

■ Museums and social economics – a Swedish example

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Résumé

Les projets culturels ont des conséquences sociales mais aussi économiques. C'est pourquoi les investissements dans la culture prennent de plus en plus d'ampleur dans le développement de la communauté. Une étude centrée sur la politique économique du musée de Bohuslän réalisée en 1994 a fourni des données sûres quant aux structures et aux besoins du visiteur et a examiné l'aspect financier et économique du programme. Les faits et les chiffres qui en ont résulté d'après les éléments budgétaires, permettent de considérer le musée sous une perspective purement économique. L'article évoque le chiffre d'affaires généré par les visiteurs et les conséquences financières, dues aux achats du musée et aux revenus fiscaux rapportés par les employés du musée à la région elle-même. En conclusion, l'article démontre que pour toute couronne suédoise dépensée pour le musée, 0,60 couronnes reviennent au trésor de la ville et donc au Conseil départemental.

Today's cultural ventures and projects are increasingly being discussed in economic terms. Many studies have shown that concrete cultural projects of a high quality have considerable social effects aside from the purely cultural. Cultural investments often prove to be profitable in a purely business and socio-economic context. In recent years cultural tourism has, for instance, become an increasingly important source of income for our Swedish museums. Many studies have also pointed to the growing importance of culture as a driving force in regional development. In recent years a general belief has grown amongst both politicians and museums that the activities and projects the museums engage in play an important role in shaping the future growth of communities. There are profound changes taking place today in Swedish society and in the working life of our citizens, and these changes are coming at a very high rate. The old industrial society is being replaced by an educational society. Our citizens are better educated, have more leisure time and make more demands on leisure activities and the quality of life, which in turn has led to culture playing a more important role in their lives. Studies examining employment and community development increasingly predict that the necessity of availability of an active cultural life and higher education is of essence to the growth and further development of regions.

Growth and development are no longer tied to natural resources. The birth and growth of businesses can occur anywhere. In the past the workers had to move to where industry and natural resources were located. Plainly, you had to live where there was work. Now we are seeing profound changes in the structure and work methods of businesses. The new types of businesses dealing in information and knowledge are highly movable, adjust quickly to market demands and can easily establish themselves in the

areas in which people wish to reside. Thus, cultural investments have become an increasingly important factor in community development, where different regions compete in trying to attract people and businesses by offering an attractive quality of life in terms of housing, work, culture and leisure.

What I have described so far is no doubt a very utilitarian and economic view of culture! So, I must emphasize that there are dangers in focusing too much on the economic effects of the projects and activities in our museums. If museums were only governed by a materialistic mentality, this could, in time, lead to a situation where economic profit rather than cultural value determined which projects were to be funded, where short-sightedness would dominate, where boldness and renewal would cease and opportunism would be used as a way of obtaining shrinking allocations.

The goals and objectives which are to lead museum work must be aimed at something much higher and much more important than financial gain! Museums must never stop pursuing their mission of spreading humanism; they must actively promote our understanding of ourselves as individuals and of the society in which we live. This can not and must not ever be put into purely economic terms! However, I still maintain that those of us who work in the field of culture must widen our understanding of the very real socio/economic effects of our work in order to sharpen our argumentation in the public debate and in seeking financial support. We need to have a good understanding of cultural politics as well as a good and thorough understanding of cultural economics in order to uphold and explain our endeavours in the public debate.

The Bohuslän Museum and Cultural Economics – a study

In 1994 the Bohuslän Museum was the

subject of a study focusing on cultural economics¹. The study had two objectives:

– to increase our knowledge about our visitors in terms of their thoughts and opinions on the activities at the museum which, in turn, would enable us to develop the content of our programming, as well as get better at marketing ourselves.

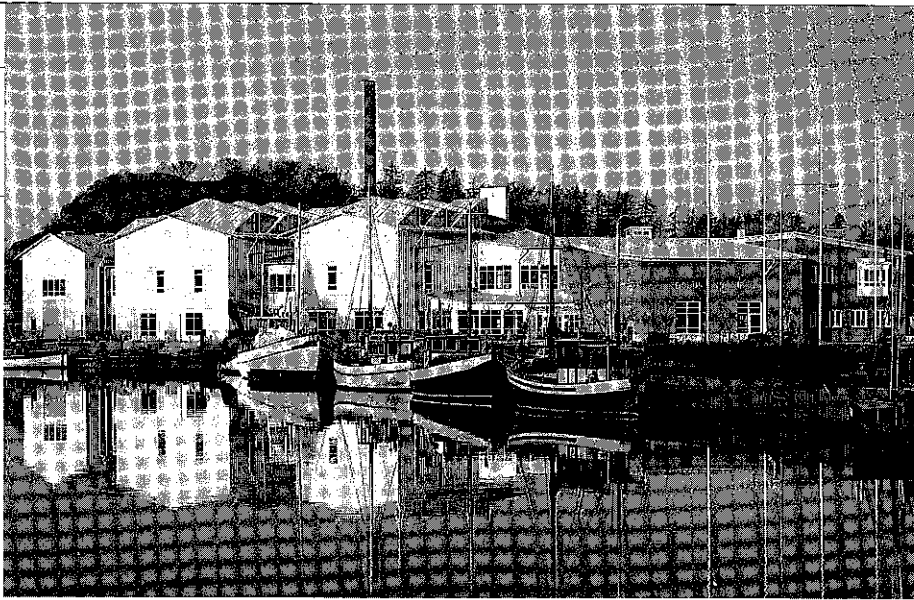
– to survey the financial and economic side of our programming and to document facts and figures enabling us to describe the museum in a strictly economic perspective. Here I will only discuss the second objective. In order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the socio-economic effects generated by the Bohuslän Museum the study focused on three areas: the turnover in money resulting from visiting tourists, the yearly purchases made by the museum, and the number of employment opportunities resulting from this activity.

Visiting tourists

The conclusions drawn in regard to the financial turnover generated by museum visitors were based on 1,244 interviews conducted between May and December in order to compensate for seasonal variations and to truly reflect the whole body of visitors during the year. When calculating the economic effects resulting from the number and nature of visitors, only those visitors not living in the area were counted. Visitors residing in Uddevalla or in the vicinity of the city were not counted. In 1993 the museum was visited by a total of 310,775 persons and of these 9,200 were tourists. About one third of the tourists named the museum as the reason for visiting Uddevalla. These 93,200 tourists attracted to Uddevalla and the Bohuslän by the museum spent on average 227 SEK per person per day, on food, lodging, gasoline, souvenirs etc. All in all they spent more than 21 million SEK. This comparatively large turnover of money is calculated to have provided 18.7 work-years outside the museum for local businesses such as restaurants, hotels, and shops. Subsequently these 18.7 work-years generated in the area produced 1.2 million SEK in tax revenues for the municipality of Uddevalla and the Bohuslän County Council combined.

Purchases made by the museum

In order to operate during the year of the study, the museum made large purchases of goods and services. These purchases included those made by, for instance, the cafeteria, the museum shop, the exhibitions and the administration etc. The investigators examined all invoices paid by the museum during the year. The purchases were as follows:



An economic study of Bohuslän museum in Uddevalla, Sweden, shows that culture is a rewarding business, not only in social but also in economic terms.

Purchases made within the city of Uddevalla: 8.1 million SEK

Purchases made within the rest of Bohuslän: 4.4 million SEK

Total purchases: 12.5 million SEK

Naturally the museum also made purchases outside the Bohuslän region – 3.4 million SEK during the year of the study – but this was not of interest as the study concerned itself with the “regional” socio-economic effects. The rather large amount of purchases made by the museum during the year of the study generated a total of 8.8 work-years in Uddevalla and Bohuslän. This in turn resulted in 0.7 million SEK in tax revenues for Uddevalla and the county of Bohuslän.

The museum personnel

During the year, 158 persons worked full and part-time at the museum. If converted into work-years this amounts to 101. The museum received special national funds for 33 of these work-years since the museum employed a number of persons with special needs and/or handicaps. Economically, this is of course favourable to the museum and its trustees. Regional tax revenues resulting from 101 work-years:

The municipality of Uddevalla: 3.7 million SEK

The Bohuslän County Council: 1.4 million SEK

Total tax revenues: 5.1 million SEK

During the year of the study, Bohuslän Museum generated 101 work-years at the museum itself. In addition, the museum created a total of 18.7 work-years as a result of the expenditures made directly by the museum itself. In other words, the museum through all its activities in Uddevalla and the region, created a total of 128.5 work-years which in turn provided the region with 7 million SEK in tax revenues. These figures

do not include the so called multiplier-effects, that is the economic effects resulting when businesses sell goods and services to the museum and its visitors, and in turn buy products needed for their own production. Similar effects result when persons employed by the businesses that are affected directly or indirectly by the mere existence of the museum spend their earnings in the area. A conservative estimate of the multiplier-effects generated by the museum within the region gives another 3 million SEK in tax revenues in addition to the previous ones. This gives a total of 10 million SEK. During the year of the study the municipality and the county council earmarked a total of 18 million SEK for the operation of the museum. The refund in terms of tax revenues amounted to 10 million SEK.

Thus, for every SEK spent, 0.60 SEK was returned to the treasury of the city and county council. And this in a museum which was never intended to give any money back to the community but where the investors' primary objective was to further understanding and development of ourselves as individuals and society. ■

1 Bohlin, M., Hanefors, M., "En kulturekonomisk studie av Bohusläns museum. Image, publik och samhällsekonomi", *Institutet för Turism & Reseforskning* N° 1/94.