

Africa Talks 2022 Creative Africa. The future of cultural industries

di Chiara Piaggio

Whether we are talking about films, music, photography, books, art, fashion, design or multimedia, the African creative and cultural universe seems to have conquered the West. It is an Africa that fascinates and seduces. And not because it evokes the now threadbare categories of ethnic and traditional, but because it releases avant-garde energies, creating and updating the latest global trends. Literature has perhaps represented the most striking case. In 2021, in just a few months, writers of the African diaspora reached an explosive success, obtaining rush of prizes that followed on one another with unprecedented power: from the three most important in the world, the Nobel for Literature, the Booker Prize and the Goncourt, without forgetting the Neustadt, the Camões, the International Booker Prize and others. It is not only literature that is attracting interest. The African artists, the designers, the fashion designers, the filmmakers and musicians who become popular with the Western public are constantly increasing.

What is there behind and beyond the writers of the diaspora, the colourful fabrics used by the major international brands, the Afrobeat music in the Berlin clubs or the artists who exhibit at the Biennale in Venice? How is the world of cultural and creative production changing in the continent?

The cultural and creative industry (CCI) of Africa and the Middle East, is estimated – before the slowdown due to the Covid emergency – to generate income equal to \$58 billion and give work to 2.4 million people. This data, however, does not take into account the informal sector, in which many of these activities take place: the informal African creative and cultural sector is alleged to be worth some \$4.2 billion and give work to about half a million people (E & Y, Cultural Times, 2016). Of course, these are numbers that can appear low if compared to the other continents: at global level, it is estimated that the CCI produced \$2,250 billion per year and employs 29.5 million people. The perspective changed however, if we look afar. It must not be forgotten that the African industry is still young. And this is perhaps where its strength lies. In its capacity to innovate, to offer original points of view, to naturally avoid the conventions that now elsewhere are sclerotized. And in its potential for growth.

Since the start of the millennium, the African cultural and creative industry has recorded a substantial increase and the direction taken seems to be that of exponential growth: the income of digital music streaming in the continent should reach \$500 million by 2025, according to the World Bank, clearly increasingly since the \$100 million of 2017. The Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, is today one of the most creative industries in the fastest expansion in the world, with an annual rate of growth of 8.6%. (PwC Global Entertainment and Media Outlook). Today, Nollywood already employs some 300,000 people and generates \$500-800 million per year, with such a widespread diffusion throughout the continent as to influence habits and lifestyles: young Tanzanians use Nigerian slang, Ghanaese dress like their favourite stars, hairdressers in Zimbabwe offer the hairstyles of the most famous actresses. As for the literary industry, it is growing at the rate of 6% per annum thanks to influential publishers, especially in countries such as Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa, and other smaller ones that are popping up in still emerging contexts, often created by the writers themselves. The phenomenon is all the more important as to drive some writers who already have a name in the West to make an about turn, to choose continuing their production in Africa, although living elsewhere. With a precise objective; to put an end to the curious paradox that, for many years, has led African publishers to buy the rights of writers of their own countries, instead of being the ones to sell them to the rest of the world.



This energetically growing Africa has a counterbalance of the long list of challenges that the continent still has to face up to, such as the incomplete legislation on intellectual property rights and its weak application - for each Nollywood production bought, nine others are pirated – or the lack of infrastructures that can help production and distribution. Then there is the difficulty of mobilizing important funds that act as a driving force for economic development or the weak spending power by the potential public.

The future, in a word, still remains in part to be written. But in a continent where 60% of the population is under 24 years old, everything is looking ahead. And it is easy to see how this sector can still be transformed, which first of all uses young people in a context in which there is no shortage of young people; that addresses the middle class in the first place, and their increase should reach have the population by 2030; that feeds on the city and the Internet, where urbanization is explosive and connectivity increasingly widespread. Already today the use of technologies is favouring the spread of cultural products and choosing new forms of enjoyment; from the exhibitions of virtual reality launched on the network, to the festivals organized on the social media, to the bookbloggers who are able to orient sales. And the ecosystems of innovation continue to be developed all over the continent, in the form of creative clusters, technological and media hubs.

The African cultural and creative industries, in short, have today all the potential to represent an opportunity not to be overlooked, to become sectors which can contribute to solve, amongst others, the challenge of the creation of jobs. This is a challenge that the continent has to face up to.

Africa has understood this. Rich not only in natural resources, but people of talent as well, it increasingly has the intention of looking on to the world with a new business card. Even more, after having been recognized outside, it has the intention of freeing itself from the Western market, to add its interior and go back to being itself. And by doing so, it is showing a new side of itself: through culture and creativity, Africa has appropriated back its self-narration, revealing that it is capable, combative, optimistic, irreverent, ironic and telling its stories in the first person with a freshness that has aroused the curiosity of the world. The future, of course, has still to arrive. But the change has already begun.

At Africa Talks 2022, four guests will converse on the cultural and creative industries in the continent, analysing their current context and the future perspectives: from the new ways of supporting the sector to the mechanisms of production, to the systems of dissemination and enjoyment.

Ojoma Ochai, UNESCO consultant and until 2021 Regional Director for the creative economy of the British Council in sub-Saharan Africa, founder of the new born CcHUB Creative Economy in Nigeria, will present an overview of the current status of the CCI and new trends.

Sidick Bakayoko, CEO of the Ivory Coast start-up Paradise Game and conceiver of the FEJA videogames festival, will analyse the emerging sector of gaming and entertainment.

Rémy Ngamiye, a young writer from Namibia, will speak about the publishing market through his experience as the founder of Doek!, the first literary magazine in Namibia, created to offer new spaces to writers and encourage the spread of literature in the continent.

Neri Torcelli, Curator of AAVF – African Art in Venice Forum at the Biennale of Venice, will tell us of the changes in the contemporary art market in Africa and the interconnections between cultural centres and artists, aimed at creating an inter-African network of relations to break free from the Western market.

They will be followed by the documentary “System K” (R. Barret, 2020), which shows the life of some artists and performers in the city of Kinshasa, amidst precarious conditions, enterprising initiative and incisive provocations.

