

CHALLENGES OF MANAGING CULTURAL PROJECTS IN AN URBAN SETTING - CASE OF SLATINA CITY

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ABSTRACT:The rehabilitation of a historical monument in Slatina and the elaboration of a strategic development plan for promoting intercultural, interactive events was a great challenge. To achieve such ambitious target, we realised a socio-cultural analysis at municipal level and we identified a number of strategic issues. The assessment of the Strategic Plan's impact on the city of Slatina for the next five years is performed according to certain indicators proposed in the light of the culture's role in development and will consider elements of economy, tourism, society, education, youth and multiculturalism. Also, it has been taken into account the European Commission's recommendations for the development of local cultural policies formulated in the *Agenda 21 for Culture*.

KEYWORDS:heritage, multiculturalist, intercultural, management of challenge, development.

1. INTRODUCTION

The "Victoria" Intercultural Workshop was founded within the project of the same name run by the Municipality of Slatina in partnership with the "Evrís" Foundation in Iceland and funded from EEA Grants by the PA16/ RO12 programme – "Preservation and revitalisation of cultural and natural heritage".[2] In September 2010, the building of "Cinema Victoria" entered the asset of the City Council of Slatina, which restored it and suggested setting up an intercultural workshop where any cultural, artistic or social expression, irrespective of the culture, ethnicity or the particular features of the one who supports it, may find a place to manifest itself. The "Victoria" Intercultural Workshop aims at being a cultural institution that will provide cultural, artistic and recreational services, by following non-discrimination principles, by ensuring access and participation to education, culture, entertainment and recreation to all citizens, regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, ethnicity, religion or culture. [1]

2. THE INTERCULTURAL WORKSHOP'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND RELATED MEASURES

Between 8-20 April 2016 was applied online a questionnaire to identify categories of cultural consumption in Slatina, cultural activities involving them and the frequency of participation in events, electronically distributed to the general public via email, networks socializing websites. Questionnaire answered a number of 50 people.

The analysis of responses to questionnaires showed that 50% of respondents that go "Less" at the library, while 38% never go to the museum. This is not surprising, because this answer is in line with national situation. The causes are multiple: on lack of interest in reading the classic book is often replaced by e-books or audiobooks and museum visits are rare due to the lack of thematic exhibitions of general interest. We believe that the activities we propose in the strategic plan of Intercultural Workshop "Victoria" will develop appetite for reading and increase public interest in museums, especially for occasional exhibitions. Below, we presented the categories of frequency and type of events they are participating in the municipality.

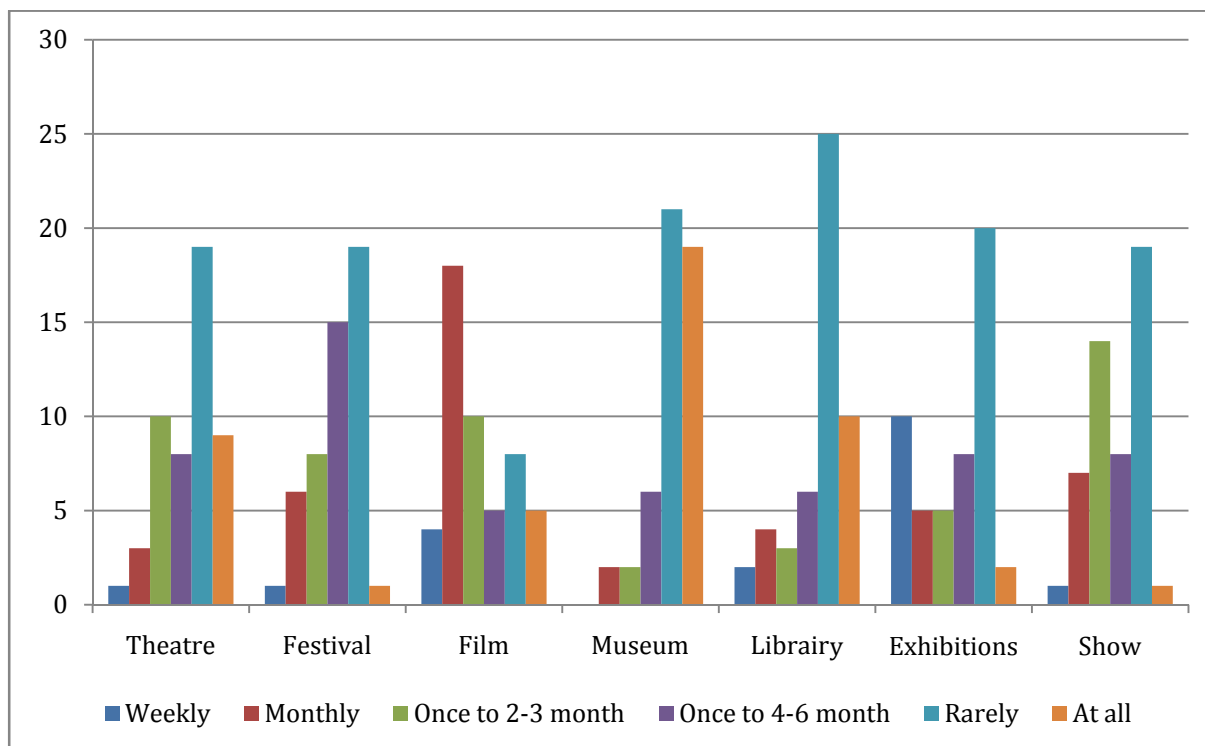


Figure 1 Answer of question: How often you go to...?

Based on a socio-cultural analysis at municipal level, a number of strategic issues have been identified, namely:

- unequal access to culture (centre-periphery, social affiliation) and low interest in cultural participation;
- precariousness and lack of sustainability of the cultural sector;
- a need to encourage creation and creativity, to maintain and develop cultural diversity and intercultural collaboration (of content, forms of expression, approaches etc.);
- a low level of international cooperation, limited connection and involvement of the cultural sector in Slatina on the international stage, lack of competitiveness in Europe;
- limited cooperation within the cultural sector, especially between institutions and organisations and between the cultural sector and other sectors;
- outdated perception of the cultural sector as a side field of activity, the lack of public ownership of culture as a development and regeneration factor;
- underdeveloped infrastructure compared to the existing needs;
- culture quality and cultural operators professional abilities vary greatly within the sector, updating methods and developing work skills are needed;
- lack of a culture of using public space;
- low level of cultural communication professionalism, lack of effective promotion systems.

These issues are likely to be settlement by the measures and actions the “Victoria” Intercultural Workshop’s activity plan will provide for the next five years.

2.1 Increased access to culture, educating the cultural events consumer audience

Under this priority, we have identified a number of issues, namely: concentration of cultural offer in premises located within the city centre; reduced cultural participation for neighbourhood residents, especially for disadvantaged people, for groups of physically disabled, seeing or hearing impaired people, etc.; poor cultural education which generates nondiscretionary consumption, decreased ability to filter information; waste of creative potential due to reduced concern of cultural actors to discover and promote talent; cultural producers’ reduced concern to generate specific audience programmes dedicated to increasing public education etc.; the need for a research/ data base on cultural participation in the city, since it was found that the cultural consumption and expenditure allocated by individuals/

families to culture are generally reduced, and the audience for art events belongs most often to one social class (traditional culture consumers). To solve these problems we recommend the following actions, some of which may constitute activities that can take place in the “Victoria” Intercultural Workshop:

- training programs for cultural operators in audience development techniques;
- interinstitutional programmes to encourage public participation in a wide range of cultural events;
- issuing cultural vouchers for disadvantaged people;
- presence of posters for high profile cultural events which would generate a sense of normality regarding cultural consumption;
- a system of collecting data and annual surveys on cultural needs and cultural participation in the city, in order to match the offer with the consumer demand;
- development of arts education programmes to cultivate interest in culture, to stimulate creativity and participation, which would increase cultural demand, including partnerships and special programmes in schools;
- applying the adapted model of Sibiu: cultural events for the general public (free of charge) in order to increase access to culture (street theatre performances, concerts, etc.)

2.2 Sustainability of cultural sector

Under this priority, we have identified a number of issues, namely: scarcity of cultural operators, given the low number of funding sources and the limited resources in the sector; the allocation of funds for culture from the local budget does not reflect the needs, the priorities of the sector, or the quality of the projects but the political vulnerability of the funds distribution, etc.; lack of assuming culture as a sector with potential in the development of the city and reduced support from the economic environment for cultural activities; the cultural act is still centralised/institutionalised; the increased number of interdisciplinary cultural practices, the intersection with other fields, the change of methods and area of intervention require a redefinition of culture at a strategic level; cooperation between the Olt County Department of Culture, the “Eugen Ionescu” Cultural Centre and the “Victoria” Intercultural Workshop; cultural operators’ reduced capacity to attract European funds, to generate their own income, to raise funds from the community and to imagine alternative operating systems (sharing); the need for accountability from cultural operators to ensure the sustainability of cultural practices; lack of guarantee funds for the contribution to EU funded projects; reduced availability from the public to pay for cultural activities – reduced rate of cultural consumption expenditure. To address these problems we recommended a series of interventions by the local government and the cultural actors active on the local market:

- increase of the local budget allocation for culture and improving the financing of cultural projects from the local budget;
- establishing clear criteria for cultural productions selection, establishing funding priorities in line with the cultural objectives proposed by the development strategy of the municipality;
- creating a framework for multiannual financing (applying indicators from the *Societal*⁴ manual, which would be gradually taken as indicators of good practice and as added value for projects financed from the local budget);
- taking responsibility for the role culture plays in the sustainable development of the community, incorporating culture as a cross-cutting priority in local policies;
- establishing a fund for co-financing projects supported by EU funds (having particularly NGOs and cultural institutions as beneficiaries);
- introduction of a mechanism of financial support for cultural projects from local fees/taxes, similar to the “percent for art” system type;
- encouraging the involvement of the private sector in culture through financial support and partnerships, through tax incentives, etc.;
- attracting foreign investors through international partnerships;

- communication campaigns to encourage support for culture (which appeals to local pride) – by individuals through the 2% mechanism, by crowdfunding platforms, volunteering etc., by companies through CSR actions, including the creation of crowdfunding platforms;
- development of cultural incubators funded by the government, supporting entrepreneurship in culture and creative industries through tax incentives.

2.3 Encouraging creation - production of new cultural forms

The problems and needs identified within this priority are: festival-like transformation of local culture and support only for certain types of activities and parts of the cultural act; superficial contacts and cooperation; the need to constantly support creators including their artistic mobility; lack of recent art research and archiving. To solve them, we proposed a series of measures such as:

- promoting participatory cultural productions;
- taking new directions and strategic priorities defined in the city by the public institutions;
- development of a programme/research projects on recent art history in Slatina, in the regional and national context;
- developing a cultural calendar of the city, which would allow for an overview of the cultural program annually held in spaces of culture, including the “Eugen Ionescu” Cultural Centre and the new “Victoria” Intercultural Workshop, correlating the activities of various cultural operators to cover the entire year with specific events;
- public archiving of past events;
- more dynamic promotion of museums, their schedule becoming more attractive through temporary exhibitions, etc.;
- reducing the city hall’s role of cultural events organiser, increasing its playing a role of facilitator and financier;
- creation of a fund to support the mobility of artists and cultural products, including encouraging international co-production practices to strengthen lasting relations with the international scene and the development of collaborative professional practices (not only the import of events);
- recognising excellence in the arts/ culture by organising award giving galas;
- the local government and business people’s acknowledgement of the need to support cultural projects throughout the entire cultural cycle (creation, production, dissemination/ presentation, reception/ consumption, reflection/ education);
- supporting the development of a culturally diverse and balanced agenda that would encourage creation, education, production, not only dissemination and cultural consumption as it frequently happens due to the tendency of festivalisation.

2.4 Developing international cooperation and the European dimension of the cultural sector in Slatina

The problems identified under this priority are concerned with: low level of international cooperation in the sense that the international dimension is reflected in inviting foreign artists; low international mobility of artists and their works; low participation in international networks; import of events. The recommendations to overcome these problems relate to:

- developing the European/ international dimension of the cultural sector by taking it as a priority for the funding programme, including support/ encouragement of participation in European networks and encouraging international co-production;
- development of a mobility fund and a co-financing fund to encourage the participation of local actors in European projects and European cooperation, with a role in increasing the visibility of the local scene internationally, followed by attracting European funds [3];
- promoting cultural tourism through tourist packages linked to the cultural agenda, with the possibility of attracting international audiences (cooperation with travel agencies, which would include thematic cultural products in the tourism offer, collaboration with the Tourist Information Centre Slatina) [4];

- city marketing, focused on the cultural profile (art, lifestyle, hospitality, alternative spaces, free spirit, etc.)

2.5 Increasing intra and inter-sectorial cooperation

Under this priority, the following issues have been identified: low cooperation between different types of cultural actors, especially between public institutions and NGOs, hence the low number of partnerships; inadequate cooperation between the cultural sector and the business environment; modest European participation/ cooperation of cultural actors in Slatina; increasing the relevance of culture to other areas: urban regeneration, education and foreign affairs, social inclusion, etc. The measures and recommendations to overcome the highlighted problems concern:

- encouragement of partnership, collaboration and interdisciplinary practices for the funding programme from the local budget;
- facilitating the participation of local institutions/ organisations in European projects (mobility fund, co-financing European projects fund), including through regional cooperation with universities in Craiova;
- creating a platform for cooperation between the authorities, the business environment and the cultural one, including fostering the opening of the public sector to cooperation with the independent sector and encouraging co-production practices, through the allocation of funds for the projects of public cultural institutions.

2.6 The need for a new approach to culture as a vector of social transformation

The identified problems are limited to: the understanding and perception of the cultural sector is still in the old paradigm, as a peripheral area addressed to elites; therefore, in the absence of a redefinition/ update of the meaning of culture as a social act, the potential of culture for the development and welfare of the community is wasted; the need to identify a proper and specific way to approach culture; increased number of interdisciplinary cultural practices, intersection with other areas, changing methods and the area of intervention require a redefinition of culture and strategic level; the need for broad support and public acceptance of the new concept of culture, and the need for cultural operators accountability in order to achieve the sustainability of cultural practices. The recommendations and supporting measures aimed at overcoming the problems identified refer to:

- a strategic plan, such as the one for the “Victoria” Intercultural Workshop, to redefine culture, its role in society, the values it promotes and public commitment to this approach;
- a study on the assimilation potential of this approach by the cultural producers, the government, the public, etc.;
- addressing culture as a cross-cutting priority in local policies;
- create a platform for cooperation between cultural operators, communication/ awareness campaigns;
- the existence of a permanent mechanism for cooperation and communication between cultural operators and the local government.

2.7 Development of cultural infrastructure

The lack of spaces dedicated exclusively to culture is a national problem. [5] For Slatina, we have identified a number of issues, namely: most independent cultural organisations rent spaces, while institutions own spaces and facilities without preconditions related to the cultural program; worrying degradation of heritage buildings; degradation and lack of usage of the cultural potential of spaces with cultural values, including recent heritage degradation and neglect; ways to access and programme public spaces as spaces for events, communication facilities etc.; inadequate cultural communication infrastructure; loss of public access to some areas with cultural potential, through retrocession. The measures we recommend target:

- a system of content-oriented management of spaces: the manner of cultural programming of the spaces managed by the City Hall based on a coherent software, which would give cultural direction/ vision to programming;
- creating a mechanism whereby operators/ independent artists be facilitated access to public resources (e.g. 10 days/ a year, the space/ infrastructure/ technical assistance to be made available to independent projects or collaborative projects between institutions and independent organisations such as “The open day”);
- facilitating access to spaces for events/ current activities to cultural operators by rearranging and equipping public property spaces, creating a mobile infrastructure, developing an online scheduling system to access these resources;
- a programme of acquisition and redevelopment of a fund built for the cultural needs of the city;
- reclaiming symbol spaces for the community, as was the case for the “Victoria” Intercultural Workshop building;
- creation of a cooperation agreement between the government and the main owners of premises to facilitate the temporary use of some spaces they own for public cultural programmes;
- researching and valuing recent heritage, preventing its destruction (including by refurbishments which do not comply with the original project);
- mapping public spaces or those with public use potential which could be suitable for cultural activities (former industrial spaces, former power/ thermal or electrical plants in the neighbourhoods etc.); a study on their potential cultural use in the interest of the community; the implementation of a pilot project to activate spaces of this kind, to develop an urban regeneration programme including by using European funds;
- evaluation of the current ads display system, development of new spaces for display/ cultural communication and development of an integrated system to plan access to these spaces for display, including the “Victoria” Intercultural Workshop and other strategic points in the city.

2.8 Improving cultural communication

Under this priority, we have identified a number of issues, namely: insufficient display system; deficient cultural communication of operators. To solve these problems we recommended the following actions, some of which may constitute activities that can take place in the “Victoria” Intercultural Workshop:

- developing an online platform/ cultural calendar (online system to post cultural events by cultural operators, system of surveying the public's taste for events, system of programming spaces and facilities, including the use of public spaces, calendar of events of interest including their inclusion in tours packages, booking spaces);
- developing a calendar of cultural-educational events in all cultural and artistic centres of creation in Slatina;
- an intranet system – levels of information about the city (cultural events, cultural spaces, data on built heritage etc.) accessible on technology that allows for smartphone applications;
- multilingualism (publication of international events programmes in several languages (Romanian, English, Romani etc.);
- defining and promoting the city's cultural profile within the city and outside of it, through concerted management of promoting events (online platform, guide, display);
- encouraging alternative modes of publicity for events (virtual environment);
- developing tourist packages based on annual cultural agenda by interested tourism establishments;
- awareness of specific resources/ identification symbols/ authenticity with ethnic, cultural, and educational features, included in the profile.[4]

In line with the priorities identified above, the “Victoria” Intercultural Workshop has the following objectives:

- providing cultural products and services to meet the cultural needs of the cultural community, preservation, transmission, promotion and enhancement of traditional culture and intangible cultural heritage, especially the cultural heritage of the Roma ethnic group, continuous education and training, of community interest;
- preservation, valorisation and transmission of moral, artistic and technical values of the local community as well as of the national and world cultural heritage;
- fostering creativity and talent;
- promoting traditional crafts, development of cultural exchanges locally, nationally and internationally;
- cultivating the values and authenticity of contemporary folk creation and the performing arts in all genres.

In order to achieve the above mentioned objectives, the "Victoria" Intercultural Workshop will organise and carry out activities (measures) such as: cultural events with an educational and/ or entertainment role: exhibitions, film screenings, fashion shows, competitions, seminars, evening readings in Romani; preservation and enhancement of the crafts, customs and traditions by organising festivals, product sales exhibitions, demonstration workshops; organising continuous education and professional training courses; organising and participating in national and international events; promoting young talent; organising, in collaboration with other cultural institutions, cultural/ intercultural exchanges locally, nationally and internationally; organising workshops, seminars and debates on cultural issues.[3]

3. CONCLUSIONS

The "Victoria" Intercultural Workshop initiates and conducts intercultural artistic events, and artistic, formative or social training programmes. Special attention will be given to the "Victoria" Intercultural Workshop's programmes and projects targeting the Roma community. It is known that there is a large discrepancy between the level of school education for the Roma population and the national average. In Romania, the national average for 12-year-old children and above who have attended at least 4 years of schooling is of 94.4%, whereas in the case of the Roma, the percentage is of 46%, which is less than half the national average. Studies show the gap between the participation of the non-Roma and Roma children to preschool in Romania; in the 2000-2001 school years only 20% of Roma children attended kindergarten, compared to 66.1% for the entire population of children of preschool age. Approximately 27% of the Roma have never attended classes at any school and, while literacy is said to be almost complete within the entire country, illiteracy was estimated at 44% for men and 59 % in women among the Roma population. Early school leaving is more common in traditional Roma communities, where early marriage is practised, which is one of the causes of dropout for Roma girls. [6]

The "Victoria" Intercultural Workshop will conduct a series of educational activities, aimed at increasing participation and performance in formal education within Roma communities.

Tracking the effectiveness of the objectives included in the Strategic Plan requires a continuous monitoring and evaluation of the results of undertaken activities. The people responsible for implementing, monitoring and evaluating the Strategic Plan will be determined by the institution that will manage the Workshop, depending on the employees and departments number. It is recommendable to create a specialised department, responsible for the Workshop's activities and programmes.

Basically, there are at least three ways of organising the Workshop to fulfil its roles and responsibilities in terms of implementing the Strategic Plan activities.

4. REFERENCES

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