

Pink Capitalism:

Perspectives and Implications for Cultural Management



By Lorenzo Yeh (Junzuan Ye)

Master Program of Cultural Management

University of Barcelona

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I. Introduction

What is pink capitalism? How do we understand and analyze this socioeconomic phenomenon? What are the implications for cultural management and cultural managers?

The popularity of LGBTQ¹ social movement to some extent has given rise to the prevalence of pink capitalism, a form of capitalism combined with LGBTQ populations. The essay begins with an informative presentation of pink capitalism and several relevant business models: LGBTQ marketing; bars, nightclubs and hospitality; digitalization and applications. Throughout the second part, considering its interdisciplinarity and complexity, three different theoretical perspectives and a critical perspective from queer theory are discussed to better understand the phenomenon.

Implications for cultural management serve as a continuous critical reflection on pink capitalism and the previous perspectives. The core topics in this section revolve around the possibility and resulting business models of connecting the LGBTQ public to the arts, and the visibility of queer creative professionals. Illustrative case studies with cross-cultural perspectives are presented: *La federica*, a queer bar for queer art in Barcelona; *Q-Space*, a queer community-maker space in Beijing.

The essay explores the flexible boundaries among economics, business models, societies, gender and cultural management, with the aim to better understand the phenomenon of pink capitalism, LGBTQ culture, and in turn get to know ourselves better as cultural managers, who work with people and identities, crossing the borders beyond different cultures with insight, foresight, humanity and tolerance.

II. Pink capitalism: queer in a market place

What is pink capitalism?

Since the mid-1960s in the United States, there has been a documented shift in marketing practice from targeting the mainstream or mass mass market to including more specialized niche market (Engel, Fiorillo and Cayley, 1971). Following this trend, profit-driven businesses and marketers started to search for more potential “alternative” customers, giving rise to the popularity of niche

¹ Abbreviation of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transexuals and queers

market such as latino market and gay/lesbian market. (Peñaloza, 1996) Meanwhile, gay and lesbian social movement² in the United States and also in other western countries (i.e., the Netherlands and Spain in Europe) has also lead to raised awareness and increasing visibility of non-heterosexual presence.

Under these circumstances, pink capitalism came into being, marking a “new” market -- a market comprised of gays and lesbians, and people with non-heterosexual sexual orientation, known as LGBTQ -- was born. It was “new” because it had been previously, consciously or unconsciously, ignored by the society, enterprises and the media.

Pink capitalism, also known as pink money or pink economy, now is popular term to describe this socioeconomic and market phenomenon of including gays/lesbians and/or people with other non-mainstream sexual orientation to the market economy (Roque Ramírez and Horacio, 2011). It is the combination of capitalism, market economy and sexual orientation, where people are differentiated in sexual orientation and gays/lesbians - especially white, middle-class and urban gay men - are considered as target market, potential clients or affluent buyers.

With more presence of pink capitalism in the marketplace and different economic sectors, it is definitely influencing local businesses and social opinions, shaping consumption patterns of LGBTQ, and meanwhile having other tangible and intangible effects.

Representative patterns of pink capitalism

Pink capitalism can be traced in a variety of economic activities. Such examples can be found in corporate marketing practices, bars and nightclub business, hospitality business and other specialized gay/lesbian-oriented business. 3 typical patterns of pink capitalism are presented as follows with illustrative examples in Spain, China and other countries.

² This includes homophile movement and gay liberation movement. While homophile movement tries to improve the image of gays and lesbians, and in turn to be accepted and included to the mainstream society, gay liberationists' aim is to assert a new sense of identity based on the pride of being gay.

LGBTQ marketing:

Marketing targeted to LGBTQ people is one of the major forms of pink capitalism. Assuming that LGBTQ as their current or potential clientele, marketers are seeking to relate their marketing campaigns, completely or partially, to this segment. To achieve this goal, they adopt a series of different strategies.

1) Redirect general campaign or advertisement to gay/lesbian-friendly media



Ads in gay magazine Shangay. Source: <http://shangay.com/>

Evident examples can be found in local or international LGBTQ magazines or other offline/online platforms, such as *Têtu* and *Shangay* - two main gay magazines respectively in France and Spain. Among the advertisements placed on those platforms, major categories include travel, alcoholic beverages, entertainment, hair and skincare, luxury goods, pharmaceuticals, and fashion, etc.

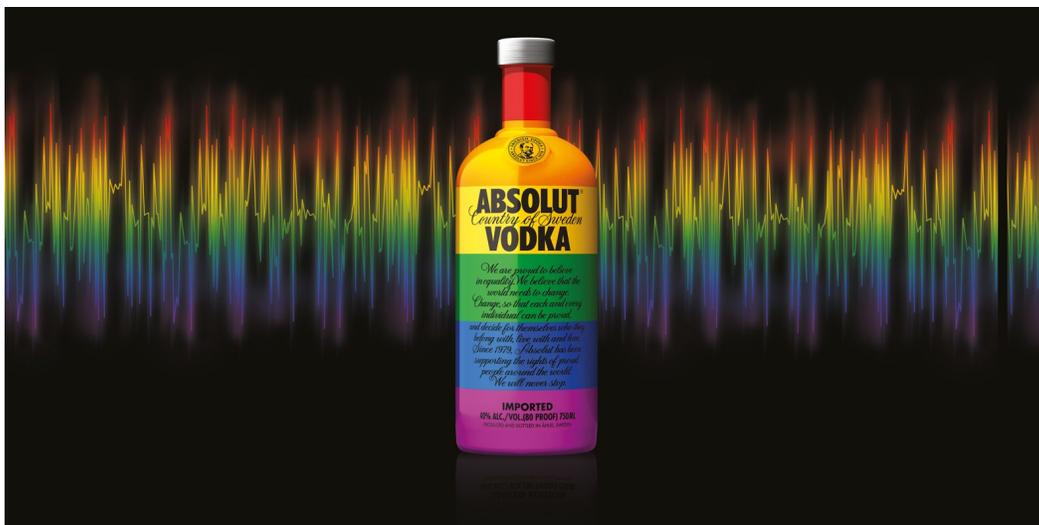
It is a cost-effective strategy for companies that intend to show their special interest in LGBTQ market, since no or few extra modification costs are added, despite the fact that general campaigns can result in unexpected reaction from the LGBTQ public -- when the information (i.e., sexist or normative) in the ads is considered inappropriate or offensive.

2) Modify marketing campaigns with LGBTQ-related elements

By adding gay/lesbian-friendly elements, marketing campaigns create a self-identifiable association with their customers. Placing gay/lesbian symbols like rainbow colors, seeking sponsorships of LGBT organizations and events, or involving gay/lesbian couples in the commercials are considered typical practices in this campaign category.

For instance, when same-sex marriage was approved in the United States in 2006, a variety of brands were taking advantage of the event by relating their campaigns to LGBTQ elements, which not only showed support for LGBTQ but also reinforced the gay/lesbian-friendly image among their customers.

3) Make LGBTQ-specific products or campaigns



Absolut Vodka. Source: <http://www.businessinsider.com/these-major-brands-support-gay-marriage-2013-6>

Absolut is a Swedish alcoholic spirits brand in the world and is marketed in 126 countries. It has been long time since the brand started showing an interest in the LGBTQ consumers, and considered LGBTQ as “trendsetters”. The special rainbow bottle selection is a LGBT-specific product as the brand’s tribute to the 30th anniversary of the Rainbow icon as symbol of LGBTQ movement.

Bars, nightclubs and hospitality

In major cities in the world nightlife and city tourism have become an integral part of urban lifestyle, and thus related business is logically viewed as an alternative profit-making logic. LGBTQ-specific business in this realm is emerging as well: gay and lesbian bars, nightclubs, themed restaurants and even gay hotels. In order to attract LGBTQ customers, they make every possible means to incorporate theme-related elements into their business models.



Source: Destination Bar

For example, in Beijing, the number of gay night destinations has been rising and a lot of bars or clubs are considering a “gay night” to attract LGBTQ customers (predominantly gay males). *Destination* is one of the oldest and most popular gay bar and club in Beijing. Located in Sanlitun, the business and nightlife center of East Beijing, the bar/club has become the most visited gay venue in Beijing.

In general, the popularity of gay bars, clubs and derivative hospitality business is closely related to the assumption of segmented gay customers as well as their specialized tastes (music types, ambient preferences or particular tribes), and also it is a result of urban geographic concentration since a lot of gay bars and clubs are geographically centralized in a specific neighborhood, which forms a convenient marketplace for gay-specific night business.

Digitalization and applications

The wave of business digitalization and social media has also spread to the field of pink capitalism, giving rise to a variety of new business opportunities related to LGBTQ in the virtual reality.

First of all, numerous social networking applications specialized in LGBTQ are in the market, especially for gay males.

Social networking applications for LGBTQ

Mainly for gay men	Mainly for lesbians	Mainly for transgender and others	No special distinction
Grindr Jack'D Planet Romeo Hornet Scruff Growlr Blued ...	HER (formerly Dattch) Hinge Bumble Wapa ...	Teadate	Tinder OkCupid ...

Prepared by the author

From the brief classification above, it is not hard to find that the majority of the applications are focusing on gay men, leaving an unequal situations for other LGBTQ groups. Besides, only few applications for transgender and others are in the market, which implies a socio-economic vacuum for transgender people.

In China, the coexistence of social media and severe censorship of LGBTQ content in publications and broadcast makes a way for LGBTQ applications. *Blued* is now China's most popular gay dating application, whose 27 million members surpasses even global gay dating application, Grindr.

“The consumer power of the gay community is robust, but it has always been neglected,” says BlueD CEO and founder Geng Le, a former police officer. “We want to tell people that the pink economy is very strong.”³

III. Theoretical perspectives and critiques

There are different ways to understand pink capitalism for its complexity and interdisciplinary nature. In this chapter, three different theoretical perspectives are presented to further discuss the phenomenon.

Perspective 1 - Social articulation of desire

Pink capitalism is an economic phenomenon based on social articulation of desire: people with the same cognitive codes (social identities) form their preferences and tastes through social interaction. (Cornwall, 1997)

As the counterposition to the classical and neoclassical economic presumption that individual preferences and tastes are predetermined in markets -- people know and are sure of their preferences, which forms the basis for economists to interpret individual's behavior -- the theory of social articulation of desire focuses on the cognitive and social formulation of individual preferences and tastes.

In this sense, an individual's preferences are not a constant factor. If individual preferences are unknown, an individual would trade information with other people to figure out which choice is superior or inferior by adopting standard statistical procedures. During this process, an individual identifies with people with same tastes, and share information and choices with them. LGBTQ share something in common in the society (i.e., non-mainstream preferences and common social pressure from the society); they identify with each other and socially relate to each other, and thus their individual preferences are somehow influenced by each other and evolve through the interactions within the same community. This explains the assumption of shared customer preferences of LGBTQ in the market.

³ How China's Pink Economy Is Leading the Country's Battle for LGBT Rights, Available at: <http://fortune.com/2017/01/11/china-lgbt-pink-dollar-gay-market-business/>

Social identity plays an important role in preference formation. From a critical point of view, there are two negative effects of social identities on this process. First, shared identities facilitate in community-building and categorization, in a way in which people are distinguished by some common traits. Second, outsiders (people who don't identify themselves as part of one of the tribes) might perceive biased image of the formed categories and make "illusory correlations" (Richard, 1997) based on stereotypes: the deed of discovering false correlations between LGBTQ and other traits

Perspective 2 - Niche market and segmentation

Pink capitalism is also a marketing phenomenon. A niche market is marketing concept referring a subset of the general market, which is closely related to a specific market segment based on shared characteristics. In the realm of pink capitalism, especially in LGBTQ marketing practice, LGBTQ is seen as a customer segmentation.

Marketers and business operators assume that this segment to be rich and loyal: 1) gays and lesbians have on average more income compared to their heterosexual counterparts; 2) they are childless resulting more disposable income; 3) they are aesthetics-sensitive and considered to have high brand loyalty. (Gluckman and Reed, 1993) The business is seeing gay and lesbian customers as a previously-ignored and potential market.

Some scholars have a different opinion in this respect. For instance, Fugate (1993) doesn't consider LGBTQ as a qualified market segment since this group doesn't fulfil the traditional standard of identifiability, accessibility and sufficient size of a market segment. However, Lisa (1996) holds an opposite viewpoint affirming that LGBTQ are self-identifiable and accessible since they are active in the market, the media and social movement (at least in the United States). She also thinks that LGBTQ marketing is a manifestation of LGBTQ social movement in the marketplace.

Specialized marketing services targeted to LGBTQ customers are also growing. In the United States, LGBTQ-specialized marketing services are provided by companies including *Community Marketing & Insights*, *C+R Research Services*, *Cypher Research*, *Focus Pointe Global*, *New American Dimensions*, *Research Now*, *YouGov*.⁴ In Spain, *LirLur LGBT marketing*, based in Madrid,

⁴ Results from GreenBook Directory, Available at: <http://www.targetmarketingmag.com/article/Market-focus-gays-lesbians-28746/all/>

Barcelona and Tel Aviv, is offering marketing services and strategies oriented to the LGBTQ market for national and international brands.

Perspective 3 - Night time economy

There is also a close connection between pink capitalism and night time economy.

The term was first used in the work of the academics associated with Charles Landry’s creative cities research organization Comedia, and in 1990 appeared in John Montgomery’s article on urban cultural planning. (Shawn, 2013) “the Night Time Economy refers to a range of leisure activities that are predominantly, *if not exclusively, consumed between 18.00 (6pm) and 06.00 (6am).*”⁵

It was created in order to ‘sell’ cultural production and its economic benefits in the night to local and national authorities in the UK (Hadfield, 2006), and has become a popular yet controversial term in economic studies of alcohol and leisure industries at night.

Main Categories	Activities
Core Night Time Economy	Drink, food and entertainment
Non-Core Night Time Economy	Service activities: retail trading (excluding liquor), hospitality and infrastructure, etc.
Supply Night Time Economy	Supply chain activities which support the previous two categories

Source: Research Report The Australian Night Time Economy 2015

Major patterns of pink capitalism -- bars, nightclubs, themed restaurants, hotels and other LGBTQ-specific business - form part of a city’s night time economy. They are somehow interdependent in big cities with popular nightlife scenes and higher level of LGBTQ acceptance.

⁵ Definition of night time economy. Research Report The Australian Night Time Economy 2015, Available at: <http://lordmayors.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Australian-Night-Time-Economy-2009-to-2015-FINAL.pdf>

On the one hand, Flourishing night time economy makes fertile soil for alternative night business models to emerge, since business leaders see fierce competition and various opportunities in a rich nightlife scene. Therefore, they have to think out of the box in order to enhance their competence in the nightlife market, and LGBTQ-specific night business appears as a possible and profit-making solution. On the other hand, a variety of LGBTQ-themed night business models also contribute to a prosperous and diversified night economy. By attracting LGBTQ clients, night economy grows with enlarged client base and possibly increasing turnover. Besides, successful LGBTQ night business helps to generate brand effect and establish reputation for the city's nightlife, which is a city branding strategy adopted by some western major cities, "gay destinations" (i.e., Amsterdam, Barcelona and London).

A critical perspective from queer theory

Pink capitalism as a socioeconomic phenomenon is gaining increasing popularity and discursive importance in LGBTQ-accepted western societies as well as some emerging economies in Asia.

China is also keeping up with this trend. *"The country's so-called 'pink economy' is currently valued at 300 billion US dollars per annum, making it the world's third largest after Europe and the U.S. (Globally, the LGBTQ community is estimated to spend more than \$3 trillion each year.)"*⁶ Indeed, it serves as an alternative economic momentum as well as a social force, which to some extent increases the visibility of LGBTQ community in the mainstream society.

From a critical perspective, its validity and controversial impacts are being questioned by some LGBTQ activists and academics such as queer theorists.

Queer theory⁷ originates in a series of post-structuralist theories which put categories and social codes (identities) in question. The core propositions of queer theory can be traced in the book of Judith Butler (1990), *"Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity"*.

"Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being"

⁶ How China's Pink Economy Is Leading the Country's Battle for LGBT, Available at: <http://fortune.com/2017/01/11/china-lgbt-pink-dollar-gay-market-business/>

⁷ "Queer" finds its roots in British English, which was originally used pejoratively, meaning "strange" and "peculiar". There is no current agreed definition of queer, but in many cases it is used as a shorthand term for gays and lesbians, or in a broad sense, any mismatches of gender, sex and sexuality.

The theory emphasizes the performative nature of genders under normative circumstances, and thus denaturalizes and criticizes the constructed gender norms: binarism of masculinity and femininity, heterosexuality and homosexuality. Therefore, from a critical perspective of queer theory, pink capitalism is considered as a normative game which reinforces the current unequal gender positioning and also generates new stereotypes of LGBTQ.

For instance, a lot of LGBTQ marketing campaigns and LGBTQ-specific business (bars and clubs) mainly focus on a specific type of customers that are white, urban, middle-class gay men, which intensifies the gender, racial and class hierarchy within the LGBTQ community: those who are lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, intersexual and colored are ignored. Divisions and discriminations within the community are formed: i.e., lesbians stay clear of gays, and vice versa. Gay social applications also deteriorate biases even among gay men. Fat, effeminate or Asian gay men and transgenders are sometimes discriminated against by other apparently more masculine and white counterparts.

Also, the image of successful, accepted and affluent gays and lesbians also creates an illusion behind which appear the real problems faced by the community: inequality, discrimination and violence still prevail in a lot of places in the world.

IV. Implications for cultural management

As cultural managers, or widely speaking, as professionals in the culture and arts, what can we learn from the discourse of pink capitalism? What implications do these economic activities related to LGBTQ entail for cultural managers? How can we, if possible apply these to our professional practice?

Connect the LGBTQ customers to the arts

Pink capitalism, in nature, is an economic and profitable logic targeted to LGBTQ people: by making specialized marketing campaigns, initiating LGBTQ-specific business and proposing customized value propositions to LGBTQ customers, companies are realizing their profit-making logics and meanwhile giving possible support and empowerment of LGBTQ -- despite some critiques already discussed in the previous chapter. As cultural managers, can we apply a similar logic to the LGBTQ

public and connect them to the arts? There are two aspects to be considered when before this question.

Is queer affinity for the arts reliable?

Is it reliable the common belief that LGBTQ have more innate talent and passion for the arts and take more active part in artistic events than others? The study of Lewis and Seaman (2004) examines the correlations between sexual orientation and attendance in artistic events (museums, performing arts and concerts).

They suggest that lesbians, gays and bisexuals (LGBs) are much more likely to participate in the arts than their demographically-similar heterosexual counterparts. Demographic differences and accessibility of artistic events to LGBs contribute to the community's higher attendance. First, LGBs are on average more highly educated and more probable of being childless city residents, which give easier access to the cultural and artistic events; second, generally speaking, artistic events encourage creativity and openness, and welcome more LGBs compared to other events (i.e., general and sports). Nevertheless, LGBs higher attendance in arts cannot be fully explained by higher innate talent.

Despite the fact that any generalization of LGBTQ can be inaccurate considering the diversity within the community, their research provides significant implications for cultural managers: there are large potentials of connecting the LGBTQ public to our events or projects; we should proactively seek connections with LGBTQ through our ongoing and future projects.

Controversy

One might also sense the controversy of this question: as a cultural manager, or broadly speaking any critical and culturally-sensitive individual, shouldn't one treat everybody else equally and oppose to any tag or categorization? It is undeniable that every individual should be seen equal and free of tags, which is why some stigmatized patterns of pink capitalism are criticized. By principle, we should treat everybody equally, but meanwhile we also need to recognize the differences -- we are not living in a utopia afterall.

Therefore, our logic should try to avoid the errors in pink capitalism. We are addressing the reality of diversity equally -- being LGBTQ as part of the personal reality or preferences -- not favoring only

one specific type of sexual orientation or preferences (like gay men in LGBTQ marketing) nor forming new stigma about LGBTQ people.

Case study of La Federica: a queer bar for queer art in Barcelona

How do we connect LGBTQ customers to the arts? In general, as mentioned above, cultural events welcome LGBTQ more than other public events. Actually, there are a variety of existing LGBTQ-themed cultural events (i.e., queer film festivals), in the form of LGBTQ-specific cultural products. In this case, cultural events or festivals are designed and implemented in order to meet preferences and needs of the LGBTQ community.

Another logic is to combine current LGBTQ-oriented business models (the cases of pink capitalism) with the arts, which is adopted by a queer bar in Barcelona, La Federica.

About La Federica project

Located in the Poble Sec neighborhood and opened in 2012 by the previous founder Diego Federico Garcia, La Federica used to be a gay/lesbian-friendly restaurant. The initial project of La Federica restaurant didn't seem to work very well, and was then transformed into a queer-themed bar 2 years ago, which has been so far co-operated by Albert Villaplana (Albert V.) and Albert Macaya (Albert M.), "the Alberts".

Their objective is to establish a meeting point for the queer community in Barcelona with tolerant and somehow alternative ambient, which is different from the mainstream gay atmosphere in "*the Gaixample*"⁸. The venue is characterised with the complexity of a lovely bar-resto, cozy and minimalistically-designed interior space with tables and chairs, as well as a small patio in the backyard.

Currently, "the Alberts" are in charge of the bar's daily operation: bar-resto, parties and events. As with other bar business, employees here are generally part-time workers: "the Alberts" work full-time only on the weekends when parties are organized, while other employees including bartenders, DJs and doormen usually work on a part-time basis.

⁸ "*The Gaixample*" refers to the central area in Barcelona's Eixample district, which forms a dense concentration of LGBTQ population and related gay-specific business such as boutiques, bars and nightclubs.



La Federica. Source: La Federica

In terms of customers, 90% of them are LGBTQ, aged between twenties and fifties, and the majority of the LGBTQ customers are white gay men (Spanish, Latin American or of other European nationality). However, thanks to its open and queer-friendly ambient, La Federica also has attracted a number of lesbian, bisexual, transgender and some heterosexual clients. In spite of its LGBTQ-friendly reputation, Barcelona is still unfortunately characterized by the separation between gays and lesbians within the LGBTQ community, which is evidently reflected in the bar business -- the division of gay bars and lesbian bars. La Federica is one of the only venues in Barcelona, where every genre can be mixed: gays and lesbians, heterosexuals and homosexuals, locals and visitors, as well as people from different cultural backgrounds and ethnicities.

Combining bar business with queer art exhibitions

As a queer bar, usual events organized at La Federica are parties with various themes related to but not limited to queer: drag queens, special outfits and different DJ sessions. A series of themed parties not only help the bar to build tighter relationships with its customers, but they also generate remarkable income periodically.

The idea of organizing art exhibitions at La Federica was proposed by Albert V., who is currently managing all the events organized there. Apart from his job at La Federica, Albert V. is a freelancing graphic designer. Two years and half ago, he discovered the potentials of the space with a large scale of white walls, and started to materialize the idea of organizing queer art exhibitions in collaboration with his artist friends.

The protocol of exhibition organization at La Federica begins with artist selection. Some artists directly apply to exhibit their works at La Federica, while others are hunted by Albert V. through galleries, art fairs and social media. Exhibition promotion starts approximately 15 days before exhibition openings, adopting social media as the major platform (Facebook and Instagram) where all event-related information is published. Exhibition openings with DJ sessions usually fall on thursdays, when people are in the mood for weekends and in the meantime there are not as many parties going on as on Fridays and weekends.



Exhibitions at La Federica. Source: La Federica



Exhibition "Girl, You've got an Expo". Source: La Federica

Each exhibition are organized on a monthly basis with different artists. Their artworks differ in styles and techniques but share the common point, queer themes. "Girl, You've got an Expo" is one of La Federica's most successful exhibition. Curated by *Núria Jus*, the recent exhibition in November presented visual works of 25 illustrators -- many of them are internationally recognized -- under the theme of "RuPaul Drag Race", a popular American drag queen reality competition TV program. Each of them needed to conceptualize and materialize a visual work based on the image and their perception of one of the drag queens on the program. The exhibition and related parties attracted a great number of customers. It was so popular that even *RuPaul*⁹ started to help to promote the exhibition.

⁹ *RuPaul Andre Charles* is an American actor/host, drag queen, television personality, and singer/songwriter, as well as the producer and host of the reality competition series *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

Feasibility, challenge and opportunity

The objective of queer art exhibitions at La Federica is community-friendly and vanguardista: presenting and promoting artists with different styles and techniques, especially emerging queer artists. Therefore, “the Alberts” always try to offer more to participating artists by allowing them to organize small-sized performances and other exhibition-related activities. Besides, artists are not charged to exhibit their works and own the entire income of their artwork sales.

After all, La Federica is not a gallery, gaining profit from artwork selling. Bar business is their major focus. However, from a money perspective, queer art exhibitions can be understood as an “event marketing” strategy to retain their current customers, attract potential customers, generate extra consumption at the bar-resto. The bar’s marketing strategies also consist in active collaboration with other popular queer parties in the city and national or international LGBTQ non-governmental organizations. A number of art exhibitions and similar events at La Federica have been co-organized and co-promoted with collaborators.

Organizing queer art exhibition, according to Albert V., is an opportunity since current customer feedbacks on those exhibitions are remarkably positive, which makes them willing to recommend the bar to their friends. In comparison, the real difficulty lies in the art exhibition itself. Barcelona is a city with intense cultural agenda. Therefore, how to create high-quality cultural and artistic contents in response to a variety of tastes and preferences is a challenge for all.

Increase the visibility of queer professionals in the arts

A self-reflection on the definition and related responsibilities of cultural managers is necessary. As cultural managers, first of all, we are working with different forms of culture and arts: they differ each other in genres (fine art, performance, literature, etc.), in origins (Asian, European or Latin American) or in historical periods (Ancient, modern or contemporary). Also, the interdisciplinary nature of our study and professional practice also requires us to be capable of working with people from different disciplines (artistic or non-artistic), cultural backgrounds and identities.

Therefore, apart from having sharp insight to cultures and arts, it is also important for cultural managers to be aware of the diversity and combat the normativity and the stereotypes of heterosexuality or homosexuality, which are shaped by the mainstream society (also, appeared in

the mainstream form of pink capitalism): In this case, increase the visibility of queer professionals in the arts.

Case study of Q-Space: a queer community-maker space in Beijing

Since 2016, located in the central and historical “*Hutong*”¹⁰ area in Beijing, Q-Space has been striving to increase the visibility of queer creative professionals, including queer visual artists, writers, designers and queer activists. The emerging community-maker space is situated in a traditional house with a lovely courtyard, hidden, underground, yet vibrant and avant-garde, providing home as well as a workplace for one of the most active and edgy queer and feminist artistic community in Beijing.

Mao Yi is one of the founders and long-term residents of the space. She quitted her last job as an architect, and started to work on the community-friendly project.



Q-Space. Source: Q-Space

¹⁰ “*Hutong*” (胡同) in Chinese means small alleys or narrow streets, which commonly appear in Beijing and other northern Chinese cities.

“At Q-Space, you feel that inner passion people have for their chosen subject, and you get to dip into those topics and engage with the queer community. Gender, sexuality, public perception of the community – all these things can be discussed and are a source of inspiration.”¹¹

The objective of Q-Space is to build a community that connects diverse groups, grassroots movements, queer artists, NGOs, researchers as well as other organizations; a community where everyone has access to the tools, knowledge and resources that enable them to make possible changes in the society with special focus on diversity and the empowerment of LGBTQ and women.

In order to achieve this objective, Q-Space has been carrying out a series of events and projects within and outside the space, ranging from life drawing to filmmaking, from maker club to language corner, with involvement of different queer creative professionals. For example, queer life drawing classes have been gathering a number of participants and models, queer and non-queer, dealing with a variety of themes that can be sometimes provoking and controversial for the mainstream Chinese society: i.e., gender nonconformity and masturbation. They also organized TransChina, a meeting for transgender activists in China as well as audiovisual projects including a documentary shooting project about everyday life of queer people in Beijing.

Rainbow Ride project

Among all the queer and creative projects of Q-Space, one of the most outstanding project is the Rainbow Ride. It appears as an art installation, a pink-colored electric three-wheeled vehicle -- a tuk tuk covered with rainbows with seats in the back.

Rainbow Ride is definitely challenging and provoking the city's mainstream and hetero-predominant atmosphere. It has been circling around the whole city, attracting eyes of passers-by. Curious participants can climb on the back of the tuk tuk, sit on it and write about their life experiences. A white sheet attached to the frame can be also used for film projection. So far, this project has been presented at several LGBTQ events in Beijing with a variety of diverse stories from different people.

¹¹ This queer graphic artist is pushing boundaries in Beijing, Available at:<http://www.timeoutbeijing.com/features/LGBT/161970/This-queer-graphic-artist-is-pushing-boundaries-in-Beijing.html>



Rainbow Ride. Source: Q-Space

The aim was to provoke the norms and raise awareness of gender diversity. With the circulation of Rainbow Ride, different queer artists have also been dedicating their creative ideas related to this project. Some proposed to make an art exhibition of this project, others have been working on related pop-up events (pop-up cinemas and pop-up storytelling for children)

Feasibility, challenge and opportunity

Q-Space is a queer community-maker space and in order to make the community grow sustainably, the space has been adopting a “pay as you feel like” donation policy for its daily operation. It takes a form of “modern utopia”: the events are supported by a number of volunteers; food sharing and pop-up markets are organized regularly.

Most of participants have their job apart from their dedication to the maker space. Since it’s a small space run by a group of passionate queer artists and activists, so far it has been sustainable within the community and keeps growing. As a social and community-based project, it is effective to raise the visibility of queer creative professionals within and outside the community.

However, running a queer project in China is somehow risky and progressive at the same time, especially in the capital city of Beijing. Beijing is an international city with profound cultural and historical roots, a juxtaposition of traditions and modernity. On the one hand, traditional and socio-political climate impede gender diversity and emerging progressive cultural atmosphere, posing a challenge to the visibility of queer community; on the other hand, a growing number of open-minded youngsters, expats as well as LGBTQ activists have been instrumental in the process of making sociocultural change, although it takes courage, time and patience.

V. Conclusions

In general, pink capitalism is a subgenre of capitalistic economy incorporating LGBTQ populations as current or potential customers. The major positive impacts of pink capitalism consist in remarkable economic benefits gained from LGBTQ-specific business models, as well as possible socioeconomic inclusion of LGBTQ in the marketplace and the society; however, from a critical perspective, it also leads to the formation of new stereotypes and bias within and outside the LGBTQ community.

As cultural managers, it is necessary for us to reflect on this socioeconomic phenomenon critically. Besides, a self reflection on the role of cultural managers is required: it is our mission to propose constructive solutions and develop cultural projects that help to combat social stigma and prejudices of LGBTQ and enhance gender and cultural diversity. In order to achieve this, it is important to consider how to connect the LGBTQ public to the arts and how to increase the visibility of queer professionals in the arts.

Organizing queer-specific cultural events and festivals is the major way to connect the LGBTQ public to the arts. The case study of *La Federica* shows the possibility of transforming a conventional pink capitalistic logic to a more community-friendly and artistic model, which connects LGBTQ customers to the arts and meanwhile serves as an “event marketing” strategy. Speaking of increasing the visibility of queer professional in the arts, the case of *Q-space* serves as a successful example in the sociocultural context of Beijing. It manages to provide queer creative professionals with a community-based space with a variety of ongoing queer-friendly cultural projects.

However, both cases above deal with small-scaled projects. *La Federica* is a small bar with art exhibitions as a supplementary service, while *Q-Space* is a small-sized and not-for-profit queer maker space. In terms of feasibility, both projects turn out feasible because they are small-scaled (implying lower fixed costs) and somehow self-sufficient (implying operational costs). Besides, a growing network of customers or community around the project is also a favorable factor in both cases. Community-building is a crucial process for successful queer-themed cultural projects, and only in this way can projects grow in a sustainable manner.

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Annex - Interview with La Federica: Questions

1. When was La Federica opened? What are the motivation and the story behind?
2. Who are the founders? Who are currently working at La Federica? What do they do respectively? Do they have other jobs apart from La Federica?
3. In terms of customers, are they generally LGBTQ? Describe your impression on the frequent customers and the general ambient at La Federica?
4. Usually what kinds of events are organized at La Federica?
5. When did the bar start to organize artistic events and exhibitions? What was the motive? Who is in charge of the organization?
6. Is there a protocol of event organization? Can you share with us one of your experiences?
7. So far have you received any feedback on the artistic events from the public?
8. In your opinion, what are the difficulties and opportunities of organizing artistic events and exhibitions in a LGBTQ-friendly bar?