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PROMOTING SOCIAL INTEGRATION THROUGH CULTURAL EVENTS

Case study

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Abstract

In our increasingly internationalized world, one of the main consequences is the creation of multicultural environments. This is a controversial issue, regarded either as an enriching experience, either as a threat to national identities. However, the “secret weapon” that most national minorities and immigrant communities seem to make recourse to is the one of cultural performance, in the form of events. After all, culture is the most pacifist and apolitical form of self-promotion. Managing cultural events with the purpose of raising awareness of a nation's own culture is in itself an example of good practice towards integration, and an exercise in creativity and cross-cultural management. In this article we will analyze concrete examples of cultural events organized by the Romanian diaspora and Romanian cultural institutions abroad. We will find out about the concepts behind these events, the way they have been managed, and the positive impact they have on the way that Romanian national identity is perceived.

Introduction

The departure point of this article has to do with one of the most representative social issues of today's society, which is immigration, and which has numerous consequences, on an individual level, as well as on the community level. And without a doubt, the biggest challenge for immigrant communities is to achieve social integration within their adoptive societies. The immigration process is usually generated by work or study opportunities abroad, and creating experiences that might not have been possible in the immigrant's home country. However, beyond the professional and economic advantages of immigration, or the formalities which give an immigrant a legal status in a new country, the social life of an immigrant or a community of immigrants is also at stake, and the issue is very complex. How are they being perceived by the local population? Are they accepted and respected? Do they enjoy equal rights and opportunities?

In the worst cases, the main obstacles towards social integration have to do with a variety of factors:

- The media spreading negative associations between some immigrant communities and erroneous stereotypes or criminality.
- The population of the host country viewing immigrants as a threat to their own professional opportunities.
- The long-term fear that a multicultural environment would jeopardize the local culture, and eventually the national identity of the host population.

Having mentioned culture, although cultural practice is the social manifestation less quantified by sociological data, it is also one of the primary tools used in order to invalidate any possible negative stereotype, by creating knowledge and acceptance, and ultimately leads to social integration. The cultural identity of an individual or a community is not about positive or negative consequences, or about superior and inferior characteristics, but simply about difference, acceptance and exchange.

Romania is one of the countries from which a large number of people have emigrated, mainly in search for work, and generally settled in older European Union member countries, as well as the United States of America and Canada. Moreover, several unfortunate stories of criminality, clandestine migration, but also caricatured cultural stereotypes, have given Romania and Romanian nationals a public image which does not do them justice, and is detrimental to our most important cultural values and to that part of the Romanian population who is living a respectable life abroad.

Consequently, this article has the purpose to explain how culture and cultural practice can help achieving social inclusion in the context of national

minorities, using examples from the activities of Romanian cultural institutions in Italy and the United Kingdom, which are two of the top destinations for Romanian emigrants. Last but not least, we will think about suggestions for further actions and methods of improvement regarding the visibility of these cultural practices.

The Challenges of Social Integration

When we talk about social integration, or social inclusion, we talk about vulnerable categories (national or ethnic minorities being some of them), we talk about equal rights and opportunities and about all social categories being "able to participate as valued, respected and contributing members of society" (Salojee, 2003). Social inclusion covers several areas of everyday life, it is an ongoing process, and complex sets of social policies have been created in this respect. The term has entered current use during the past few decades, simultaneously with the ever-increasing diversity and stratification of modern societies.

In his paper entitled *Social Inclusion, Anti-Racism and Democratic Citizenship*, author Anver Salojee is establishing four basic elements of social inclusion, named "cornerstones" (Salojee, 2003), towards which the process must aim at:

- Valued recognition – namely, respect and recognition for all social groups outside the mainstream society, as well as support for those members of society who are sensitive to cultural issues and differences.
- Human development – minority groups must have the right to be involved in the decision-making process of the society, especially the ones affecting them directly, as well as the families and communities to which they belong.
- Proximity – aiming towards diminishing moral, as well as physical barriers. Members of different communities should not be afraid to approach each other and interact freely and trustingly.
- Material well-being: providing the necessary resources for all people to support themselves and participate in all aspects of social and community life.

In our case, we shall focus on national minorities and the use of culture for the purpose of achieving social inclusion. As seen above, we have an outlook of an ideal socially-inclusive society, with its four pillars. However, some of the major negative characters, which are bound to induce fear and/or rejection into the mainstream society are the media, which often operates under the slogan "bad news is good news", hence being more inclined to broadcast negative news associated with immigrant communities, and, as a consequence, also the political class, which presents immigrant communities and their "bad deeds" as a weak spot of society, which, presumably, they will do anything to keep at bay.

But, are things really that bad? Are these issues really impossible to be worked around? Or is it more like a vicious circle made of hostility at its most basic level of everyday life, which also causes more negative consequences felt in all aspects of minorities' behaviour?

When an individual chooses to live in a different country from his country of origin, he will gain a more open perspective of the world, which will result in a multi-dimensional cultural identity. In the book *Cultura i valorile morale în procesul de globalizare (Culture and Moral Values in the Process of Globalization)*, author Elena Cobianu (2008) offers an insight precisely into this aspect of cultural identity and the changes it can go through in relationship with globalization or through the process of migration, which is, in itself, also a product of globalization. The hallmarks of national identity, such as language, traditions, lifestyle, or social behaviour, are at risk of gradual loss when the subject comes into contact with different cultures. Therefore, both the host population and the immigrant communities feel the need to defend their specific cultural values. Sometimes, there are some cultural values being borrowed by an immigrant from the host population. However, in the cases in which the subject has a solid knowledge and a deep respect towards their own national culture, the desire to preserve and defend it will grow. This is particularly applicable when the society of the host country is striving to create a culturally homogeneous population, but also when it is being met with ignorance at best, or with hostility or racial discrimination at worst. Although she refers to the relationship between European values and national cultural values, Elena Cobianu's words could also be applied to any type of intercultural interaction: "it is a long-term, difficult process, more so when people's diversity brings into focus their national specificity." (Cobianu, 2008).

Still, these displays of each community's national cultural values do not have to take the shape of clashes of cultures or power struggles, but rather of an exchange of information. It should not be a mere process of letting "outsiders" communities into the host society and tolerating them, or simply being granted formal permission of residence and a set of rights within this society. By the same token, immigrant communities should not see this opportunity for an aggressive assertion of their own values, or the creation of closed-off social clusters. The interaction between the native population and immigrant communities should come off as an intercultural dialogue in a (more or less) multicultural society – it is about learning about each other, asking relevant questions and being prepared to listen, understand and respect the others and their culture.

Romanian Outbound Migration and Romanian Cultural Institutions Abroad

As a fair number of Romanian nationals have emigrated in search for better professional opportunities or a better quality of life abroad, the inevitable consequence is the creation of solid Romanian communities in several European and North American countries. Regarding general migration tendencies, sociologist Dumitru Sandu has identified three major time and space phases in Romania's recent history, until year 2006 (Sandu, 2010):

- 1990 – 1995 – 3% emigration rate; of the total number of departures, 5 countries were exceeding the 7% percentage: Israel, Turkey, Italy, Hungary and Germany.
- 1996 – 2001 – 7% emigration rate; to the countries of the first phase, migrants start choosing Canada, the United States of America and Spain.
- 2002 – 2006 – 28% emigration rate; this phase is marked by the free circulation within the Schengen area, causing a massive concentration of temporary work migration, the main destinations being Italy and Spain.

To these first three time slots, a fourth phase must be added. It is represented by the year 2007, representing Romania's integration in the European Union. Moreover, we could take an extra step, as the year 2014 is another turning point, when all European Union countries were obliged to abolish all work restrictions for Romanian and Bulgarian workers. This has caused a further increase in the migration outflow, especially towards previously-restricted EU countries, such as the United Kingdom.

Consequently, we shall use for analysis two of the countries that have been most targeted by Romanian immigrants. One of them is Italy, which has been frequently chosen as a destination since the 1990s, mainly because of linguistic and cultural similarity, and also relative closeness in space. The other country is the United Kingdom, which, due to the previously-applied strict immigration policies, and also to its excellent reputation in the academic and professional department, has always been perceived as an ideal destination. In addition, we must also mention the fact that, because of being highly selective about releasing visas and work permits in the past, the British state had managed to keep a high standard when it came to immigrants, high-skilled immigrants being obviously preferred. On the contrary, Italy, which has not had as many restrictions and such specific policies, has been targeted also, if not mainly, by immigrants of a medium to low level qualifications, but which, on the other hand, has the tendency to value Romanian traditions and social practices to a higher extent.

Therefore, the first cultural institution chosen for analysis is Accademia di Romania (www.accadromania.it), situated in Rome, it is a

cultural institution of an ancient tradition. It was founded in 1920, when archaeologist Vasile Pârvan and historian Nicolae Iorga approved the creation of Romanian Academies abroad, starting with Paris and Rome. Its main institutional aim was to offer brilliant scholars the possibility to improve their studies, specifically in the field of humanistic sciences, such as literature and languages, art or history. During communist times, the activity of the institution ceased, and later limited itself to being a Romanian books library. However, in 1990 it was reopened, with the same mission of selecting and rewarding worthy scholars through the “Vasile Pârvan” doctoral and post-doctoral scholarships. Furthermore, after 2003 and the foundation of the Romanian Cultural Institute, Accademia di Roma also took over the role of the main promoter of Romanian culture on the Italian territory.

In addition, Romanian culture started to establish itself in the United Kingdom at a later date. As mentioned above, the Romanian Cultural Institute (ICR) was established in 2003, and its London branch started being projected in 2004, and was opened to the public in 2006. As the mission of the Institute is described on its website (www.icr-london.co.uk), it can be perfectly applied to both of these institutions, and also to their equivalents in other countries. The activities cover those of a diplomatic mission, a cultural management unit, an artistic and PR agency, and a center for research and documentation, being “Romania’s main arm of cultural diplomacy”, as described on the aforementioned website.

Indeed, this proves what complex tasks such institutions have. Experienced professionals must be informed and select past and present Romanian cultural values and promote them in an attractive way, for different audiences and objectives. The first and most evident objective is to offer Romanian immigrants a closer connection to “home”, whereas the second and most “delicate” objective is to present the native population of their country of residence a positive and high-value image of Romania, as opposed to the negative or distorted image often presented by the media. After all, culture is that pacifist weapon which often proves itself to be more successful than politics when it comes to bridging individuals and communities of different nationalities.

Intercultural Competencies and Cultural Diplomacy: Theoretic Principles and Practical Examples

Cultural diversity, or the multicultural environment, represents the foundation upon which cultural diplomacy is built and supported on a regular basis. Nowadays, multiculturalism is a very present reality in the modern western world, and societies such as the Central and Eastern European ones are following. Great Britain has an extensive

experience of this kind, due to the population of former Commonwealth countries, who have been present on the country's territory for generations. By contradiction, countries such as Italy have only started to deal with these issues in the past two decades. However, between countries and between the various communities within a nation-state, cultural differences should be regarded as something to be discovered and celebrated, instead of being feared and hated.

In the book *Public and Private Cultural Exchange-Based Diplomacy: New Models for the 21st Century*, based on the Salzburg Global Seminar of 2012, we are given four dimensions of diversity (Szanto, 2012):

- audiences
- genres
- scales of organization
- nature of interactions and power relationships.

Although, in the case of Romanian communities abroad, the main, obvious priority is to raise awareness to Romanian culture, there are several aspects to be taken into account. Arts and activities should be selected in a diversified way, to embrace the various art forms, and to offer balance between classic and modern art and culture, in order to attract various types of audiences, and to offer a broad insight into Romanian culture.

Unfortunately, the knowledge that mainstream categories of foreigners often have about Romania consists of a few dissociated images from different moments in history, or the linguistic resemblance in the case of Italy. However, there is nothing congruent or consistent in these images. Therefore, the role of cultural institutions is to show that Romanian cultural identity is so much more, and has much more substance.

The concept of identity has been extensively defined and used in various domains, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and many others. Simply put, we could define identity as the sum of physical, behavioral, and spiritual traits which are particular to us as individuals, but also common with other people who are similar to us, creating collective identity. A Romanian citizen living abroad, whilst having his own individuality, he / she will also possess a bigger or smaller proportion of typically Romanian social and cultural values, which could either create distance or create closeness towards the adoptive society population. And this fact is eventually decided by the level of mutual acceptance which is present, or which can be encouraged through cultural practice. In his book *Schimbare sociala i identitate socioculturala (Social Change and Sociocultural Identity)*, Horațiu Rusu presents various classical theories, which are still actual in the present day (Rusu, 2008). Of these theories, the theory of Wilhelm Wundt stands out, as “the individual spirit is identifiable with the collective one, and it is

reflected in manifestations such as language, myths, religion or traditions, which are only possible in a community of individuals” In addition, Emile Durkheim sustains that identity is independent of the living conditions of the individuals, and it remains such at its core, regardless of the circumstances. Therefore, this means that also the core identity of the Romanian national abroad should have a stable, immutable component, which is thoroughly known and respected by ourselves in the first place.

So, what does Romanian cultural identity entail? Who are we, culturally speaking? And most of all, how can we relate to the “others” and consequently become integrated in our new society?

- Social integration starts with presenting oneself in the best light, but also with being offered the right support by the new society and its authorities. For example, Romania has had an established presence at the London Book Fair 2014, and also the Horniman Museum and Gardens of London has organized, in partnership with ICR London the exhibition “Revisiting Romania: Dress and Identity” - all dedicated to Romanian traditions, crafts and costumes.
- Social integration is communication, including through language and literature. Each of these Romanian cultural institutions offers access to language courses and Romanian literature, translated into the language of the host country.
- Social integration is discovery, but also experiencing entertainment in the process. Performing arts also has its well-deserved spot in the institutes' programming strategy. Events and programs such as “Eccellenze romene nell'arte teatrale e cinematografica” (“Romanian Excellences in Theatre and Film Art”), or the theatre and dance projects organized by the ICR in London, have not only brought to the Romanian public abroad legendary names of our stage and screen, such as Maia Morgenstern, Marcel Iure , and many others, but have also been a platform for encounter and exchange between the artists of the different countries.
- Social integration means to exchange information and learn about each other's similarities and differences. One example is the one-day study seminar organized by the Accademia di Romania, entitled “Restauro: l'Italia e la Romania a confronto” (“Restoration: Italy and Romania in Comparison”), a niche event targeted at professionals of art and architecture, tackling topics such as the influence of Italian art over the Romanian one, the techniques each country uses for restoration, the way national heritage resources are being used, or the presentation of the research activity of partner universities – University of Architecture and Urbanism of Bucharest and Università di Chieti-Pescara.
- Social integration also means to let the “other”

form a personal opinion and perception of your own identity and give feedback. Translated into the language of cultural practice, the question would be: “how does the other interpret my own culture?” Hence, the Romanian Cultural Institute in London is offering us the conference “Shakespeare – Adaptation, Reception, Translation”, a joined international cultural initiative, organized in partnership with several universities and cultural institutions from Romania and Great Britain, and bringing together scholars from all numerous countries of the world, with the purpose of discovering how the most important name in the history of English literature is being interpreted in different cultures. At a smaller scale, but still in a relevant way, Accademia di Romania is organizing the art exhibition “La Romania vista da Roma” (“Romania Seen from Rome”), where Italian painters are sharing through their works their visual view of Romania and its people, its landscapes or its history. Remaining in the realm of visual arts, the Romanian Cultural Institute in London offers the exhibition “Capturing Carpathia”, organized in collaboration with the Global Heritage Fund, and thought as a collection of “sights, sounds and tastes of Romania through the eyes of British travelers and artists” (www.icr-london.co.uk).

These are just a few of the events currently or recently organized by Accademia di Romania and the Romanian Cultural Institute in London, but it is enough to establish a pattern and a strategy of operation. Which, given the fact that all the required competencies are found in the theoretical literature, it means that the Romanian cultural institutions abroad are using the right intercultural techniques when it comes to creating a new image for our country, consisting of real cultural values and relationships. A few good recommendations can be found in the *Public and Private Cultural Exchange-Based Diplomacy: New Models for the 21st Century* handbook, in the section written by Andras Szanto, “Creating an Enabling Environment that Promotes Cultural Diversity within the Context of Cultural Engagement” (Szanto, 2012). The most important of these guidelines for cultural managers are:

- Encouraging collaborations between larger and smaller organizing institutions, as each of these institutions has its own audiences, which help create a more extended outreach.
- “Providing training to cultural programmers”, in order to enrich their cultural and intercultural knowledge, but also their awareness of culturally sensitive issues.
- Creating spaces that act as physical platforms for interactions between the various cultural groups.
- “Develop trust with less-than-educated members of society; developing interest, understanding, tolerance for other cultures” - and another aspect to keep in mind is that quite often the mass population

of a different country will not show the same interest and understanding towards our culture, but it is important to keep our confidence in the value of our culture, and help them understand it too.

- “Recognize the importance of long-term planning as opposed to quick, one-off events” - as we saw, the events given as examples are taking place within the same time frame, and they are very diverse amongst themselves, offering a certain cultural mosaic effect. Surely this pattern of programming will be circular across time, and constantly offering something new, yet differentiated, in order to reach all audiences and all types of taste in art and culture.
- “Work with international media to balance negative stories and cultural stereotypes with good news stories”.

Conclusions

With just a small insight into the offer of intercultural events of two key institutions at a particular point in time, we notice how they all render some general principles which, from the smaller universe of cultural events management, can also be translated on the “macro” level of everyday society. Key concepts which we may have noticed in the description of these events are also key steps towards cultural integration: self-promotion, emphasis on value, support, partnership and exchange. It is important to know oneself and respect one's own identity, in order to let the other know and respect the real “us”, even when we represent a national minority. However, at the same time, we must be open to receive information about the dominating community of our society, learning to respect their own values and practices.

Moreover, these cultural manifestations offer constant opportunities also for non-cultural issues to be raised and discussed between representatives of national minorities and the native, mainstream population, eventually influencing attitudes of policy makers and the relevant media.

To conclude with, we can say that culture is indeed one of the key tools for shaping and developing the society of the future, a society which is diverse and inclusive at the same time. In the UNESCO publication *Culture and Development: How Culture Promotes Sustainable Development*, Francesco Bandarin states that “culture both enables and drives development and it is essential to be acknowledged as such in the post-2015 development agenda. Culture enables development as a cross-cutting element that should be mainstreamed in any development program. Indeed, to be most effective, development approaches should be adapted to local contexts, and should therefore rely on the cultural resources while respecting cultural rights. Culture also drives development within a number of cultural sectors including the creative industries, cultural tourism

and heritage, both tangible and intangible.” (Bandarin, 2013).

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