Measuring relevance in art exhibition ecosystems: discussion and critical inquiry through a case study

Extended Abstract

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We live in a world immersed in a culture of objective quantification, in which each aspect of human's life can be measured to determine scales of values computed by algorithms [1]. Both these algorithms and the rankings they produce become epistemic and axiological instruments to articulate certain notions of relevance [3]. Simultaneously, for several decades, the art field has experienced continuous global expansion in an exponential growth process, with the appearance of new museums, biennials, fairs, etc., and making art exhibitions one of the driving-forces of the art-cultural dynamics. This increasingly complex and expanded scenario is claiming the need to develop metrics and models that allow measuring the weight of the actors involved [2]. Faced with this situation, we posed a research question: what dimensions of "relevance" might be explored in the art exhibition ecosystem? And, how can they be modeled independently of the extrinsic factors, such us the traditional discursive assessments of the art system?

As a response, we developed a conceptual and mathematical model to build a relevance index based on the loan relationships established among institutions and collectors, as these connections are a crucial factor in defining the agency role played by actors in artistic circulation processes and the articulation of an exhibition ecosystem. The application of the equation developed to a given dataset results in a hierarchical index within the art exhibition ecosystem according to the value of the impact index (Mi), which locates institutions and collectors in different position in the raking as an expression of their capacity to promote artistic circulation and of their articulatory ability. However, and beyond the ordering itself, the interest of these ranking mechanisms lies in their heuristic value, that is, in their capacity to trigger questions by unveiling aspects of the functioning of the art exhibition ecosystem that have gone unnoticed.

Our proposal aspires to offer a discussion about the results we are obtaining from the application of this conceptual and mathematical model to a specific art exhibition dataset provided by the ExpofinderDB (www.expofinder.es). This case study is giving us the opportunity to inquiry about how the new knowledge extracted by the relevance index is able to subvert traditional concepts of relevance based on discursive practices.

References

[1] J. Z. Muller, *The Tyranny of Metrics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

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[3] M. Mazzucato, *The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy* (London: Allen Lane, 2018).