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The Role Of Educational Programmes In Communication And Public Relations Activity Of The Hungarian Public Cultural Institutions In Transylvania (Romania)

Cultural education is more than a trend with a nicely sounding name in the world of cultural institutions, or than another box to "tick" in the manager's job specifications demanded by the financier. To carry out activities pertaining to cultural – theatre, museum, or concert – education is a serious engagement, as it demands significant financial investments, as well as human resources, investments that will only show a return in the long run. Cultural education means more than forming and appreciative audience or raising young audiences into loyal visitors: it leaves its mark on the organization itself. Carrying out these activities in the form of regular programs can be a catalyst of all-encompassing changes that start from the management, and, through modifying the organization's internal and external communication strategy, bring significant changes in the way the institution relates to its social environment.

One of the more important conclusions of this research is the fact that cultural education activities can not exist in a void: they can only be implemented by institutions that regard cultural education equally as valuable as their basic activity, invest into its development, and – maybe most importantly – plan their general activity in collaboration with the rest of society.

This is because the essence of theatre, museum, and concert education lies in community participation – in watching shows, concerts and exhibitions together, and analyzing them along specific points of view. This community moment – the mutual exchange of experiences, the articulation of thoughts and ideas, the confrontation of different arguments – makes the "educational" component possible.

We have few points of reference regarding the way cultural education changes the perception of cultural institutions, as well as the perception and consumption of culture in general.

There are multiple reasons for this: cultural institutions and their financiers (with few exceptions) do not invest time, energy and financial resources into audience research. On the

other hand, there is a lack of strategic documents about the methodology and effectiveness of these activities. Moreover, the field of cultural education is too young for any researcher to be able to draw general conclusions.

My research aims to draw general conclusions about the communication potential of educational programs started be Transylvanian Hungarian cultural public institutions. This requires the use of what we call grounded theory. This qualitative method leaves sufficient leeway to create a uniform discourse for a field with diverse definitions: *"Grounded theory demands that the researcher do field work very early in the project, and start the process of collecting and analyzing data. During this phase, the researcher will make early interpretation of data and constant comparisons between information. There are several ways of processing data. Through different coding methods, we can get to more abstract and more theoretical phases, thus identifying hidden patterns and connections within the text"* (Mitey , 2012).

The specific sampling method of *grounded theory* is theoretical sampling, which does not involve the questioning of source set with predefined characteristics and number of elements, instead ensures a continually improvable and refinable framework. At the same time, *"the purpose of theoretical sampling is not the growth of the original sample, but rather the refining of ideas and the forming of usable, relevant categories"* (Mitey , 2012).

The coding of the thus collected data is a multiple-stage process that follows Glaser's logic. According to this, the researcher should start with a coding *"which is always connected to the data, and collects ideas separately, in memos. These notes will be later used during the comparison stage. The emphasis is on constant comparison and the development of theory, where expressions are constantly redefined, in order to shape the appropriate categories.* (Mitey , 2012).

This is best done at the level of theoretical saturation, which is the point where *"subjects can still add some aspects to the research, and codes are still explanatory. When no more essential information occurs, we have reached the point of theoretical saturation. This is when the processes of data collection, coding, and analysis end"* (Mitey , 2012).

In grounded theory, it is essential that the researcher does not draw obvious conclusions, but rather explains the motives and reasons of each attitudes and approaches, and show societal connections. The researcher's attitude must reflect the fact that the task is not only the description of experiences, but also the drawing of theoretical conclusions by abstracting experience: *"rather than presenting data in itself, grounded theory demands a significantly higher level of abstraction. (...) Grounded theory studies only one segment of community life,*

and portrays only moments. It strives to understand basic social processes and identify the connections between events" (Mitey , 2012).

Based on all of these aspects, my research questions are as follows:

1. How does the paradigm of cultural education refine the perception of cultural management, and what new tasks does it add to institutional communication activities?

2. How do these (theatre, museum, concert education) programs work in practice, and how do the contribute to the establishment of social cohesion through accumulation of cultural capital?

3. What are the factors worth considering when attempting to put a communication and management strategy, based on cultural education activities, into practice?

As we can see, the majority of works referenced in each chapter is from the end of the 2000's and from the 2010's. This might suggest that the field is best approached from the direction of practice. Thus, as the starting point of my paper, I have chosen my own experiences gained in cultural institutions and organizations. Starting from these, I have drawn conclusions regarding the perception of culture within the network of cultural institutions in Romania, followed by a detailed presentation of culture consumption tendencies in the country, in comparison with European surveys.

The main conclusion of this chapter is that we are currently seeing a process of literacy development in Romanian culture consumption. This means that cultural institutions must connect with an audience whose interest in the different fields of culture might still be small, but is constantly growing. To captivate this type of audience, new strategies should be elaborated, that take into account the needs and device use of an experience society, as well as the audience's capital accumulation. Thus, in order to improve accessibility of cultural products and services, managers and cultural professionals must involve, beyond the existing customer base, target groups that have previously not or scarcely connected to their activity. The pivot of this process is the approach I call inclusive culture. The essence of this is cultural public institutions becoming safe spaces where different opinions can coexist, and this engagement towards society is reflected in the internal and external communication of the organization as well as its cultural offer. A we can see, this is a remarkably long and complex process, where one of the most important steps is the regular, systematic operation of cultural education workshops.

Following this, I attempted to define cultural education activities from the viewpoint of public relations as well as school education. Based on the literature referenced, it seems evident that cultural education is a supplementary product connected to the public education activities

of cultural public institutions, which contributes to the shaping of audience perception through improving accessibility of the core product. The specific methods of this process are defined by public participation, thus, cultural education programs also affect the institutions themselves, reshaping well-established ideas about their audience and community.

To understand the mechanisms and effects of raising spectators, in the following chapters of my paper, I have published the description of the different fields of cultural education – theatre, museum, and concert education. Importantly, I highlighted the good practices that act as starting points for Hungarian language cultural education programs in Romania, along with the most important educational activities of the field.

This is why, in my paper, I attempted to represent and describe the practices of institutions that have been consistently running cultural education programs for years. The reason I ultimately chose public institutions for analysis is that, within the Hungarian community in Transylvania today, these are the only organizations with enough resources on hand to allow us to draw conclusions regarding tendencies, and later strategies or long-term plans.

In the next part regarding cultural education programs run by cultural public institutions in Transylvania, it is noticeable that they are adapted to the institutions' own profile, using predominantly Hungary-based good practices.

The analysis of these programs was conducted mainly from a practical viewpoint, as there are insufficient theoretical materials available which systematize these activities based on any criteria whatsoever. In conclusion, we are faced with a lack of a universally valid approach to cultural education. This situation is true regardless of the type of cultural institution analyzed. What different institutions call cultural education depends greatly on its financial and human resources, but also on the composition of the public and the community, as well as social context. One common aspect of all programs assessed in this paper is the fact that they attempt to complete, in some manner, the knowledge accumulated in school, while generally seeking to be as interactive as possible. The quality of the interaction varies: two- or three-tier theatre education programs seem to be the most successful in involving participants. Museums in Széklerland that I have analyzed can be placed somewhere around the middle of the interaction scale, whereas educational concerts run by philharmonics might be the least interactive or participatory. In this latter case, irregularly organized musical instrument presentations might be the only occasions for audience interaction. One of the important conclusions of the chapter is that the per capita costs of cultural education programs is high, they demand specific space and personnel, and their effect is only measurable in the long term – and primarily, not in the

number of tickets sold, but rather in the interest towards cultural services. In the future, the elaboration of a methodology for this will be needed, however, one precondition is that the present situation be very well known – and, as we have seen, the documentation and follow-up of cultural education activities is not fully realized.

Regarding the effects of cultural education programs, opinions and experiences that teachers can share with institutions could be most relevant. Thus, in the next chapter, I have organized focus group interviews with teachers and educators assigned for the task, where I have discussed the success and efficacy of cultural education programs in Bihor county (and primarily, those run by Szigligeti Theatre). An important finding of this chapter is the fact that in each school, there are some teachers or other people who, through their authority and reputation, as well as their interest in cultural services, can act as a powerful link between cultural institutions and educational institutions. This link is worth exploiting, and the most important and most basic means for this is its integration into decisions regarding programming and audience policy. This, by the way, can serve as a starting point for a community-based general activity we have previously mentioned and will discuss more in detail later. Teachers surveyed have clearly stated what they believe is the benefit if cultural education activities: they can add a personal aspect to school learning, and contribute to the development of abilities and skills. At the same time, they came up with suggestions regarding the programs, with most of them asking institutions to be more aware of the school curriculum, as well as the bureaucratic aspects of organizing school activities.

A cultural education program is a paradigm that pertains to each building block of an organization, as well as the many different organizations within a society. Thus, though later, the assumption that in some institutions, cultural education programs are dependent on the personal ambitions of people responsible will prove true, it is essential that we get acquainted with manager's attitudes regarding this subject. Interviews conducted with managers of cultural institutions (this time, we surveyed the directors of all Hungarian theatres in Transylvania, museums in Széklerland, and philharmonics that have some Hungarian aspect to their activity) have further confirmed the previous conclusion according to which the irregularity and insufficiency of resources gravely affects all public relations activities, including cultural institution. Although they recognize the benefits regarding the education of new audiences, in the case of several respondents, we can conclude that a true paradigm shift remains to be seen. One reason for this lies in the inflexibility of public institutions, however, it is also undeniable that the shortness of financial resources, the irregularity of financial aid from Hungary, the lack

of qualified personnel and a lack of substantial knowledge about the audience can all obstruct the full accomplishment of cultural education programs.

Throughout the multi-component research, we have discovered the essential theoretical bases, methodologies adapted to different local institutional networks, as well as needs and demands of institutions and audiences that influence the establishment of cultural education as a standalone discipline. Importantly, the process relies upon the importing of experience from Hungary. People who work in this field – as demonstrated by the survey – have, without exceptions, mentioned referential Hungarian programs and courses when asked about their own training and the development of the programs.

This process can bring two types of results: on the one hand, it can help find new directions for the management of Hungarian cultural institutions in Transylvania, and on the other hand – as it is a practice/service less known by the ethnic majority of the country – it can also be hindered by bureaucracy.

Another hindrance is the financing of the programs, as most institutions, on the lower bound of their operability, are struggling to fulfill their basic duties.

During the research, it was essential to survey those who participate or, in some cases, initiate cultural education programs. Thus, in the next chapter, we asked theatre, museum, and concert education professionals, in the form of a survey. Based on the answers, it is clear that Hungarian cultural education professionals in Transyilvania ave acquired their specific knowledge from Hungarian institutions, take or have taken part in trainings in Hungary, and regard Hungarian programs as standard in this matter. Each respondent emphasized the necessity of a cultural education program in Romanian higher education, as well as the establishment of professional networks. In this respect, the Székler museums hold the first place: there, people working in the field have regular professional forums for exchange of experience.

One important conclusion is the realization that cultural education must exist as part of a more general cultural strategy, based on the collaboration of the cultural-creative service providers, local governments, NGO-s and businesspeople of a particular town, county or region. This type of inclusion and collaboration or public participation can be defined as collectivization. The phase where particular institutions are in this process, can be asserted using levels of community participation. Thus, in the chapter regarding collectivized operation, I have published a chart that ties the programs of each institution to a certain level of participation. As a result, it is evident that due to legal requirements, the first level of community participation is achieved by each institution, as this refers to the publication of organizational

documents. Unfortunately, none of the Transylvanian institutions achieve all five levels of participation in practice, although the fact that nearly all of them make efforts to involve the community into their volunteering programs is reassuring. The level of collaboration is represented by theatre shows that involve different social groups, whereas the level of empowerment is achieved by only one program. This is the project of the National Theatre of Târgu Mureş, where volunteers were prompted to create their own theatre production. They were also in charge of the budget. The show was then included in the repertoire of the theatre. When it comes to encouraging community participation, philharmonics perform the worst: here, beyond the publication of documents of public interest and the institution's weekly program, no other form of involvement is to be found.

Thus, I have dedicated the last part of my paper to the attempt to elaborate a strategy.

As we have previously stated, cultural institutions operate under very diverse social and economic circumstances, when it comes to elaborating a strategy, it is the most efficient to talk about trends on a regional level. Due to my personal connection to the region, I have chosen Bihor county, in order to further develop an existing cultural strategy, using the results obtained in the different phases of my research. I regard these parts of the research as parts of a situation assessment. Thus, I have added new directions pertaining to cultural education, as well as specific program proposals, to the document elaborated by the Bihor County Council, but never applied in practice. At the same time, factors and suggestions included in the model are not specifically connected to Bihor county, their elements can work in other regions as well. Lastly, I have analyzed documents and measures, as well as organizational changes that support the establishment of cultural education.

In elaborating such a strategy, we must firstly establish an action plan that will ascertain the most important values and policies in the main documents of the institution (rules of procedure, operation manual, mission and vision statement). In the case of Bihor county, the action plan contains the theoretical framework pertaining to the following breakout points: promotion of cultural heritage, development of a rich cultural life, the importance of education and professionalism, the maintenance of cultural-creative synergies, quality cultural management. These general concepts can take effect in harmony with each other, in the form of specific activities. In this chapter, I give some suggestions of such activities. In order to show the entire life cycle of a project, I have also added success indicators. These are the following: number of participants, number of visitors, number of successfully implemented programs, number of partnerships and collaborations, audience feedback. However, the part about these success indicators should be enriched with aspects that match the profile of the specific cultural

institutions, and that been suggested by the managers or professionals in the field. As we have seen, the chart shows mainly quantifiable results. However, in the case of cultural services, the collection of non-quantifiable, quality feedback is also important – here, the methodology and indicators can only be established through the involvement of cultural professionals.

One declared goal of my research is to raise awareness of the fact that cultural service providers and intermediaries in Romania are facing a paradigm shift. The most burning question of the next few years will be whether a new national or local legal framework can be elaborated, that can ensure a larger leeway for managers, and supports their work by means – such as financing, consumption surveys etc. – that can make branding more efficient, and improves their social perception. It is to be recognized that the evaluation of managers is not as simple as evaluating viewership data, as the real value of a cultural public institution is given by the social impact of its activity.

Running cultural education programs enhances, on the one hand, audience accumulation of cultural capital, the involvement of new audience categories, long-term renewal of the audience, and, on the other hand, the collectivized operation of institutions. As such, it exists somewhere between management, public relations and communication, ans aesthetics. For its operation, well-rounded and qualified personnel is needed. Thus, higher education institutions should adapt their educational offer to this criteria.

To establish cultural education as a standalone discipline and earn recognition for the field in the general public, it is necessary that workshops and professionals tighten their connections with each other. By creating forums, networks, and databases, and employing an active, collective thinking, cultural education can become part of a Transylvanian-HUngarian cultural identity. Some entities that are currently working towards building the necessary channels for this are: House of Traditions Network in Transylvania – currently under construction -, Hungarian cultural centres in Oradea and Cluj-Napoca, to be founded by Iskola Foundation, investments in cultural infrastructure financed from different government resources in Hungary (e.g. theatre studio buildings in Satu Mare and Timişoara), the Union of Hungarian Teachers in Romania and the Partium Centre for Education and methodology, or the Union of Hungarian Theatres (MASZÍN). The most important question remains how cultural institutions will exploit the possibilities offered by collectivization: whether they will strive towards knowing and involving their audience and community, and whether they will successfully implement long-term audience education and renewal programs.

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I was writing the last pages of my paper during the last days of the third wave of the coronavirus pandemic. Cultural professionals and the entire world of culture has gone through a critical year and a half, as, in most places, theatres, museums and concert halls have never been closed for such a long time, even during the world wars. In the context of the pandemic, cultural consumption has become a third-rate question, and Romanian measures taken to slow the transmission of the disease have all but forgotten about cultural service providers. The pandemic and the restrictions that came with it mostly affected the distribution of the cultural core product, as, exploiting the possibilities given by online platforms, many institutions invested energy into innovating digital platforms that could substitute, but never fully replace the personal experience of a live show. Thus, the greatest loss pertained to the suspension of public relations, which also parenthesized the possibility of community operation.

If we look at cultural education programs, it is evident that most institutions have stopped at the elaboration of educational materials. In Transylvania, no projects based on involvement and participation have been started – and it is difficult to find any in Hungary as well. This shows that cultural education is a very vulnerable means of culture transmission: its payback rates are the lowest, and, due to an overburdening of staff, it has never really found its place in the online world. The ground has effectively been cut from under the institutions' feet, and right now, it seems that serious investments are needed to make up for the year and a half lost, be it in their own innovations, collaborations, or getting to know their community. How this will affect the story of cultural education in Transylvania, remains to be seen.

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