8.2   Critiques of quality management in cultural mediation

Quality management is a business administration approach adopted by European managers in the 1990s. Although one now encounters "quality" as an evaluative term used to describe suitability for purpose or degree of excellence applied to any form of process – up to including "quality of death" – until about twenty years ago its use in German was chiefly limited to the context of products (goods and services). The spread of this term can be seen as an outcome of an increasing trend towards the economization of all areas of life. As we have shown in connection with the → *critique of the concept of the target group*, here again one must ask whether a quality imperative in cultural mediation implies that cultural mediation is some form of commodity. Arguing against such a construction would be an understanding of cultural mediation as an autonomous cultural practice aiming at the production of relationships, the opening of spaces for actions and questioning and changing existing conditions – and something which, like the arts that provide its subject matters, does not lend itself to a normative approach to quality.

Thus far, it has been rare for increased funding for facilities engaging in cultural mediation to be made contingent on the implementation of a quality management system. A 2010 survey study looking at quality development measures in German cultural mediation found that people working in institutions with formalized monitoring in place have less time for substantive, conceptual and educational work (→ *BKJ 2010*). Thus quality management can lead to deterioration of "quality", undermining motivation and structures.

The definition of verifiable criteria by an external body and the coupling of subsidies with measured results is also having an influence on the content of cultural mediation. The 2010 study cited above, for example, reports that the application of common quality assessment parameters in cultural mediation, such as "[…] project organization, target group potential, networking, effect on the public, […], sustainability", can lead to negative assessments of experimental and open-ended projects, because the open structures of such projects do not provide much data suitable for assessment in these categories (→ *BKJ 2010*). Conversely, there is a risk that precipitous conformity on the part of the education practitioners could, by causing them to factor such parameters into their planning, impede

→ *criticism of the target group concept* see Text 2.2

→ *BKJ 2010* http://www.bkj.de/ fileadmin/user_upload/ documents/Qualitaet/ BKJ_Studie_Qualitaet_web.pdf [21.2.2013]; see Resource Pool MFE080201.pdf
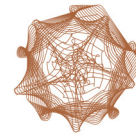
the development of new concepts and encourage them to adhere to the path entailing the least risk.

Practitioners and researchers in cultural mediation are working on multidimensional approaches to assessing quality in the field. However, a review of the literature in this area suggests that most of them are basing their evaluation criteria on the → *reproductive understanding* of cultural mediation's function, the → l*egitimization of the arts as a universal educational good* or → *target group orientation*, without questioning those norms. Critical-deconstructive approaches to cultural mediation and those which are aimed at broadening the institutions themselves are off the radar, so to speak. Thus who holds the power to define these parameters lies in each case remains a key question in the discussion about quality development.

→ *reproductive understanding of cultural mediation's purpose* see Text 5.2

→ *legitimization of the arts as a universal educational good* see Text 6.5

→ *target-group orientation* see Texts in 2. Cultural Mediation for whom?