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Agenda 21 for culture in the town of Novi Sad. Need and challenges

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Agenda 21 for culture in the Town of Novi Sad. Need and challenges

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1. A cultural policy, Why?

Culture is a fundamental element for a society. This is the main aim of UNESCO. The Agenda 21 for culture also makes this highly clear. Culture is needed so that you can get a valuable world view and question some certainties that are infringed on you from above. One of the aims of Agenda 21 for culture is to promote to be confident in the art and culture surroundings for citizens. Cultural development is important. Contemporary culture speaks directly about the important questions of our time and to the changing landscape of global identity.

We need a cultural policy to support structuring cultural projects (artistic project, equipment...) and those projects can exert a real influence all around society; to ensure a good distribution of cultural facilities in a city or a territory; to refine objective reasons to support or not the projects; to foster artistic creation and to give artists the opportunity to work in good conditions and provide some ideas and movement to society.

Nowadays, the challenge of good cultural policy in the city of Novi Sad and in contemporary society has to be transversal. All dimensions of the city and territory (social, education, economical, tourist) are linked and culture needs to be related to each of them. We have to create some good conditions for artists for artistic diffusion and circulation. To create good conditions for mutual resources and to associate culture workers at different levels (local, national, European and International)

Agenda 21 for culture opens up the area of elaborating a cultural policy for Novi Sad in a new and contemporary manner. Generally, there is no cultural policy in the city of Novi Sad. The challenge is to abandon old things, and to introduce something new. From the current position, it is not possible to consider whether this is actually feasible. But, there is no doubt that the building of a new functioning system should immediately begin.

2. The Identity of Novi Sad

Novi Sad is one of Serbia's most important centres of higher education and research and the capital of the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina. The city is located on the banks of the Danube River, facing the northern slopes of Fruška Gora Mountain. In the town inhabitants with multinational and multicultural heritage live. Identity has to be understood as our legacy and invention.

According to the 2002 Census, the city had an urban population of 299,294, while its municipal population was 333,583. The population of Novi Sad is comprised of: Serbs (75.50%), Hungarians (5.24%), Yugoslavs (3.17%), Slovaks (2.41%), Croats (2.09%), Montenegrinains (1.68%) and others.

In the 19th century, the city was the capital of Serbian culture, earning the nickname Serbian Athens. Today, Novi Sad is the second cultural centre in Serbia (after Belgrade).

Since 2000, Novi Sad has been home to the EXIT festival, the biggest music summer festival in Serbia and the region; and also the only festival of alternative and new theatre in Serbia - INFANT, the most prominent festival of children literature - Zmaj Children Games, Novi Sad Jazz Festival, and many others. Besides Serbian National Theatre, the most prominent theatres are also Youth Theatre, Cultural centre of Novi Sad, and Novi Sad Theatre. Novi Sad Synagogue also houses many cultural events in the City.

The other cultural institutions of the city include Offset of the Serbian Academy of Science and Art, the Library of Matica Srpska, the Novi Sad City Library, and the Archive of Novi Sad. The city is also home to cultural institutions of Vojvodina: the Vojvodinian Academy of Science and Art and the Archive of Vojvodina.

The cultural resources of the city of Novi Sad need a sustainable environment based on effective partnerships between local actors, political authorities and international networks.

The city has a number of museums and galleries, public and privately owned around Novi Sad. The most well known museum in the city is Museum of Vojvodina which houses a permanent collection of Serbian culture and a life in Vojvodina through history. The Museum of Novi Sad in Petrovaradin fortress has a permanent collection of history of fortress. The Gallery of Matica Srpska is the biggest and most respected gallery in the city, which has two venues in the city centre. There is also the Gallery of Fine Arts - Gift Collection of Rajko Mamuzi and The Pavle Beljanski Memorial Collection - one of the biggest collections of Serbian art, as well as the Museum of Contemporary Arts of Vojvodina.

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3. The governance of culture in Novi Sad

The existing system of cultural management in Novi Sad is based on the state model of the cultural policy. This, actually, means that national authorities make decisions on the cultural development of Novi Sad without a previous definition of objectives.

The city policy has to be based on different actors: political authorities, professional cultural institutions, associations, informal citizen groups and sponsors. The functioning of cultural policy in the city of Novi Sad should depend on the structure of local actors. The local politicians have to make visible certain values which can be shared and can form the bases of agreements and partnerships.

Agenda 21 for culture is necessary to a great extent due to it being the tool to make changes and cohesion within the urban cultural system. The priorities fixed relate to the decentralization of decision making and finance, but the impact of central government in allocating income for culture is still visible. When the mechanisms of funding culture in the town of Novi Sad are analysed, it is seen that the advantage is actually the legal organisation of the budgetary system or regular payment inflow, but the disadvantage, however, is the criteria regarding making decisions about projects, which should, in line with the Agenda 21 for culture principles, be clearly defined. With the aim to improve the funding of culture, it is necessary to further develop the democratic decision making.

Another weakness, I would say, is the lack of intergovernmental, interdepartmental, and intersectorial co-operation. There is no evaluation of the performance results of the institutions of special significance (e.g. reputation within international public, advanced training, relation of audience). There is no systematic training of personnel. There is a great need to train the staff and engage in life-long learning schemes for the cultural professionals. This is mentioned in several articles of Agenda 21 for culture, i.e. permanent innovation and education.

4. The cultural system. Who is concerned?

Let's assume that the cultural system of a city is made of the following groups (reality is more complex, I simplify):

- Decision makers (local and municipal administrations, culture institution directors)
- Audience (permanent and temporary)
- Creators (artists)
- Mediators (media, experts, cultural managers, advisors).

Studies indicate the visits to exhibitions, libraries, book promotions, and lectures are the least popular. The proportion is such that 70% of citizens do not use such contents. Therefore, it is important to work on the relation with the citizens, to activate and stimulate them through educational programmes at cultural institutions. Media have got a highly relevant role. International organisations and agencies like European Cultural Foundation, Pro Helvetia, and other foundations of local and regional character, have also got an important role.

An analysis of the four groups comprising the cultural system in Novi Sad shows that only three are active: decision makers, mediators, and creators, while the audience is almost fully non-developed. Creators at culture institutions are closed and do not establish a direct and active relation with the audience due to which the cultural market is not developed at all. An empowered educational programme system that would include the audience is missing (the Museum of Vojvodina, Matica Srpska Gallery in part, have got developed educational programmes, but not for all population categories). Decision makers are the most active for they endeavour to establish relations with creators and mediators.

STRENGTHS

- long tradition of cultural institutions
- abundance of funds
- rich cultural legacy of Novi Sad
- multicultural society fostering tradition, customs and languages
- high number of artists
- events transferred at a local level but have regional and international significance) (EXIT festival at 2005 was visited by 150,000 people, the new and alternative theatre – INFANT, Video Medea, contemporary art exhibitions)
- international partner co-operation
- media

WEAKNESSES

- relation of cultural institutions and creativity
- poor conditions of the buildings hosting a cultural institutions
- lack of facilities for work for the artists
- high expectations from the state 100% in the area of finance
- poor technical resources
- obsolete management at the cultural institutions
- low audience
- lack of a cultural governance model

OPPORTUNITIES

- introduction of new contemporary management
- creating a cultural development strategy for Novi Sad
- establishing public-private partnerships, and with the civil sector in the area of decision making within culture,
- cultural heritage revitalisation

THREATS

- lack of system of law on culture (or obsolete laws, which is the case with libraries)
- lack of institutional co-operation
- centralised system within individual culture areas

5. Towards a cultural strategy for Novi Sad

The majority of European cities have based the cultural policies on four key principles: the cultural identity, the cultural diversity, the creativity, and the participation of citizens in cultural life. The cultural development strategy of Novi Sad should ensure that these principles are observed and interwoven in all policies. The programmes resulting in higher participation of citizens in the cultural life should be specifically developed. Also, substantial investments in research activity in the area of culture are necessary. It is necessary to introduce new instruments, above all, strategic planning, to ensure further development. The objective is to create favourable conditions for a harmonised cultural development to be able to contribute to the sustainable development of the society.

I would like to highlight four principles/elements that are important for initiating the cultural strategy of the town of Novi Sad. These four elements would clearly initiate the position of culture from the edge to the centre and result in a different way of thinking. They also indicate the need to move from a vertical approach to a more horizontal governance. It is necessary to gradually introduce the Agenda 21 for culture, i.e. explaining it part by part, taking in consideration the analysis of the situation in the town. Therefore, I have determined four principles that could lead to a better impact of culture in local development.



The Agenda 21 for culture provides a new view of approaching the segments which are not easily instituted within the cultural system of the town of Novi Sad.

The Agenda 21 for culture provides a new view of approaching the segments which are not easily instituted within the cultural system of the town of Novi Sad. What we need is a strong promotion of the Agenda 21 for culture through seminars and symposiums. The elaboration of a cultural strategy, or a strategic plan for culture, is important and it can contribute to the local development for the period of next four years (2009 – 2012). These are the four principles.

A. DECENTRALISATION

The principle related to the decentralisation in decision making and finance by recognising creative originality and defence of the principle of the citizens' right to culture.

B. DIGITALISATION

It has to promote the approach to digital dimension of any cultural project and of both local and global cultural heritage. Permanent innovation is crucial and the use of new technologies which should be used as the instrument, so that culture is available to all citizens.

C. EDUCATION AND CITIZENS

The principle of the Agenda 21 for culture relating to achieving co-operation between cultural and educational policies is important for our society. The role of educational programmes is to organise the principle of culture as a creative tool resulting in the development of creativity, and it is related to a great extent to the increase of the knowledge in society. The actual benefit for the citizens includes increased knowledge and the opening up of a new approach. By opening the facilities, people are provided with better access to the cultural institutions at all levels of population. The aim is to promote self-confidence at culture facilities for children, students, teenagers, adults, and the elderly. As Barry Lord says: "Museums seem to be about objects, but are really about people". The ability of culture to provide a platform for expression that can lead to a social change is evident in the development of educational programmes through culture institutions. This could make a positive impact on formal and non formal education systems in the future. The impacts on citizens are learning outcomes: increase in knowledge and understanding, increase in skills, change in attitudes and values, enjoyment, inspiration, creativity, action, behaviour and progression.

D. URBAN PLANNING

The positioning of culture parameters is important within the urban planning and establishment of regulations for the aesthetics of public facilities and collective property. This includes the projects for micro units in urban areas through visibility studies. The participation of culture facilities in the urban and rural territory (region, town) would be ensured.

6. Why Agenda 21 for culture is useful for Novi Sad. A few examples.

Agenda 21 for culture, with its principles, brings many new elements within the town culture structure. The programmes of individual cultural institutions included in the budget of the town of Novi Sad do not dialogue: each institution operates individually, resulting in unequal quality. Connecting the cultural institutions would result in a stable level of common development. The Agenda 21 for culture provides interesting guidelines.

By adopting Agenda 21 for culture, the municipal staff will begin to think about some new ideas, because the existing situation is unsustainable. There is one important segment of the Agenda 21 for culture, which is a partnership through networking at various programme levels (art projects, educational, territorial, etc.).

In terms of the implementation of Agenda 21 for culture in a neighbourhood, the challenges of the cultural policy would include modernisation and technological sophistication of media and the presentation of culture for the purpose of facilitated exchange, while, at the same time, preserving the characteristics of that place, preserving traditional values, architecture and urban planning. Ensuring facilitated access to contents.

Networking with other towns would entail a clear definition of our own cultural resources, looking for common denominators of cultural legacy with other towns with the aim of improved co-operation.

Undoubtedly, Agenda 21 for culture becomes a strong argument to support the creation of a sound cultural policy in the town of Novi Sad. It is important that the process of cultural decentralisation begins; the municipal cultural council operates as an advisory body; the significance of strategic planning in cultural development is recognised as an innovative urban policy instrument; the priorities regarding facility maintenance are set up; digitalisation is promoted, and there is new cultural content in local communities, a wider variety of events and support for cultural industries (especially publishing) development.

7. Contributing to the global debate on culture and local development. Views from Novi Sad

Novi Sad is a new partner of Agenda 21 for culture. It is perhaps bold, but surely useful, that the international activities of Agenda 21 for culture are analysed and critically reviewed. There are two main areas. Firstly, I think that a more intensive interaction between the cities and local authorities acting in line with the Agenda 21 for culture principles is necessary. And secondly, we need specific projects based on partnerships. For example, a peer-review scheme could be launched: cities should, through exchange, evaluate the projects with partners and develop new models. The network that Agenda 21 for culture is creating should be sustainable for a longer period through specific action plans. The development of projects depends on a number of factors: active support, engagement, mobility... however, it can be sustained with the development of strategic partnerships and participation at national and international levels.

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The ability of the Agenda 21 for culture network is to provide a platform for expression that can lead to social change. The goal can be defined as more effective management between national and international partners. The partnership strategy should be set up for the projects following the Agenda 21 for culture principles to reach the level of stability. To achieve a sustainable development, the partnership and network are key elements, and each project must, above all, have an innovative context. The partnership through the Agenda 21 for culture would ensure a broad development and the area of activity would impact on the connection and spreading of knowledge among partners and accessing various finance levels.

This would become a world platform improving a serious exchange of knowledge, methodologies, experience, and comparative research programmes, through working groups, projects, activities, and events. The aim of the partnership is to evaluate the programmes and practice in culture with partners to impact on the development of new models and the research of the existing ones. I would like to emphasise that specific action plans in the fields that follow would be very useful for Novi Sad: the educational programme development, the projects relating to urban design (developing feasibility studies for micro areas), and the cultural industries development projects (entrepreneurship in culture).

8. Conclusion

We live in the age of creativity. Creativity is the core of capability in culture. Traditional models are not feasible any more. Creativity in any sense is an important part of the Agenda 21 for culture in the current post-industrial world which is virtually impacted by the changes in the global culture where top positions are given to the creative industry innovators and representatives. Agenda 21 for culture has to inform a broad range of activities for the strategic development of a city and consolidate a stronger worldwide network of partners.

- The article and the full report are available on-line at <http://www.cities-localgovernments.org> and <http://www.agenda21culture.net>. They can be reproduced for free as long as UCLG and Barcelona City Council are cited as sources.
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