary people who don't have dementia and they do the same meaningful work together. And the last thing we forget is what we learned through experience. The second one is the [Future Library](#) [2], which is a participatory project and has become something extremely meaningful because it is about hope, long-term thinking and trust. It is a conceptual work which offers rituals because we walk through the forest with the authors. People visit the forest, which has become a sacred space, like a cathedral, where you can contemplate, where you can listen to the nature. People have turned it into a ritual, not only when authors are there. For example, I meet people who are bringing the coordinates on the phone to find it from all over the world. It is also about nature, climate crisis, hope, mental health and well-being. It is a very touching work.

Does your method represent a Nordic approach or it can be used also in other geographical and cultural contexts?

I think my method is a very general thing. Site is extremely important, and context and site are always my method. You have always to take site, context and people into consideration, because people are at the highest risk. What I have experienced through the Future Library is that all is about human needs.

Exploration is a central concept in your approach to participatory art projects. To this extent, what synergies are necessary between culture and other fields, especially health and well-being?

From my point of view, exploration is when you discover unexpected things. If you have a linear process, you have a plan, you know what you need, but if you are more explorative you will be more sensitive to the unexpected, to new things, and to innovations. I think this is how we should work and if we did that, we would enter a site and we would think "who can we collaborate with?", and then we probably will be able to see connections and interfaces between health and art and other different fields. You have to be good at thinking "who can I collaborate with and how can I do it?". This is a much more fruitful and richer approach, and more unexpected things can happen. To design good services - good health services - we should think about who people are and what they need. And this is challenging because institutions are very good at making systems and at trying to fit you. But we have to think how we can actually turn this perspective around.

From your perspective, how should we work with arts in order to reimagine and shape future health care places?

The re-design of these services is absolutely necessary. I am wondering if Covid could help to do that. Many years ago, I worked at a national health institution where you can go and complain about your treatment, and what we found was that people did not complain about the treatment itself but 85% of the complains was about communication. We have to know that it is important how we see patients, how we communicate empathy. This is the same perspective when you design services: if you really want to make patients happy, you will be interested in who they are, see them as persons and be much more open to how to redesign your services. And it is more fun, more interesting to think this way, even if you are a doctor, or a nurse. We have a tendency to think we know our customers, but usually we have blind spots, so we have to think differently and to redesign routines regularly.

Can you give us some examples of inspiring experiences of public art projects dealing with health and well-being?

I am sure that there are lots of good examples, because artists are interested in the human aspects and in what's going on and what's cooking. For me, the Future Library and the farm are both the best examples I can think of from Norway because that is really doing well-being. What I think would be great is to collect them, and to share them worldwide, or at least at European level, in order to learn from what has already been done and also to do more interventions to spread the word of the importance of art and its good impact. We have much in commons, even though there are diverse things we have to take into consideration, and the method is how to work to implement art as a natural part of health care and well-being. I think this should be a European and international network, because art is very global and when you are looking for art you forget countries. This has also to do with freedom of expression, democracy, participation as through art you can also learn to express different opinions, how to prevent loneliness and to promote diversity in a good way.

To a great extent, the Covid-19 pandemic has made more evident that culture should become a key enabling factor in the promotion of human health and well-being. From your point of view, what are the most important opportunities and difficulties in the field of cultural welfare? What are also the main needs in terms of capacity building and social impact evaluation strategies?

That's a big question. We need to find out how we can be prepared for another pandemic. We also need to think of the digital, how we can provide people with arts and culture in a more privatized context. The only thing I can come of is the digital but I think that we can use it differently. It is possible to innovate this area and how to keep the access to arts and culture, even though we have to close down during a pandemic. There is a lot of opportunities still to be found. Another question we should address in discussion is: how can we know how important arts and culture are to people's well-being? What kind of infrastructures should be provided next time we have a pandemic? That is challenging. In this world there are too many silos and we have a lot to do to in terms of collaboration. I work both in art and culture and I also work in business. We need a lot of bridges and interpretation between these silos. We need a trans-disciplinary approach because we have to sit down at the same table and solve things together: that is when innovation happens. What I am more concerned, through this pandemic, is the meaning of life and how to cope for future because of the climate crisis, not so much for adults but for children and young people. In the future people should be safe, hope for the future, have possibilities and be seen as human beings. And to do that art is so important because art is diversity in itself.

Endnotes

[1] Flatbread Society is a long-term project initiated by Futurefarmers as a public art programme for Bjørvika, Oslo (Norway). The project was curated by Situations, and commissioned and produced by Bjørvika Utvikling in collaboration with the artists. Supported by The Norwegian Public Roads Administration (Eastern Region) (source: <http://www.flatbreadsociety.net/about>).

[2] The objective of the Future Library is to select and invite authors and to sustain the artwork for its one hundred year duration (until the year 2114). One thousand trees have been planted in Nordmarka, a forest just outside Oslo, which will supply paper for a special anthology of books to be printed in one hundred years' time. Between now and then, one writer every year will contribute a text, until the year 2114. A special ceremony in the forest each spring marks the handover of the author's manuscript. This event is free and open to all. The day involves a public walk into the forest, where the author gives a reading (source: <https://www.futurelibrary.no>).

ABSTRACT

During the 2021 edition of ArtLab Bergamo, we met Anne Beate Hovind, a Norwegian and well-known urban developer involved in a variety of ambitious art projects in public spaces and infrastructures such as hospitals. We had a conversation with her to explore her approach and the synergies between culture and other fields. As she said, we have to learn "how to work to implement art as a natural part of health care and well-being", taking into consideration that "if you really want to make people happy, you will be interested in who they are, see them as persons and be much more open to how to redesign your services" with sensitivity and empathy.

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Agenzia giornalistica **AgCult**
registrazione al Tribunale di Roma 195/2017
Via Cattaro, 28 - 00198 Roma
redazione@agcult.it