

The Manager Profile in the Cultural Institutions. Case Study - the Students' Cultural Houses from Romania

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Abstract

Through this abstract, we wish to point out the main ideas of the article, which focuses on several relevant directions for what the profile of the cultural institutions manager in the Romanian public domain represents, accentuating a specific type of public institution, meaning, the students' houses of culture. The questionnaire was the method used to obtain the data concerning the manager's activity and his role within the Romanian public cultural institution. The results of the research and the practical implications, beyond the particularities of each students' houses of culture, are relevant in the reality of the present, offering a radiography of some important cultural edifices of Romania. Inside situations, pleasant and less pleasant aspects, things to change and concrete proposals to accelerate the evolution and development of these cultural centres are reference points for the deciding government authorities that have the right to give the green light for change. This article is also about the role of the managers of public cultural institutions have to play, to revive the Romanian cultural houses.

The value of this material represents the starting point for change, with the emphasis on those essential aspects which need to be rethought and to be adapted to the present. The cultural managers will raise awareness to the common institutional problems, and the higher deciding factors will have a basis on which to create a plan involving the necessary measures.

Keywords: *Cultural Public Institutions, Public Management, Artistic Innovation, Cultural entrepreneurship, Romanian students' cultural houses, Youngsters Non-formal Education, Governmental public policies.*

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1. Introduction

Through the topic addressed, we want to make an honest x-ray of the duties and role of the manager of culture in the public sector in Romania and the marketing strategies with which he must be aware, taking as a focused case study the directors of cultural houses of students. The best marketing strategies for defining the role of the public cultural manager and his vision for a successful future of the cultural programs of the institution which he leads and

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their impact in the society. More than that, the students' houses of culture have a major role in training young people for artistic careers, as well as for life. They are an important link between university life and society, transferring the young people's values and artistic potential towards the community acknowledgment of which they are part of.

The students' houses of culture have a major role in training young people for artistic careers, as well as for life. They are an important link between university life and society, transferring the young people's values and artistic potential towards the community acknowledgment of which they are part of. The culture generated through these institutions has a specific dynamic, focused on the contemporary, new, non-commercial, quality. Moreover, the houses of culture are keepers of the traditional culture, "old fashioned", supporting the traditional values, so that we do not ignore our cultural roots and identity values, in our pursuit of new and fleeting things. The old music, folklore dances, Christmas traditions and customs, traditional Romanian carols, poetry nights with recitals from classical Romanian poets are living proofs of the national patrimony which must be preserved. "Too much interest in what is contemporary will determine the state to become just an adept of what is trendy, recklessly ignoring the roots in search of the fleeting novelty. Beautiful things and of durable value are thus destroyed in the name of progress, that sweat landscapes, replacing gold with steel, declaring that the old music and poetry are boring. In a certain manner, this is an even greater crime, because the patrimony can no longer be rebuilt after it has been destroyed, and the indifference towards the contemporary work will leave a hole in history" (Mundy, 2000, pp 19), thus tradition and innovation coexist in these cultural dwellings. The Romanian National Strategy for Cultural Development mentions between 2016 - 2022: "Culture - a durable development factor, reaffirms the importance of identity and local and regional specificity, which implies the need to protect the cultural patrimony and to make the community become aware of its value. These objectives converge towards making culture the fourth pillar of a durable development, together with the economy, social domain and environment. These measures support the contribution that culture and cultural patrimony have to the territorial vitality, by putting forward elements of local and regional identity through a better protection of the cultural patrimony." The Students' Houses of Culture from the country's cities which are or are not university centres, have a major say in the national cultural landscape, as well as in the civic education of young artists.

2. Research methodology

The questionnaire was the method used to obtain and summarise the data concerning the current subject of analysis. We applied questionnaires composed of 5 relevant questions for the cultural manager's activity and role within the public institution. We have studied research articles published by specialists in the cultural domain, belonging to different countries, opinions and particularities of the cultural

manager from Romania, expressed in press articles and official declarations, as well as studies belonging to the National Institute for Research and Cultural Training. The questionnaire was applied to students' houses of culture, the managers offering answers which reflect their own point of view and experience. We thank them for their valuable intake that they provided to this study article. The first question - In your experience, what does the profession of a cultural institution manager pursue? - has received ample answers, from which we could extract several defining characteristics of this leading role, of cultural manager. Upon the whole, according to the answers, being a manager of a cultural institution entails many and various qualities, gained through the years of experience in the cultural domain, as well as following speciality courses, according to one of the cultural managers that have replied: "the profession of manager in a cultural institution presumes a sum of skills, knowledge and vast experience in the cultural domain." In the categories listed below we also included answers and references to the personal qualities which a cultural manager must hold.

2.1 The cultural manager of the public cultural institutions is himself the best marketing strategy for the institution

The profession of manager in a cultural institution presumes a sum of skills, knowledge and vast experience in the cultural domain.

➤ Experience in the cultural domain: „previously acquired knowledge”, „experience organising cultural events acquired in years of working with the institution staff, collaborators and especially young people and students”, a good management of the financial and human: ”analysis of the clear resources”, „concrete awareness and research of the organisation types and methods within the institution, as well as producing aesthetic, artistic, moral values, protecting and circulating the cultural patrimony”. „It is necessary that the cultural manager is experienced in planning, organising and efficiently leading the organisation”, he must be „ a good coordinator and administrator, expert in legislation - „the manager must coordinate the entire activity, to be involved to the tiniest detail, to be a good administrator and a good knowledge of the laws”, “to know the law”.

➤ Professionalisation and speciality training: „the professional competences specific to a manager (complex speciality training, the capacity to motivate and mobilise the team, to plan and coordinate)”, „to motivate the subordinate personnel”, „acquiring professional competences such as flexibility, adapting to permanent and imminent changes”.

➤ Specific personal qualities of the cultural manager: „personal development, with focus on the institution's cultural specific”, to be a “good communicator, a good mediator and negotiator”, „to be a good people person, know how to coordinate a team, be a team player, before a leader.” The manager of a cultural institution would be ideally characterised by “creativity, ability to communicate, negotiation, verbal fluency, capacity to analyse and synthesise, good team leadership skills, efficiency, adaptability and flexibility, strategic thinking,

spontaneity and quickness in taking decisions, special abilities in planning and organising operations and activities as well as the desire to permanently inform”.

➤ Innovation and vision: „enlarging the cultural horizon”, „knowing to attract the public in your projects”, „creativity, the idea to create something that has not been done before you, and to “grow”, to take the best out of what others have done before you for your objective.” Being a good cultural manager means “to love art encouraging creation, to have the capacity to visualise and interpret talent, knowing how to establish a dialogue with the artists and connect them to the cultural projects that you have in view.”, „ developing and discovering new opportunities which are beneficial to the institution”, „developing collaborations and partnerships with other cultural and educational institutes”.

➤ Focus on results and the institution image: „the proposed objectives to transform into expected results”, a good cultural manager will be preoccupied to satisfy the cultural needs that the beneficiaries of the cultural act have. Another aspect belonging to the role of cultural manager is to “finalize the managerial process”. Also, in order to make sure that the institution grows and is recognised for its initiatives, the manager needs to “initiate and implement cultural projects that contribute to the increased visibility of the institution”.

2.2 Developing cultural programs for a large variety of public is a big challenge - Who is the audience?

According to another answer to the questionnaire, a good cultural manager must manage very well and weigh in the cultural supply and demand relationship, so that the cultural product will meet its proper public, and the artistic act to reach the beneficiary: „To be a manager in a cultural institution implies a very good knowledge of the target group (groups) or the beneficiaries of the organised cultural activities and the vision to satisfy those specific cultural needs that they require”. Following the same idea, another answer similar to the one above, sees the manager as being responsible with “identifying the supply/demand mechanism, benefiting the art consumer with a project adapted to the demand of the current times and without following a direct material profit.” The cultural institution manager from Romania needs to create attractive projects, “contributing to the degree of curiosity of those who benefit from the institution’s services”. Besides creating the profile of the cultural institution manager, the respondents have also referenced their experience as student house of culture managers, a role for which they require specific attributes such as:

- ✓ Knowledge on the ways to “specifically approach the young beneficiaries and students to whom the institution’s activities are addressed”
- ✓ Adapting to permanent and imminent change, of the successive young generations
- ✓ Reshaping their personalities, by acquiring abilities and personal aptitudes such as understanding, patience or knowledge of pedagogy,

psychology, which help in getting close to young people and understanding their needs

2.3 The Cultural Manager - between the “old” culture and the “new” culture

Being the manager of a cultural institution in Romania is indeed a challenge. “Culture is complicated, but there is no reason to also make its management complicated” (Mundy, 2000, pp 28) and still, in general, both in Europe, as well as in our country, the situation is quite the reverse, the management of the cultural institutions being a difficult process from a law perspective, autonomy regarding the budget, financial resources, human and logistic. The manager of the students’ culture houses must level up to the community expectations, one of the main requirements being those to transform the image of this traditional institution and to constantly reorganise the cultural and artistic program, so it answers the needs of the constantly changing young generations, to respect the budget limitations, but also the main cultural-artistic lines of these culture institutions, some over 80 years old (such as the Bucharest Students’ Culture House). Tradition and innovation are two terms that need to coexist under the same roof and combine harmoniously and generate positive results within society, drawing the youth and the students towards this sector of national patrimony and traditional cultural values, best represented in departments dedicated to folklore. “Society is in need of balance between conservation and new, between youth and old age, between particularity and diversity. Culture, as well as nature, uses the past to feed the future” (Mundy, 2000, p 6), therefore the directors of the students’ houses of culture have the duty or responsibility to take forward the specific authentic cultural elements, defining for the Romanian culture, all of which needs to be found in the offer of cultural activities and services of the public institution.

On the other hand, the manager of the students’ houses of culture must have a vision, and must be open to the future. Young people are the “raw material”, if we may use this metaphor, that these institutions mostly use, modelling entire student generations, and representing through this mission an “universal school of cultural-artistic fulfilment and an active forum of methodical guidance” (Hodorog, 2007, pp 36). Of course, when we reach this point, the concern to train the youth not only from an artistic point of view, but also from a human perspective appears, by sharing moral values, which accompany or derive from the student cultural-artistic activities. Returning to the previous point, the element of new is part of the vision of the Romanian cultural institution director, as well as the director of each Students’ House of Culture from any city in the country, maintaining, at least regarding innovating cultural projects, a large power to shift the artistic landscape and cultural consumption. It so happens that jazz bands, folk ensembles or established house of culture events identify with the name of the city and become a cultural brand of the city, colouring and providing life to the cultural life of the city

in question. The Student Folk Ensemble „Mărțișorul” belonging to “Dumitru Farcaș” Students’ House of Culture is a true brand and an ambassador of folklore, renowned both nationally, as well as internationally. The student theatre festival “Nights in Thalia’s world” organised by the Ploiești Students’ House of Culture has reached its XVIIth edition, an event with tradition and resonance at a national level and with great impact in Ploiești city. Therefore, the directors of the students’ houses of culture represent managers of the cultural public institutions whose main objective is with the young people and for the benefit of young people, by elaborating and managing a cultural-artistic offer specific to this target audience. The young people are “the engine of cultural development; they are active cultural consumers and at the same time represent the future public that will consume events and cultural property” (Voicu, Dragomir, Barlaboi, 2017, pp 210). In Europe, the youth has an essential role and a substantial role in the cultural sector, the institutions and cultural creative centres being sustained by the governmental organisms in the work with the young people, under the aspect of “investing in cultural resources, including the tangible and intangible patrimony such as dancing, music, theatre and festivals, can develop strong creative and sustainable economies, can create opportunities for young people and can strengthen the social identity and cohesion. Promoting creativity among the young people and recovering the creative potential and energy must be a priority in finding creative solutions to the current challenges” (*Culture as a vector for youth development*, UNESCO, 2013).

2.4 The cultural manager - between the objectives of the cultural agenda and the budget limitations

The budget and the income of the public cultural institutions have always represented a sensitive subject, through the many cultural actions that have remained outside the events agenda of the students’ houses of culture. The grant-own income percentage has not suffered many transformations, approximately 90% of the institutions expenses, generally speaking, have been covered from public finances, with regards to the financing of the institution’s projects, the remaining expenses regarding invoices and maintenance or the equipping of the spaces within the institution were covered by its own income. Therefore, the control over the budget, the optimum and successful management of the cultural agenda, so that it ensures the continuity of the traditional projects of the institutions, investing in new, innovating projects, keeping the balance within the approved budget, all of these are very important aspects that come under the ability of the students’ house of culture manager of being a good fund and financial resource and human resource administrator of the institutions that they lead. According to the results obtained, it can be proven that not every specialist in the cultural sector has what it takes to be a good cultural manager or specialist in managing the cultural agenda. The cultural manager can be similar to a cultural entrepreneur, in the fight with the budget and having beforehand the objective of ticking as many cultural-artistic

activities as possible and to bring innovation, on a small budget. “They are rather cultural entrepreneurs, than public servants or public personas, in their heart, spirit and action” (Albinsson, 2019, pp 355), as the author of a study about cultural managers from Sweden asserts. Arjo Klamer (2011, pp 141-156), whom the author of the study quotes, “adds a moral value to the ones he includes in the category of cultural entrepreneurs. (...) To be focused on the cultural content, over the art itself and over the creative process represents a moral attribute of the cultural entrepreneurs”. Moreover, the author insists on the fact that cultural entrepreneurship supposes the creation of value, a process where money is a means and not a purpose. Finally, we list below a few characteristics of the cultural entrepreneur, which the Swedish author mentions and which we consider similar, if not identical to the ones belonging to the managers of the students’ houses of culture:

The need for autonomy in creating the work agenda and establishing the cultural-artistic programs from the current years; A permanent sense of alertness regarding new opportunities of cultural collaboration, both national and international; Prioritising events when the budget is insufficient; A strong desire to innovate, to move forward, to stand out with new and impactful projects; A visionary character which has a degree of spontaneity and a good start in the community’s larger cultural agenda; The motivation to attract acknowledgement from society for the young artists; Offering young artists a solid “ground”, where they can find support and the opportunity to launch artistic productions, in a high visibility space, through the public cultural institution profile, known through seniority and tradition; Prudence in choosing and selecting the collaborative artists, to maintain the high moral spirit of the artistic productions, by avoiding elements such as vulgarity, extremist messages, etc. (Albinsson, 2019, pp 363). Analysing the empirical data gathered through the questionnaire, regarding the question “Does the budget allocated to the institution that you lead, cover its needs? If yes, to what extent?”, we have mainly identified negative answers regarding the consistency of the budget funds, from all the managers of the students’ houses of culture.

“The allocated budget does not cover at all the needs of the institution (I am referring here both to the administrative needs, investments, personnel, as well as for the ones regarding organising cultural events.)”

„The institution’s budget was not and is not sufficient. The needs of the institutions are many, therefore they cannot be covered through the allocated budget. They can be achieved with priority, but only with a substantial annual budget.”

„The allocated budget only covers basic needs of the institutions. We also require subventions when it comes to investments in modernising the unit and reaching a professional level with regards to the cultural-artistic and creative activities.

„Evidently more is needed, the budget only covers the administrative survival of the institution, however I believe that regardless of the resources that

we have, in order to paint, dance, sculpt, sing, do sports, plant a tree, etc. you do not need money. If within every person there is a creative force, it will manifest regardless of whether there is or there isn't any money."

"The budget is always in relation to the expected projects within a certain period of time. Culture is a domain in which budget is very important and without it, no high level projects can be attained."

„The budget allocated to the institution only covers “personnel expenses”. With regard to “Goods and services”, although the budget is insufficient, the institution’s activity takes place within normal conditions due to the cost efficiency and the judicious use of the allocated funds. We are constantly facing an undersized budget regarding “other expenses” - scientific and social-cultural actions, the progress of the projects listed in the activity agenda, being possible only by remastering the expenses in order to fit the allocated funds (for example, reducing the number of participants in the national festivals competitions).”

2.5 The cultural manager - a link between the financing organism and society

„Cultural manager is an interface more or less visible for the beneficiary public” according to one of the houses of culture managers in their answer regarding the role of the students' houses of culture director, an answer that we consider pertinent, through the fact that this role entails the transfer of artistic, moral and cultural value from the institution towards society. This value has nothing to do with the financial results or with an economic efficiency model, the elements of cultural patrimony and cultural expression having a symbolic value, of cohesion, expressions, acknowledgement and satisfaction of the identity needs of individuals and the community. In addition to the culture spread by the cultural organisms in the private environment, the cultural manager of a public institution has the moral responsibility towards society, by assuring the quality of the artistic act as well as a responsibility towards representing all or as many public categories as possible, by providing a wide, mass access to the artistic act. “The cultural politics in the public sector should counterbalance the negative effects of the commercial influences in the cultural sector” (Albinsson, 2019, p 6). This idea represents the responsibility which a manager takes when they “deliver” a high standard cultural act, when they choose their collaborators and partners in the projects that they unfold. The concern for the quality of the artistic act is constant, both in the way we prepare the young people and students that follow non formal education classes pr preparation hours for a specific domain (modern dance, folklore, picture, jazz, theatre, literature, etc.), but also in the nature, diversity and need to satisfy the large culture consuming public. The accessibility criteria is also very important when we speak of the cultural-artistic events agenda belonging to a public cultural institution, and implicitly, to the students' houses of culture, in order to respect the right of the final culture act beneficiary, the citizen, to participate, to have free access to culture, a right guaranteed by the Constitution. If we wish to measure the performance of a public cultural institution, the factors that would

determine the success are the ones incorporated in the quad basic model of the cultural entrepreneurship, displayed by the Swedish author: economic prosperity, artistic innovation, social change and institutional development. At the economic prosperity chapter, this cannot be measured within a specific timeframe or an exact financial value, the positive results and the evolution of the young artists prepared on the students' houses of culture "benches" being visible for years, through the acknowledgement of their talent and hard work on the national and international scenes. The concrete results of training the young people and students that develop or start their artistic career under the guidance of the hired reviewers can be measured in a) award, scholarships, rewards, projects, nominations; b) the number of participants in the programs, non-formal education classes and cultural events; c) the number of invitations to tournaments, festivals, national and international conferences, competitions; d) the number of students and student organisations that have developed projects throughout the year; e) the number of events. It is evident that, keeping in mind these aspects of efficiency or performance evaluation of the public culture institution, evaluating the financial gain has no object. "From an economical point of view, the financial analysis of the cultural institutions shows an economic inefficiency in all the institutions. Most of them are institutions that are supported through grants, generating small income, in relation to the supported costs. This situation is due to the lack of adequate stimulants in growing the income, die to the subventions secured by the local or national authorities, which cover, at least in theory, the costs connected to maintaining the facilities and the costs of the activities carried out." How well the cultural manager manages to bring visibility, interest and participation from the society must be estimated or measured through other factors than financial ones. "The evaluation of the cultural institutions is not possible to be made only through financial indicators, because these institutions have a variety of objectives. In order to evaluate these objectives, there are appropriate methods through which several internal and external variables are being compared. The non-parametric methods are being used that are usually applied to measure the efficiency of the service production, for example DEA (Data Envelopment Analysis)". Therefore, the students' houses of culture manager constantly assumes an active role in the relation to the government's financial organism, that requires results and respecting the measuring factors of the results, specifically, the quality and quantity indicators in the Implementation Report (supporting document filled in at the end of each cultural activity), according to the cultural policies adopted at national level. Also, there is a permanent relationship with the cultural beneficiary, for which they elaborate cultural programs together with the review team, consultant and artistic counsellors. The alternative methods through which we can receive answers regarding the level of satisfaction and participation are: measuring the number of visitors, applying satisfaction questionnaires, having a visitors suggestions book or blog, site where the culture act beneficiaries can express their opinions.

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, what does an authentic cultural institution manager look like? Beyond the qualities, aptitudes, and experience of the cultural manager, the future is more important. A public cultural institution manager must always ask questions regarding the future, what they can change, where they can bring innovation, what they can add and how they can satisfy the cultural consumer generally as well as the non-formal education needs and personal development of the young people and students that pass the institution's threshold. They can be like a parent who is always concerned with the education of their children, asking what more they can do for them and how they can contribute to positive results and promoting their talent and qualities. For this, they assume certain objectives, that they later measure through results. The results depend on strategy and on the team that implements the projects. The team and the quality of the cultural act are interconnected. The focus placed on an authentic culture will lead to guaranteed success, because authenticity and originality creates value. The government authorities that are responsible with public politics and financing need to provide support and find solutions that will encourage the means of self-financing for the public cultural institutions.

The students' houses of culture have a major role in the young people's education, beyond the school or university program, as well as in their civic education. "Culture and cultural institutions have a major role in the civic education, because through them, the citizens can affirm themselves through a cultural point of view, can express their vision over the world, as well as their knowledge and skills, and thus to own the role of active citizens, informed and successful, in a democratic society" (Kochoska, Petrovski, 2015, p 2). Through education, entire generations of young people are prepared to understand the cultural act, to disseminate it, and why not, to generate it. "Education represents a crucial element within the cultural politics that must not be left completely in the hands of the Education Department. It is so crucial that it can be said that the preparation of the population to join its culture is just as important as preparing them for work. The two are more interconnected as Europe shifts focus from heavy industry to creative industry, the main job creation engine. This is why, this chapter will take into consideration two major themes: the public education to allow it to enjoy and partake in the cultural life and the necessary education that will permit a constant number of people to continue their careers in the cultural department" (Mundy, 2000, pp 48). In addition to the private cultural forms (independent organizations, cultural centres etc.) the students' houses of culture have the responsibility to assure massive access to the artistic act, by involving a large number of young people and students, as beneficiaries of the artistic act, as well as creators and generators of the cultural manifestations. The course of trajectory of the cultural act must be a continuous process, fluid and open, from the beneficiary or consumer, to the creative artist, these roles always being interconnected and experienced at the same time by the students that create the cultural act, but who also participate, at the same time, at their own productions, together with the larger

audience. The student cultural environment is a dynamic environment, the institution needing to keep up with this dynamic that they need to also incorporate in their cultural programs. The key defining words for the success of a public cultural institution are: “accessibility, diversity, openness, responsibility and flexibility” (Kochoska, Petrovski, 2015, p 8). Also, in contrast to the commercial culture, the students' houses of culture are those traditional culture propagation oasis, authentic, as well young independent artists, that are just beginning their journey, who are extremely talented and who need support, by being offered a space and guidance to artistically express their creative potential. A continuous challenge for the cultural manager is to take into consideration the level of participation in the cultural programs that are implemented or hosted, culture not being a “passive distraction, but (...) a problem of active involvement and interest” (Mundy, 2000, pp 28). The cultural manager has a key role in building the image of the cultural institution, through cultural programs, through innovation, through the decisions that they need to take bearing in mind the vision and the results that they want to reach. They develop and contribute to quality cultural projects and help, implement and support their reception from the audience or from the specific group of beneficiaries. The support of the authorities is necessary to generate the large access to culture, permanent innovation of the programs, of the needs that appear regarding the personnel and the facilities offered by the spaces where the youth activities take place, specifically in this dynamic university environments.

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