Blog 26 april 2015

Recently there is the discussion on the authentic or intrinsic value of the arts and how this is instrumentalised or compromised when put into a business setting.

So let's see some examples of how this works.

Someone from a big insurance company says: "if I want a dialogue with my customers about insurance, it will be short. Insurance is a boring subject. But if I can talk with them about art the dialogue will become longer and more alive. So if I want to attract a higher educated part of the population, then associating myself with art is an excellent opportunity. Art helps branding my company in a positive way".

Another businessman says: "a good reason to sit on an arts organisation board is that I work with people in grey suits all the time. I love to work with someone with pink hair for a change. Art is fresh air for people dealing with numbers, plans and, formats all day". Okay, you could say that if he likes working with people with pink hair that much, he should get another job. But that's not the point here.

Two businessmen who are clear, almost blunt, about their motives to work with the arts. I like that. If it is clear you can discuss the what's in in it for them and what's in it for you, as an arts organisation. And they are really passionate about the arts, don't worry. They do want to contribute.

In recent years we have seen arts and business connect in many forms:

A credit card company that supports a number of cultural organisations financially and where staff gets discounted entry to engage them with the cultural sector and stimulate their development.
A program where young professionals in business are placed on boards of arts organisations where they are counselled in their professional and personal development.
Placing artists for 3 months in SME's where they help the business to innovate and change.
Business people who provide expertise on a voluntary basis to arts organisations to

help them with marketing, communication, pricing, etc.
A bank that finances a program that helps arts organisations to develop the skills to raise more private funding.
Traditionally connections between business and arts took the form of either donation, sponsorship or award shows with good examples of those connections.

Now there is more diversity in these connections where there is not only money (business) exchanging for a positive image that comes from the arts.

But it is also about transfering skills: business expertise to the arts, creative skills to the business. And about the realisation that the arts can do what is hard for business regulated by plans and numbers, namely being authentic, breaking boundaries, improvising.

Is there a danger in instrumentalising art this way? Of course, but it is up to professional artists to withstand that pressure. F.e. by saying you cannot do a 2-day course in storytelling for a company, when it takes 6 weeks to bring an authentic story on stage with professional actors. Learning story telling takes more time than just 2 days.

The future of arts connecting with business may well be in finding mutual profit that go beyond just money. To find out more about the value art can have for business, and more about what business can mean to the arts.

Let us move beyond just sponsorship relations and award shows. There are many more connections possible between arts and business.

So, next time you meet someone from an insurance company who is interested in art, do not think about the money only. Start another conversation.

Why am I telling all this? The past two years I have been involved in a EU-project, indeed called *Connecting Arts & Business,* with partners from Belgium, Denmark, Hungary and Poland. We published a report where you find all the examples I gave to you and many more. Have a look at www.connectingartsandbusiness.eu, download the report and use it!