

# *New Ways of Supporting Arts Entrepreneurship*

## *A Case Study of Maniobra*

Javier J. Hernández Acosta  
*Universidad del Sagrado Corazón*

**ABSTRACT:** This research analyses Maniobra, a cultural employment initiative that offers guaranteed income and additional support for three years to selected artists in Puerto Rico. Maniobra's program design phase and preliminary first year results are analyzed through the author's personal experience with the project as an arts entrepreneur and scholar. This reflection suggests how to address barriers facing artist initiatives with a lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion. A conceptual framework analyzes the preliminary impacts through a combination of artistic, personal, and economic well-being. The article also highlights the importance of institutional trust in artists and artistic work, expanding traditional philanthropy models. **KEYWORDS:** cultural work, cultural policy, arts entrepreneurship, artistic well-being. **DOI:** [doi.org/10.34053/artivate.11.3.193](https://doi.org/10.34053/artivate.11.3.193)

## **Introduction**

Maniobra is a cultural employment initiative that offers guaranteed income for three years to a group of artists in Puerto Rico. The project was launched as a strategy to recognize the economic challenges of arts entrepreneurship and to identify models that can be replicated in the future. This article analyzes Maniobra's program design phase and the preliminary results from the first year by using my personal experience with the project as an arts entrepreneur and a scholar.

Artistic practice has many intersections with entrepreneurial thinking. Artists constantly navigate uncertainty to create value. Both artists and entrepreneurs start with imagination, creativity, and non-conformity, work to generate disruption, integrate diverse resources from their environment, and assume risks to advance their ideas. Although it might be easier to find an entrepreneurial mindset in the arts than in other

### ARTIVATE 11.3

occupations, we are still developing knowledge about the practice of artists in entrepreneurship. This research has developed a theoretical framework for arts entrepreneurship that is implemented in this paper.

Arts entrepreneurship continues to be an academic field under construction. It attempts to define a set of practices in the arts and creative sector, with very different dynamics and implications than other industries. While in some sectors entrepreneurship can be seen mainly as the creation of economic value through cultural work, scholars such as Rowan (2010) have argued that it mobilizes a neoliberal strategy of reducing the government's responsibilities over culture that in turn increases precarity in its creators.

Among these tensions, we need to find concepts, practices, and guidelines to define arts entrepreneurship as an exercise of creating economic and cultural value within an environment of creative freedom, collaboration, and sustainability. To achieve this, it is necessary to rehearse experiments where the balance between the sustainability of both the venture and the entrepreneur is guaranteed, with the entrepreneur's sustainability guided by the improvement of their artistic practice, economic well-being, and personal well-being.

Puerto Rico's recent economic challenges presented an opportunity to explore how to address sustainability for arts entrepreneurs. Puerto Rico is a Caribbean country, a territory of the United States that during the last decade has suffered multiple crisis scenarios including the economic bankruptcy of the government, devastating hurricanes, earthquakes, political crises, and the pandemic that has affected the world since 2020 (Bonilla, 2020). These compounding scenarios made visible the precariousness of the cultural sector while also provoking reflections on innovative models to promote arts entrepreneurship.

In March 2020, the Centro de Economía Creativa, Inc. (CEC), with the support of the Mellon Foundation, launched the Maniobra program. This initiative provides salaries, fringe benefits, health insurance, management services, and an operating budget for 37 artists in 25 cultural projects around the archipelago. The name, translated as "maneuver," serves as a metaphor for the constant work artists need to do to persist in a creative career. The initiative supports the economic and personal well-being of the artists, guarantees creative freedom, and respects the processes and methodologies of the participating artists to minimize the influence and negative externalities that social investors and philanthropy can sometimes have. These supports provide artists with the security to create new artistic work.

The Maniobra initiative creates space for artists to develop projects by providing trust-based economic support that recognizes the artists' trajectory. This article presents Maniobra as a case study exploring new ways of understanding and supporting artist entrepreneurs, using my own personal involvement in the work as a reflective tool. The article analyzes the design process of the program and its approach to addressing barriers of similar initiatives for artists and adding a perspective on diversity, equity, and inclusion. A conceptual framework is introduced to analyze the preliminary impact identified through a survey with participating artists focused on well-being.

This article serves as a bridge between my simultaneous Maniobra roles as founder of CEC, co-designer of the initiative, and lead researcher studying the development, implementation, and impact of the work. The aim of merging these multiple roles through this article is to broaden the discussion on the condition of artists and how to develop innovative initiatives to advance their sustainability. My previous experience as a musician and cultural manager allowed me to experience first-hand the challenges of cultural production in the face of economic and personal conditions that interfere with creative work. This personal experience with artist precarity led me to establish CEC as a strategy to innovate new ways of supporting artists and entrepreneurs. After 10 years of working with philanthropy and government as the main social investors in the arts, I was able to launch this new program as a diagnosis and response to the challenges caused by these structures and dynamics. Also, CEC's previous work supporting the cultural sector gave the team in-depth knowledge of the field and led us to reflect on the need for new forms of subsidies that are less restrictive and better aligned with artists' interests and creative agendas.

The first phase of the work designing Maniobra as an entrepreneurial activity is analyzed here as a case study in order to expand the agenda on the successes and failures of philanthropy in the arts. My professional experiences as both a musician and an arts entrepreneur launching CEC undergird the context for Maniobra, and my role as a scholar shapes this case study and my analysis of the program's implications for the arts ecosystem in Puerto Rico and abroad. Research methods used to aggregate and analyze data for this paper similarly reflect my multiple roles in the work. My role in the design of the program since initial conversations with the Mellon Foundation and later as a facilitator of the advisory team contributed rigorous and reliable data to this research, but also provided anecdotal elements that inform my analysis as a scholar. This data was collected through advisory team meeting minutes and my personal reflections. Additionally, a survey carried out among Maniobra participants was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods to include artist perspectives in the research.

This article analyses the Maniobra design process and impacts in order to imagine a new route to support the arts directly and with a long-term approach toward sustainability. I argue that risk management methods should be extended not only to artists' projects but also to new initiatives that are being created to support artists. This can be combined with institutional trust in artists and artistic work, expanding the processes and methodologies of traditional models of philanthropy.

## **Evolution of Entrepreneurship in the Arts**

The field of arts entrepreneurship has made a series of advances in connecting entrepreneurship and well-being that establish the foundations of this case study.

Entrepreneurship is a multidisciplinary field that has evolved in recent years. There is an evolving consensus that it represents a process through which people discover, evaluate, and take advantage of an opportunity to develop a new product or service

### ARTIVATE 11.3

(Shane & Venkatamaran, 2000). Economic theory continues to influence the research agenda of understanding entrepreneurial behavior, mainly addressed through the creation of wealth and the importance of multiple non-economic motivations for starting an entrepreneurial activity, including satisfaction, personal achievement, and the interest to innovate on top of the current conditions of an industry (Ripsas, 1998 & Van Praag & Van Ophem, 1995).

The issue of opportunities in entrepreneurship is directly connected with the creation and delivery of value (Gangi, 2017). In the arts, this does not only refer to economic value but to other dynamics such as cultural, social, educational, or community value added, establishing the foundations of arts entrepreneurship as a creative and managerial activity. The acceptance of these other value dynamics, like the recognition that the orientation of new goods or services does not have to be towards the market, and that the product can be generated solely based on individual motivations of its creator, is another core factor in the fundamentals of arts entrepreneurship.

Precisely in this way, Gangi (2017) points to the multiple value dynamics as a consensus of theories on arts entrepreneurship, following the previous approaches of Chang and Wyszomirski (2015), Essig (2015), and Beckman (2014). Similarly, the need to import an entire theoretical framework that comes completely outside of the arts has been a great challenge (White, 2019).

However, it is important to highlight that each context requires adding nuances for this balance of economic versus cultural value according to its social and political realities to avoid the challenges of colonial practices in the knowledge production process (Gaio, *et al*, 2023). Fortunately, approaches such as Rindova, Barry, and Ketchen's (2009) that frame entrepreneurship as an emancipatory exercise allow us to recognize the liberation and social justice role of entrepreneurship in the arts. According to the authors, that is made visible in the entrepreneur's interest in achieving autonomy in certain circumstances by authoring new ways to generate change and proposing new discourses on those possible changes.

Callander (2019) connects these approaches with arts entrepreneurship, arguing that entrepreneurship occurs as an exercise intrinsic to artistic creation and not only as a means to commercialize artistic work. Her analysis is central to the case study presented in this article: Maniobra prioritizes artistic initiatives connected to social justice, and participating artists are motivated by artistic creation rather than using entrepreneurship as a post-creation tool. In the same way, the ventures supported by the program have played an important role in seeking to transform structures and principles around art, its appreciation, and its stereotypes. This connects with White's proposal of "organizational attack" (2019) in theorizing arts entrepreneurship. Howard Becker (quoted in White, 2019) proposes this concept as a coordinated attack on social structures and sacred aesthetic beliefs to create new artworlds.

Within the literature on entrepreneurship, the topic of well-being has increasingly been discussed since 2013 (Sánchez-García, *et al*, 2018). The nature of a job which does not have a guaranteed income and is mainly based on scenarios of uncertainty and risk

can have a significant impact on the health and well-being of entrepreneurs. Even with the difficulty in measuring the issue of well-being, research has identified variables such as affect, life satisfaction, and aspects of physical health and social well-being (Wiklund, et al, 2019).

Well-being has been approached from two very broad perspectives: hedonic, related to happiness as an integral state of mind, and eudaimonic, linked to self-realization and personal development (Wiklund, et al, 2019). The literature establishes a direct relationship with the economic performance of the venture (Shepherd, et al, 2019), recognizing that the ups and downs of the entrepreneurship process impact life-work balance and also have a great impact on the entrepreneur's family members (Stephan, 2018 & Nguyen & Sawang, 2016). Also, the importance of autonomy and leisure time is highlighted as a key resource for navigating the challenges of developing a new venture (Wiklund, et al, 2019 & Shen, et al, 2018).

The issue of well-being in artistic occupations has been implicated by the economic challenges these professionals experience. Multiple research projects highlight the income "penalty" that artistic work entails versus other occupations that require similar levels of formal education (Alper and Wassall, 2006). The low-income condition adds to the need for multiple jobs, increasing time management challenges in the completion of artistic work (Menger, 2006).

Research on well-being in the performing arts is approached from multiple perspectives (Willis, et al, 2019). One emphasis is on the demands of the job in terms of skills, time, and preparation. In contexts such as theater and music, the high level of performance required and the interrelated fear of making mistakes are significant stressors (Kubacki, 2008). In the same way, the social context through teamwork can have positive and negative effects depending on the equity practices among the collaborators.

Arts entrepreneurship is an autonomous process compared to the dynamics in other economic sectors because other motivations transcend the creation of economic value and the creation of wealth. In the same way, the issue of comprehensive or holistic well-being is raised as an important challenge for entrepreneurs. This is intensified for arts entrepreneurs precisely because of the difficulty of capturing their economic value as well as their artistic, social, and cultural value given that they tend to produce art as a public good.

## **Cultural Work in Puerto Rico**

Puerto Rico is a Caribbean archipelago and a territory of the United States, which means that it operates under a political, economic, and regulatory framework similar to that of the 50 states. In 2006, the country experienced an economic crisis after a federal change in the tax incentive model no longer encouraged multinational companies to locate their headquarters on the island. The country continues to experience an ongoing economic recession at all levels, including declaring government bankruptcy in 2015. Further compounding this economic crisis, Puerto Rico suffered the impact of two powerful

### ARTIVATE 11.3

hurricanes in September 2017, and the continued recovery has been very slow, further accentuating inequality (Bonilla, 2020).

In January 2020, just two months before the first closure caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Puerto Rico suffered earthquakes for the first time in almost 100 years, which caused major impacts in the southern region. This was further compounded between March 2020 and May 2021 as the whole world navigated the pandemic and almost all of the cultural sector halted face-to-face activity, greatly affecting visual arts, performing arts, and music.

Changes in cultural consumption patterns during the pandemic also affected the sustainability of cultural work. According to the *Survey of Cultural Consumption and Participation in Puerto Rico* carried out in 2021 (Hernández, 2022), the consumption of visual arts fell from 16.6% attendance in 2015 to 12.8%, and the consumption of performing arts fell from 23.1% to 16.5%, even including participation in the wealth of virtual activities. In the case of music events, the percentage of people who participated increased from 22.9% to 30.6% mostly because of virtual events. Unfortunately, despite these levels of consumption, very few people paid to attend these events in 2021. For example, only 16.7% of attendees paid for music events, 25% for performing arts, and 12.6% for visual arts.

These new trends in cultural consumption tied to expectations of free participation created a great challenge for the economic sustainability of artists and cultural entities. Crisis response strategies took a while to reach the cultural sector, possibly due to the high rate of self-employment and the difficulty of demonstrating economic impacts that initial federal aid programs requested. Subsequently, multiple alternatives were opened that made it easier for self-employed workers to receive unemployment benefits just like salaried people.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the artistic sector was already facing the economic challenges of the compounding crises in Puerto Rico. In 2020 a total of 11,197 cultural workers were estimated to be working, representing 0.9% of total employment in Puerto Rico. Similar to many countries, 48% were self-employed as opposed to only 12% of workers across the rest of the labor market. The average income from self-employment was \$16,652, less than across the rest of the labor market where the average was \$21,094 (Hernández, 2023).

In the wake of Hurricane Maria in 2018 multiple support programs arose from United States-based foundations that, until then, had had little presence in Puerto Rico. In the same way, the federal government began to implement pandemic emergency funds after 2020. This injection of recovery funds has strengthened an ecosystem of support for cultural entities that did not exist before.

## Methodology

This study uses a case study methodology to analyze the design process and preliminary results of the Maniobra program in Puerto Rico. The case study methodology was selected

following Yin's recommendation for its relevance when the aim is to explain the why and how of a process or scenario (Yin, 2003). The author is also the founder of the organization being studied and facilitator of the design process and uses that experience to develop this case study based on observations, discussions, and analysis that occurred throughout different stages of program development. Following the alternatives presented by Yin (2003), the author participates as a participant observer with direct involvement in decision-making of the organization. Recommendations from Patton (2003, 2014) were used to assess the quality of the fieldwork and the documentation in terms of the role of the participant observer, the level of focus of the observations, its perspective, and its scope. Despite the challenges of this type of analysis, this method allows access to valuable information and insights difficult to collect from external observation alone (Yin, 2003).

Observations about the design process were aggregated in documentation of virtual meetings held by the advisory committee and meeting notes during the program creation process. Additional data about the preliminary impact of the project was collected through a questionnaire sent to the project participants. The design of the questionnaire was similar to the survey of the *Census of Cultural and Creative Work in Puerto Rico* (Hernández, 2022). Three open-ended questions were added to collect information about the impact of the project on the participants' artistic practice and on their economic and personal condition. A question about possible negative externalities of the project on their individual artistic practice was also added. The survey was shared with the 37 participating artists from whom 32 responses were received. This questionnaire was administered in November 2022, eight months after the formal start of the program.

The responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed and the answers were coded according to the three main axes: artistic practice, economic well-being, and personal well-being. Based on the coding exercise, key elements were identified in each of the well-being axes through which the analysis was organized. The artistic practice component was later named as *artistic well-being* based on the analysis and as a proposal to achieve consistency between the three components.

## Background and Context of Maniobra

Maniobra is a guaranteed income program for artists developed by the Centro de Economía Creativa, Inc., an organization founded in March 2020 in Puerto Rico. The organization was created as a strategy to develop an entity that would serve to advance the needs of the art and culture sector in Puerto Rico. This organization was incubated by Inversión Cultural, a non-profit organization that has carried out research projects, training, and management services for the creative industries since 2008. The new organization would be responsible for implementing LabCultural projects (an arts, culture, and creative economy observatory) and Nido Cultural ("Cultural Nest," a management services program). These programs were launched with a combination of funds from entities including the Flamboyán Arts Fund, Filantropía Puerto Rico, and the Mellon Foundation.

### ARTIVATE 11.3

After the implementation of these programs, internal reflection identifying new needs highlighted the opportunity for greater direct support for artists who lead impact initiatives in their sectors and communities. As part of the diagnosis, the following key needs were identified as the ones that the ecosystem was not yet addressing.

1. *Lack of diversification in financial support for artistic work* – Much financing for the arts comes from government entities and foundations. Following the regulatory and tax framework of the United States, non-profit organizations must be approved for local (1101.01 of the Internal Revenue Code) and federal (501c3 of the Federal Internal Revenue Code) tax exemptions. In the United States, many organizations of this type achieve their economic sustainability through a combination of public funds and private donations thanks to the philanthropic culture of citizenship. In Puerto Rico, in the absence of a collective philanthropic culture, it is very difficult for entities to depend solely on proposal and government funds, which generally do not cover indirect costs. Even so, many entrepreneurial arts projects are structured as non-profit organizations to access these funds.
2. *A direct focus on the instrumentalization of creative work* – In the case of Puerto Rico, there are few philanthropic entities focused solely on supporting artistic creation. Those entities that support the arts mainly do so through their impact on educational, community, urban, or social dynamics. Therefore, regional arts funding initiatives are conditioned on practices whose results measure specific indicators of audiences, communities, or other evidence. Often open calls for funding require that applicants carry out new projects outside their strategic priorities in order to access funds. Once again, the unique focus on the programmatic part prevents the funds from contributing to the sustainability of the project, accentuating the precarious scenarios in the creative work of the founders.
3. *Difficulty understanding creative processes and their impacts* – Creative processes in the arts still lack visibility within much of the philanthropic and government sectors. The magnitude of research, conceptualization, planning, development, and execution of creative projects, representing the early stages of the entrepreneurship process, is rarely understood. Therefore, many support initiatives from foundations focus mainly on the production and diffusion stages of the value chain, including concerts, performances, exhibitions, and other examples. The difficulty of incorporating the design and conceptualization stages into grant proposals ends up leaving artists to subsidize these initial activities with their personal time and money, contributing to artist precarity. Often direct impacts of a project cannot be achieved in the short term, leaving it to fall outside of the timeframe required by philanthropic and government initiatives. Faced with a philanthropic model that requires measuring final impacts in the short term without consideration for the amount of required preparation and planning, many artist initiatives are left out of support opportunities because they cannot meet these unrealistic expectations.

Many of these aspects have been present in the arts ecosystem for years, although it



should be noted that some were accentuated by the ongoing economic crisis and the reduction in public budgets for arts and culture. This scenario led to the Maniobra ideation process.

## **Maniobra: A Case Study**

This section discusses the process of design, development, and implementation of Maniobra as a new initiative to support the arts based on a cultural employment approach. The design of the program stands out as an example of an intrapreneurship process that begins with the identification of a need followed by an open innovation process for developing a new initiative from existing platforms.

### **Program Design**

The design of the program was led by the Centro de Economía Creativa as the primary grantee and the Mellon Foundation as the lead social investor. As a foundational step, designing a program that fostered economic stability within the community of artists leading projects was validated. Next, an advisory committee of five recognized arts and culture professionals was convened. During work sessions, program design elements were developed and validated based on their relevance to the local context of Puerto Rico and the imperative to avoid imposing external models that do not fully recognize the country's complex realities.

For example, elements of social justice and the geographic diversity were prioritized in selected initiatives, with an emphasis on projects developed outside metropolitan areas and key demographic diversity such as gender and race. In the same way, it was understood that legal structure could not be an obstacle in the selection of the projects, considering that the diversity of the cultural ecosystem in Puerto Rico includes non-profit entities, artist collectives, cultural ventures, and artist-run spaces, both with and without formal legal structures.

The process offered a critical look at two traditional mechanisms for supporting arts and cultural entrepreneurship. First, the annual support model was questioned by recognizing that the processes of implementing a project and complying with funder's reporting requirements leave very little room for implementation. Next, it was suggested that the call for proposals model does not necessarily represent an exercise of equity, considering a context where emergency scenarios overload and wear people down with competitive models that sometimes reward the skill of grant writing beyond merit. Finally, two additional risks were identified that the Maniobra program was designed to address. First, the lack of funds for new creative project implementation could replicate the self-subsidy model that accentuates artist precarity; and second, failure to maintain program flexibility to adapt according to the emerging needs of the artists and projects selected could undermine their success.

## Final Program

Maniobra was designed to select 25 arts entrepreneurship initiatives, mainly in the visual and performing arts, organized under any legal or informal structure, with an established artistic career that included elements of social justice. The application invitation process was based on the review criteria recommended by the advisory committee including elements of artists’ career trajectory, location, gender, race, potential for collaboration, and contributions to the cultural panorama of Puerto Rico. Applicants submitted a one-page letter of intent and a detailed proposal for consideration; they were assigned a mentor to support the conceptualization and development of the proposal and budget.

The benefits for being selected to participate in the program included receiving a full-time salary (\$48,000) with fringe benefits and a medical plan in addition to an operational budget of \$20,000 for executing projects, management services, and professional development trainings. This support would be sustained for three years, renewable every year, recognizing the time required for the implementation of the projects and the importance of economic stability beyond a standard one-year commitment. The salary could be divided between two participants or go to one person, recognizing cases in which there might be more than one founder. The total budget for the three-year program was \$8 million.

## Participants

For Maniobra’s initial cohort, 25 cultural projects with different legal structures were selected. Of those projects, 64% are organized as non-profit organizations, yet 44% of those do not have the federal tax exemption. 8% were structured as an LLC (Limited Liability Company). The remaining 28% do not have a formal legal structure and include 4 artists collectives and 3 independent initiatives of individual artists. To address geographic diversity, projects are located in 12 municipalities across Puerto Rico, and 52% of the projects are located outside the metropolitan area.

The 37 participants leading the 25 selected projects represent the visual arts (47%) and the performing arts (19%). Their ages range from 27 to 65 years, with a median age of 40 years. 48% of the artists are men, while 42% are women, and 10% are non-binary. 72% of the participating artists have a university degree. 68.8% earned less than 50% of their income from their cultural work before starting the program. This includes 53.1% who had part-time jobs and 18.8% who had a full-time job in another field. Only 28% of the program’s participants consider themselves white.

Variable	Results
Age	Range (27-65), Median: 40
Gender	48% are men
Race	28% are white
Education	72% have a university degree

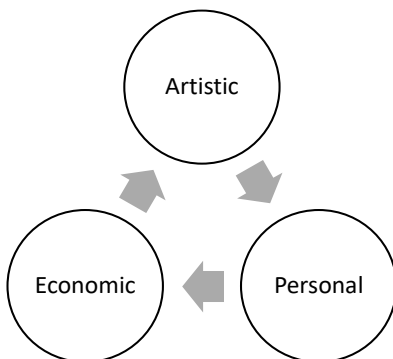
Income from Arts	68.8% earned less than 50% of total income from arts
Arts Sector	visual arts (47%), performing arts (19%)
Type of organization	64% are non-profit organizations
Location	52% are outside the metro area

**Table 1.** Summary of the profile of participants.

A range of art activities are represented in the participating initiatives including artist-run gallery spaces, community cultural centers with art programming, and art workshops managed by artistic collectives. Other projects include performing arts venues, historical archives, and initiatives that produce performing arts, dance, and popular music.

## Mapping the Preliminary Impact of Maniobra

The second key objective of this article is to present a conceptual framework on the possible impacts of Maniobra on the participants' creation and entrepreneurship process.



**Diagram 1.** Dimensions of well-being.

Analysis of the 32 survey responses (out of 37 program participants) is based on well-being and has been structured into three components: artistic well-being, personal well-being, and economic well-being. Although the original program design focused on economic impacts through guaranteed salaries and managed stable work sources, this expanded to artistic and personal well-being based on survey responses.

### Artistic Well-Being

Activities described by the participating artists in relation to the process of research, conceptualization, development, and implementation of creative initiatives informed our framing of artistic well-being. Many of these stages of the creation process were made visible by the artists themselves. On several occasions, the lack of visibility of the creation processes and the lack of initiatives that recognize the complexity of these processes were highlighted.

At this stage, six important elements emerged under artistic well-being:

- *Creative freedom* – This component promotes creative freedom within the program

### ARTIVATE 11.3

context of diversity by combining opportunities for artistic creation with economic security through operating outside of market logic. This encourages greater diversity within the artistic scene and builds commitment to innovative projects.

- *Focus* – This component increases time available for creative activity with a focus on artistic practice. This is intertwined with economic well-being as artists identify the time they spend on part-time jobs as a major distraction that impacts their creativity.
- *Resources* – Artists highlight the positive impacts of having financial resources to acquire equipment and materials for their work. It is important in both the performing and visual arts to have technical needs addressed in order to freely and fully realize creative projects.
- *Processes* – One aspect described as having the greatest impact is investment in the initial stages of project creation that involve research and conceptualization. Respondents described how available funding opportunities rarely recognize the necessity of these stages and only focus on the final product.
- *Quality* – The artists describe the quality of their work in relation to their time commitment and the resources that Maniobra facilitates. They highlight that complex labor scenarios and limited availability of funds typically require sacrificing key elements of cultural production in order to create a project.
- *Collaborations* – Artists desire the ability to establish collaborations from a scenario of equity. The foundational economic stability of their work makes it possible to identify additional external resources that can be well remunerated to help them achieve a greater enrichment of the artistic projects.

These elements of artistic well-being make it possible to establish key considerations for developing programs that support arts entrepreneurship. They represent the opportunity to achieve a balance between economic and cultural value, a unique foundation that differentiates the cultural sector from other industries. Each element is observed through quantifiable variables (investment in equipment, materials, time, etc.) and qualitative variables (quality, management of creative processes, etc.).

The following quotes illustrate how the participants understand the impacts on their artistic practice:

- “In the particular case of the organization, it offered for the first time in its history the opportunity to acquire materials and equipment for cultural and artistic production that will last in the future.” (Resources)
- “The support of Maniobra has given me the opportunity to experiment freely. Financial support gives me the freedom to work on my projects without worrying about buying resources.” (Creative freedom)
- “Maniobra program honors the process, research, experimentation step-by-step, and enhances creativity.” (Processes)
- “Receiving a fixed income has changed my performance. I have been able to focus more on quality and improvements to my projects over having to earn income to live.” (Quality)

These elements of artistic well-being are relevant for artists and cultural entrepreneurs when collaborating in programs that aim to advance their creative projects. Beyond the artist residency model, there are few program alternatives that impact the development of cultural and creative products.

## Economic Well-Being

Traditionally, economic well-being is emphasized as the main source of support for artists. As a result, it has received more focus in academic research, finding that many artistic sectors have a lower average income than the rest of the labor market despite having a higher educational level (Menger, 2006). Similarly, the necessity to also pursue jobs outside the arts in addition to an artistic career has been documented as well as the “arts pool” phenomenon that it promotes, which suggests that artists prefer to take part-time or short-term jobs with low pay in order to maintain flexibility for potential creative work.

However, it is important to understand artists’ perceptions of the value added by a stable source of income. Four elements of impact emerged in the survey responses.

- *Stable income* – Receiving a stable source of income through salaries is an immediate direct benefit for artists. However, this change is frequently expressed in terms of its noneconomic impact such as improvements in artistic practice and personal well-being.
- *Multiple jobs and grant writing* – Artists criticize the need to have multiple low-paying jobs. They also challenge the traditional system of applications and grants that requires considerable time and often does not recognize or compensate administrative work or the required planning activities.
- *Innovation* – In some cases, artists emphasized the opportunity that Maniobra represents to start projects or experiments that had been stopped due to the lack of economic stability.
- *Resilience (resistance)* – The recent history of Puerto Rico poses great economic and social challenges that accentuate scenarios of marginalization, displacement, migration, and defense of communities and natural resources. Many artists have assumed roles in community and social struggles, highlighting the importance of economic stability to continue this work in times of crisis.

The following quotes add depth of understanding to some of these elements of economic impact on arts entrepreneurs. They highlight the instability caused by depending on funding proposals for realizing projects.

- “Financially it has been a relief being able to work without the pressure of doing other things to live and being able to concentrate on artistic work.” (Stable income)
- “It is the first time in my 32 years as an artist that I can create without having to make proposals to survive or do other jobs to be able to make all the payments required in the daily life.” (Multiple jobs)

### ARTIVATE 11.3

- “My artistic practice is based on projects. The only source of payment is the projects. Therefore, all administrative, research, conceptual, documentary, and grant-writing work is not sustainable.” (Security)
- “I had the opportunity of returning to my hometown to do what I love to do.” (Resilience)
- “We were going to close our workshop permanently due to gentrification.” (Resilience)

These examples make visible what academic literature has highlighted about the challenges of artistic work. The lack of income stability and the need to hold multiple jobs has a negative impact on the well-being of entrepreneurial artists. This is visible in time constraints, immobility, displacement, and requiring artists to move to cities and countries with the highest concentration of cultural activity. Yet it is underscored by the opportunity for artists to use economic resources as drivers of political resistance.

### Personal Well-Being

Personal well-being should always be an important indicator of success for entrepreneurial activity. It places emphasis on the physical and mental health of cultural workers. The *Census of Cultural and Creative Work in Puerto Rico* (Hernández, 2022) established that in the non-arts labor market 51% of workers state that they are *very happy*, while in artistic occupations this percentage was only 26%. Similarly, 25% of arts workers state that their physical health status is fair, and 30% believe the same about their mental health status.

Four elements of personal well-being emerged in the participant survey:

- *Stress* – Stress arises in response to economic instability and the impacts it has on family and personal lives. It also arises in the uncertainty of project management and development.
- *Self-esteem* – The lack of visibility of many previous efforts negatively affected their self-esteem, creating internal questions about whether they should continue their initiatives. Participation in Maniobra is a recognition of the artists’ trajectory and has had a positive impact on their self-esteem.
- *Live/work balance* – Economic autonomy allows for a better balance between life and work. Although cultural work does not operate in the standard time frames of other professions, the nature of full-time work and the structure of fringe benefits such as vacation and sick days encourage artists to structure their own time to create a division between personal life and work.
- *Family* – Several participants highlighted the importance of the program in their family environment. With the support, they were able to provide medical insurance and stable economic income to meet family responsibilities. Similarly, the ability to better manage their time as described above also has a positive impact on family relationships.

The following examples demonstrate how the participants discussed these elements of personal well-being.

- “It has especially contributed to raising the psychological and moral spirits in these difficult moments that we face on our island, Puerto Rico.” (Self-esteem)
- “It has given me the opportunity to continue the creative process without interruption by looking for other sources of income.” (Balance)
- “It has allowed me to dedicate myself fully to the work I do, reducing stressors related to money, establishing a network of artists and collaborators who operate from solidarity, and allowing me to honor moments of rest, thus achieving healthier spaces for creativity and production.” (Stress, Balance)

The look at personal well-being, including its physical and emotional components, is an integral part of entrepreneurial work in the arts. Much of the literature still focuses on the creation and development of a company as the axis of entrepreneurial activity, yet in arts entrepreneurship that conversation should be centered on the *artist*, since often the product or company will not transcend its creator.

## Conclusions

This article makes visible an example of a program that supports arts entrepreneurship through long-term investment in artists and in recognition of the value of cultural work. It also demonstrates how the entrepreneurial process itself applies to the design and implementation of support programs.

As a mediating structure (Essig, 2015; 2022) connecting philanthropy to working artists, Maniobra invests time in the imagination, ideation, external validation, iteration, and execution of a flexible support program for artists operating in a highly diverse entrepreneurial ecosystem and responding to interconnected social, environmental, and economic challenges. Unlike initiatives that focus primarily on the final artistic product, Maniobra recognizes the precariousness of cultural work and guides social investment to prioritize the artistic, economic, and personal well-being of artists.

In technological entrepreneurship, venture capital firms recognize the long periods of time that the adoption of innovation requires. Therefore, their investments are usually long-term and facilitate the recruitment and retention of high-level, specialized human talent. With venture capital investment in technological production, there is an expectation of high returns and value creation. With philanthropic investment in artistic production, expectations are oriented around social and cultural returns that complement economic performance. However, few artists support programs direct their investments to offset the demands that these expectations place on the high-level, specialized talent of artists.

Maniobra reimagines the relationship between philanthropy and the arts to make the case for ample investment in both the levels and the length of funding needed to support

### ARTIVATE 11.3

artistic practice and its innovations. Maniobra's three-year program design and significant total budget allocation support artists' investment of time in research, conceptualization, ideation, identification of resources and collaborators, experimentation, and planning—all prelude to artistic creation itself. This strategy supports less visible aspects of arts entrepreneurship work and the complexity of the creative process. It employs an emancipatory entrepreneurial mindset that maneuvers on behalf of artists to develop equitable and effective support structures for their full practice and its returns.

## Recommendations and Future Research

This article has sought to contribute to the arts entrepreneurship literature with a discussion of new ways to support artists who develop creative initiatives. While Maniobra is in its first year as of the time of writing, it is expected to broaden the research strategies on the program and its impact, for example, by identifying how the conceptualizations of artistic, economic, and personal well-being established by the participating artists could be translated into a system of indicators for arts entrepreneurship support programs.

While this article has focused on Maniobra's positive impact, it is necessary to delve into the possible negative spillovers. For example, the nature of salaried work could imply imposing structures that negatively impact the creative process for artists. Similarly, even though established salaries seek to compensate artists within a reasonable scale, their relationship with compensation structures within organizations and projects could create scenarios of inequality. Also, despite offering health insurance benefits, some health and wellness practices are still prohibitively expensive within these traditional insurance plans.

Another important area of research could address how innovation is generated in these cultural projects, be it in artistic practices, management, collaborations, or business models. Often the lack of economic stability forces creatives to place their projects into the mainstream to stay competitive. This could discourage innovation as artists seek to avoid the risk of adoption by audiences and philanthropic institutions. It would be interesting to identify whether economic stability has encouraged greater innovation among the participants, something that was preliminarily identified in the survey.

Initiatives like Maniobra, which have intersections with universal basic income (UBI) models or other economic support strategies with continuity, should establish mechanisms to measure impact in the long term, considering the three dimensions of well-being presented in this article. In the same way, it is important to understand how the participants prepare to face the economic, personal, and project sustainability after the closure of the program that lasts three years.

As a final reflection, it is important to highlight how this initiative, whose main objective has been to provide direct support to artists, has also facilitated the development of a research agenda on innovative alternatives to support creative work and the personal and economic condition of the artist. This article accentuates the



importance of entrepreneurship as an exercise of emancipation through artistic freedom beyond economic freedom. The research exercise has also made it possible to document and reflect on a process that can represent great learnings for the future in terms of much more democratic dynamics of collaboration/action between philanthropy and the cultural community.

It also makes it possible to strengthen the theoretical and practical bridges between artistic work and entrepreneurship as forms of action still under theoretical development. Finally, it represents an example of the importance of more action research, bridging researchers and practitioners, and the need to support entrepreneurial initiatives led by scholars who can execute innovative programs based on their research in multiple contexts.

Arts entrepreneurship requires a support ecosystem that recognizes the production dynamics of cultural activity. It also requires that initiatives be designed around user experience and the needs of entrepreneurs beyond the evaluation and reporting needs of funders. To a large extent, the philanthropic or social investment ecosystem has great potential to apply the same design, entrepreneurship, and innovation methodologies that we aspire to promote in artists and cultural entrepreneurs.

## References

- Beckman, G.D. (2014). What Arts Entrepreneurship Isn't. *Journal of Arts Entrepreneurship Research*, 1(1), 3-17.
- Bonilla, Y. (2020). The coloniality of disaster: Race, empire, and the temporal logics of emergency in Puerto Rico, USA. *Political Geography*, 20, 102181. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102181>.
- Callander, A. (2019). Artmaking as Entrepreneurship: Effectuation and Emancipation in Artwork Formation. *Artivate: A Journal of Entrepreneurship in the Arts*, 8 (2).
- Chang, W. J., Wyszomirski, M. (2015). What is Arts Entrepreneurship? Tracking the Development of its Definition in Scholarly Journals. *Artivate: A Journal of Entrepreneurship in the Arts*, 4(2), pp. 11-31.
- Essig, Linda. (2015). The ouroboros of arts entrepreneurship. *Artivate: A Journal of Entrepreneurship in the Arts* 4(1), pp. 3-7.
- Gaio, A., Joffre, A., Hernández-Acosta, J. & Dragicevic, M. (2023). Decolonising the Cultural Policy and Management Curriculum: Reflections from Practice. *Cultural Trends*, DOI: [10.1080/09548963.2023.2168515](https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2023.2168515).
- Gangi, Jonathan J. (2017). Towards consensus: suggested foundational building blocks for arts entrepreneurship research and pedagogy. *Artivate: A Journal of Entrepreneurship in the Arts*, 6(1), pp. 46-62.
- Kubacki, K. (2008). Jazz musicians: creating service experience in live performance. *Int. J. Contemp. Hosp. Manag.* 20, 303–313. doi: 10.1108/09596110810873516
- Hernández, J. (2023). Anuario Estadístico para el Sector Cultural y Creativo. San Juan: Centro de Economía Creativa. Retrieved at [www.labcultural.com](http://www.labcultural.com)
- Hernández, J. (2022). *Census of Cultural and Creative Work in Puerto Rico*. San Juan: Centro de Economía Creativa. Retrieved at [www.labcultural.com](http://www.labcultural.com).
- Hernández, J. (2022). *3ra Encuesta de Consumo y Participación Cultural en Puerto Rico*. San Juan: Centro de Economía Creativa. Retrieved at [www.labcultural.com](http://www.labcultural.com).
- Menger, P. (2006). Artistic Labor Markets: Contingent Work, Excess Supply and Occupational Risk Management. *Handbook of Economics of Art and Culture, Volume 1, Ch. 22*. Ed. Ginsburgh, V. & Throsby, D. Elsevier.
- Nguyen, H. & Sawang, S. (2016). Juggling or Struggling? Work and Family Interface and Its Buffers among Small Business Owners. *Entrepreneurship Research Journal*, 6 (2), pp. 207-246.
- Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*. (4th ed.). SAGE Publication, California.
- Patton, M. Q. (2003). *Qualitative Evaluation Checklist*. Retrieved from <https://wmich.edu/evaluation/checklists>.

### ARTIVATE 11.3

- Rindova, Violina, Barry, Daved, & Ketchen, David J. (2009) Introduction to special topic forum: Entrepreneurship as Emancipation. *The Academy of Management Review*, 34 (3), pp. 477-491.
- Ripsas, S. (1998). Towards an Interdisciplinary Theory of Entrepreneurship. *Small Business Economics*, 10, pp. 103-115.
- Rowan, J. (2010). *Emprendizajes en Cultura: Discursos, Instituciones y Contradicciones de la Empresarialidad Cultural*. Traficantes de Sueños: Spain.
- Shane, S. & Venkataraman, S. (2000). The Promise of Entrepreneurship as a Field of Research. *Academy of Management Review*, 25 (1), pp. 217-226.
- Shepherd, D.A., Wennberg, K., Suddaby, R., Wiklund, J., 2019. What Are We Explaining? A Review and Agenda on Initiating, Engaging, Performing, and Contextualizing Entrepreneurship. *Journal of Management*. 45 (1), 159–196.
- Stephan, U., 2018. Entrepreneurs' mental health and well-being: a review and research agenda. *Acad. Manag. Perspect.*, amp.2017.0001. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2017.0001>
- Sánchez-García, J., Vargas-Morua, G. & Hernández-Sánchez, B. (2018). Entrepreneurs' Well-being: A Bibliometric Review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9 (1696), pp. 1-19. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01696.
- Van Praag, M. & Van Ophem, H. (1995). "Determinants of Willingness and Opportunity to Start as an Entrepreneur," *Kyklos*, Wiley Blackwell, 48(4), pp. 513-540.
- White, J. (2019). A Theory of Arts Entrepreneurship as Organizational Attack. *Artivate: A Journal of Entrepreneurship in the Arts*, 8 (2). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34053/artivate.8.2.3>
- Willis, S., Neil, R., Mellick, C. & Wasley, D. (2019). The Relationships Between Occupational Demands and Well-being of Performing Artists: A Systematic Review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10 (393), pp. 1-20. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00393.
- Yin, R. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Sage Publications, California.

**Cover image:** Photo by Jo Kassis, <https://www.pexels.com/photo/photo-of-concrete-building-4633489/>