

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

of Master Thesis in Methods and Topics in Arts Management (MaTAM)

Submitted by Laura Melani and

Supervised by Professor Chiara Paolino & Professor Ariane Berthoin Antal

To Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan

19/02/2020

## Art, business and corporate social responsibility.

### Insights from *add art* Hamburg 2019.

#### Research Aim

This master thesis aims to investigate *if* and, if so, *how* managers connect their feelings towards artistic interventions into business: whether they relate them to the indirect economic performance of their organizations (art is just an utilitarian investment to get indirect business benefits such as visibility) and/or to the social/cultural role of their organizations for the communities of reference (art is (also) able to generate a corporate social responsibility (CSR) perspective).

#### Case Study and Methodology

The opportunity to examine the research questions of this study was offered by *add art* Hamburg 2019 – *Hamburgs Wirtschaft öffnet Türen für Kunst* [Hamburg's companies open doors for art] ([www.addart.de](http://www.addart.de)), the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of a unique event in Europe and worldwide. Indeed, on a weekend (21 – 24 November 2019), 17 very diverse organizations in Hamburg opened their rooms to the public and showed one of these three forms of artistic interventions: a corporate art collection, a temporary art exhibition or a temporary art exhibition by young artists. While the corporate collections are permanent, temporary art exhibitions have often lasted longer than a four-day event (so that employees, clients, and guests could continue to experience the artworks beyond the actual art show period). Every year (and also in 2019) approximately 1,700 visitors get the opportunity to view art in companies and institutions.

The empirical study of this qualitative research project was based on open-ended semi-structured interviews. They were conducted with the managers of most of the organisations participating in *add art* Hamburg 2019. The sample comprised 12 of the 17 participating organizations: the majority of it encompassed small-to-medium organizations, founded after 2000, hosting temporary art exhibits by young artists and in the professional services industry. One person in each of these businesses was interviewed: most of the respondents were in top management positions. In addition, the study benefitted greatly from the insights shared by the coordinator of *add art* Hamburg, Hubertus von Barby.

#### Main Findings of the Study

**Utilitarian use of the art** Overall, this study confirmed that having art into the organization can generally, positively but subliminally, impact the identity and learning process of its workers and, indirectly, its economic development.

- Almost all managers stated that the artistic intervention in their organizations positively influenced their feelings towards their companies or institutions through emotions that demonstrated that they felt the impact subliminally (joy, energy, nice vibes, fun, not daily routine, creativity, looking through visitors' eyes, the possibility of new discussions, added value in the process of taking care of the employees, being open to the uncomfortable, feeling at home and feeling comfortable).

- Most of the managers who found a connection between their identity, their organization, and the art displayed or between some of these three aspects explained this relationship through different but interrelated values: human being, dialogue, people, change, and creativity. Particularly most managers of family-owned companies did not find any kind of relation between the art, their organization and/or their identity.
- Are there any (indirect) utilitarian reasons whereby managers welcome art collections/temporary art exhibits into their business premises?
  - Managers of local organizations were most likely to mention corporate image/corporate identity.
  - Corporate culture promotion was mostly mentioned by managers working in companies with young artists' exhibits which are not family-owned but the Hamburg branch of international corporations.
  - Enhancement of work environment for employees (and better work/productivity) was reported by managers of organizations hosting all the three type of artistic interventions, both family owned and not family owned, with both a local and an international scope of activity.
  - Client engagement (business development) was highlighted by managers of local and not family owned companies hosting both corporate art collections and temporary exhibits by young artists.
  - Employee engagement (business development) was mentioned just by one manager working in a not-family owned local organization hosting young artists' exhibit.
  - Visibility was reported by few managers working for international organization and hosting temporary art exhibits/of young artists.
- Most managers confirmed that the positioning/reputation/competitive advantage of their organizations was strengthened because of the artistic initiatives although the effect was indirect and not measurable. Particularly all the family-owned companies did not consider art as a way to stand out from competitors.

***Social and cultural side of the art*** Although CSR is not the main aspect to get the organizations to participate, as von Barby indicated, and the CSR-related impacts perceived by managers were subliminal/not measurable, all the key aspects of CSR had some kind of relevance for them.

- All the managers expressed their attention towards the stakeholders (who are at the centre of every CSR action) through diverse approaches. Moreover, the interviews also sought to elicit managers' perceptions about the reactions of other stakeholders towards the artistic interventions in organizations:
  - While employee care and well-being was emphasized by two managers (open question about social and cultural impact of art), all managers identified a connection between the art and the employees (specific question concerning employees), whether it entailed positive (discussions about art, feedback on how to improve the project, appreciation of the company's participation in *add art*, the possibility to know the clients better, changes of perspective of the employees and of their internal communication) and/or negative reactions from them (scarce participation, scepticism, even if managers saw irritations as a good "tool" to push employees to think and confront with each another). Also von Barby specified that temporary art impacts on employees' communication and mindsets while permanent art makes them pose questions about what has always been there.
  - Support to the artists was mentioned by half of the managers, mostly working in organizations with young artists' exhibits, and also regarded by von Barby as very valuable. Some of the managers also talked about artists' reactions: young artists appreciated the event because it gave them the opportunity to establish positive and productive relationships within the company and with the public as well as to gain some hands-on experience in proving their concepts in the outside world.
  - The majority of managers referred to a connection between the art intervention and the clients (more than half of them felt that there were only positive reactions from them, while some

managers reported that clients did not like the art or got irritated though feeling uncomfortable is often regarded as beneficial). Hubertus von Barby also stressed the connection with clients through non business-related topics.

- Relation with the local community and mutual dependence between the city's economic competitiveness and its cultural attractiveness was outlined by few managers, working in organizations with temporary exhibits/exhibits of young artists. However, most managers generally reported positive citizens' reactions: they are curious, they make good remarks, even if they represented a small share of the city population and some of them were critical and more interested in seeing the companies than the art.
- A question about CSR reporting was added during the course of interviewing, so results can only be reported for 8 of the 12 organizations in the total sample. All the managers affirmed that their organizations do not have a formal CSR report and do not include their involvement in *add art* Hamburg in other reports. In particular, CSR reports were not in the interest of the family-owned companies; moreover, the organizations with corporate art collections (two of them are the not family-owned companies) do not have a report. By contrast, a few managers were intended to develop a CSR report in the future or to promote the idea internally: these managers work in organizations with young artists' exhibitions which are not family-owned but the Hamburg branch of international corporations. The general lack of awareness towards CSR confirmed that organizations do not participate in *add art because of CSR*, which "*is not often in their mind or institutionalized*" as von Barby explained. However, companies, especially small and local ones, can become aware of CSR *because of* their engagement with arts and culture and especially with artists (as highlighted by von Barby).

Given that the study suggested that all the managers generally and positively related art with indirect both economic and social benefit, the hope is that arts and culture could play an increasingly relevant role in shaping that mutual dependence between business and society. In this regard, *add art* represents a compelling potentiality to exploit in order to perform more efficient, constructive and well-thought social behaviours. The fascinating variety of perspectives, people, approaches, priorities, cultures, values and the broad spectrum of organizations analysed also showed the uniqueness of each company or institution in its approach to the art. At the same time, it documented that every type of organizations can find a connection with the art.

### **Limitations of the Analysis and Future Research Directions**

This study has been conducted with the intention of providing as much quality and validity of data as possible. Nevertheless, as with every study, there are some practical limitations. First, the author's level of experience was that of a Master student and the predetermined time dedicated to the analysis may not have favoured the level of detail of the study. Second, the lack of a quantitative analysis to support and integrate the qualitative research may have led to incomplete information. Moreover, the field work entailed language barriers because the researcher came from abroad. Fortunately, all the respondents agreed to be interviewed in English, although this was not their mother tongue. Some limits in understanding or expressing concepts perfectly as if both parties had spoken a common native language were likely to be present.

This thesis can only be a snapshot of a very small part of a much bigger and continuous process of change and renewal intrinsic of dynamic corporate arts environment. It represents an exploration and examination of a local trend that needs further research at the local, national and international level over the years and in different business sectors and industries. Based on this small explorative study it would be thus important to: (i) advance the field on the *perceived* effects of arts-based interventions; (ii) explore further the relation between artistic interventions, CSR and CCR (corporate cultural responsibility); (iii) undertake the research agenda collaboratively with artists, employees, managers, the society and even policy-makers.