A rolling workshop in PÉCS

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Venue: University of Pécs, Faculty of Adult Education and Human resource Developemnt

This paper has been prepared to provide background and short overviews of selected issues discussed at the workshop within the framework of Cultural Policies and Activities for Sustainable Learning Cities, Communities and Regions

I.   Background information

I.1. Pécs as a learning city

In 2010 an agreement was signed by 16 local players to promote the concept of learning city and turn it into a reality. The mayor, numerous directors of cultural and educational institutions, a dean of a university faculty, adult learning professionals, organizations that have a vested interest in vocational education: managers of both the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the local Labour Centre were among the actors wishing to create a platform for generating cooperation and learning partnerships as a driver for developing community capability in the field of education and learning.

Somehow that earlier strategy did not succeed or only in part.   There have been serious manpower changes at the top and lower management levels attributable to the power shift caused by the new political election in 2010 followed by new government priorities that heavily focused on centralizing policies. As a customary feature in Eastern Europe, political powers have always played dominant and constitutive role in shaping society, thus limiting the freedom and economic resources of local voices. Competing for state funds and adapting to its priorities has been the major tune since, municipal government has got limited financial powers to develop special cultural policy agendas. „He who pays the piper, calls the tune"- this phrase adequately illustrates the situation. Current government priorities include promoting activities to safeguard national cultural identity and values, preservation of national heritage, supporting the culture of Hungarians living abroad, strengthening the middle class and celebrating the educative role of the Church. The emphasis in these issues is on national (not local) cultural institutions and projects. There is no separate cultural ministry, the portfolio has been integrated into the huge Ministry of

Human Resources that is „responsible for the national healthcare and welfare system, the development of school education from nursery to university, the protection of cultural heritage, promotion of the interests of children and the young and achieving the government's aims related to sport in Hungary"- as declared on the official website.

But recently a few of those working in the cultural and educational field and committed to supporting the revitalization of the city of Pécs through increasing the life chances of its residents and still adhering to their professional values -these professional specialists have restarted the process of building a learning city - now choosing a different approach that is on a more bottom-up development path.   It has started to try and identify existing cultural learning networks and creating new and modified ones while uncovering and mobilizing local resources. Learning in its broader sense is embedded in the social processes of life. We share the belief that a learning city is a network of collaborators acting as a proficient system that reaches a critical mass of social learning.

I.2. PÉCS, a former European Cultural Capital (2010) now is positioning itself as „a city of culture". The historical legacy and the cultural heritage of the city.

Pécs is a city of approx. 150,000 inhabitants, the fifth biggest in Hungary (total population slightly less than 10 million) situated in the south western part of the country, close to the Croatian border. Its population (decreasing lately) is still the largest (apart from Budapest) in the region west of the Danube.

 With its constantly renewed intellectual and cultural heritage, the city is the cultural economic and university centre of the South Transdanubian Region.

Historically it was a seat of the Roman Province Pannonia under the name of Sopianae. The 4th century Early Christian Burial Chambers with memorial chapels became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2000.

Following the foundation of the Hungarian Christian state (around 1000-1001) Pécs was always a Catholic religious center (one of ten Hungarian dioceses) except for the period when it came under Turkish rule for 143 years after 1526.

 The first university in Hungary was founded in Pécs in 1367. Although it wasn't able to remain functioning as such for long, still the city is preparing for that 650th anniversary in 2017. The present University of Pécs re-started its operations in 1923. Nowadays it has ten faculties that nearly cover the full spectrum of high-quality higher education. 22 000 students and a staff of 1600 enrich the city's life. (2014). The institution has become the biggest employer in the city.

Pécs' winning application for the 2010 European Capital of Culture programme was entitled „The borderless city" and was based on five pillars that still express how the city wants to be perceived by its residents and by the outside world and in which directions policy goals have been set.

- revitalising lively public spaces;
- promoting cultural heritage and cultural innovation;
- ensuring multi-ethnic and multi-cultural city life;
- acting as a regional and decentralised cultural center;
- being a cultural gateway city open to the Balkans and to other non-EU countries, thus creating a Southern Cultural Zone.

In terms of cultural infrastucture, new venues such as the Kodály Concert Hall and Conference Centre, Zsolnay Cultural Quarter (created by restoring a ceramic factory site and renovating the listed (15) Zsolnay factory buildings), a new Museum Exhibition Centre, a Library/Knowledge Centre have been added to the former landscape of local cultural institutions.

The ECoC program was seen as a possible turning point addressing the issue of the developmental orientation of the city as it had been struggling with critical economic decline since the transition from the socialist period, gradually sliding on a downwards trajectory. Since 1989 there has been the constant need for economic and structural change as the heavy industry totally had collapsed (uranium and black coal mining) with the majority of manufacturing industries suffering a serious decline in jobs and incomes, generating emigration by the young and the skilled.

Improving its image came to the forefront as well. Culture-based development, emphasizing the potential creative and cultural industries, has been one of the paths chosen within the health and environmental industry sectors (Pécs Pole Developmental strategy, 2005). Such orientations later in 2014 were pronounced in a new development strategy yet still not having achieved results that would constitute a real break-through.   Seven experts were asked to evaluate the ECoC processes. From our perspective the main conclusion was that the city had missed a big opportunity in social learning. The enthusiasm of the citizens has gradually eroded as they weren't ever fully involved.

 The challenge is still there.

II.   The workshop

Participants

23 participants accepted our invitations. Representatives from cultural institutions included: the Directorate of museums, the library-field, the Professional Association of Cultural Institutions, The Cultural Heritage Nonprofit Ltd, The Creative Industry Cluster, The Centre for Civic Communities, The Local Association for the Development of the Vasas-Hird Agglomeration, Volunteer Centre, a university research group for the city development, the

city councillor for the rehabilitation of segregated areas, the Lifelong Learning university centre, the Senior Academy and the Faculty of Adult Education and Human Resource Development.

In the invitation letter we asked the participants to reflect on what lessons they had learnt as senior cultural leaders and managers in the city in the recent period (following the year of the ECoC). Do they feel they are encouraged to co-producing local cultural policy? How and why their organizations intervene in promoting cultural sustainability? What have been the successes and failures?   What can be done moving forward, through which ways and partnerships?

Themes for discussion

The workshop participants proposed themes to discuss, the final list of panel topics selected was as follows:

- Cultural policy goals, cultural policy aspects of public policies. Social learning opportunities, community involvement, modes of governance.
- Long-term effects of the ECoC- induced culture-led development, transformations
- Heritage policy
- Cultural institutions and learning communities, participation trends, covering the city outskirts. Segregated and poor communities.
- The civic sphere, the voluntary movement, partnerships and initiatives for atypical, non-formal learning. Special target groups and thematic focuses.
- The university's role

The opening presentation highlighted the features of the global learning city movement and the outcome (Culture 21 Actions) of the March Cultural Summit of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) that has long been promoting culture as an aspect of sustainable development and has adopted the Agenda 21 for Culture. The city of Pécs is on the list of local governments that have signed up to the document.

Sustainability

Discussing culture within the framework of sustainable development hasn't previously been at the centre of professional discourse. But the values and basic principles adressing the issues of sustainability - like:

- the safety of human life,
- equal rights for access for the acquisition and creation of culture,
- ensuring full participation in society,
- protecting the opportunities for development and action for all,
- the preservation and renewal of cultural heritage,
- nurturing social cohesion among communities,
- intergenerational equity and fairness,

- recognition of diverse values and identities,
- ethical responsibility,
- awareness of long-term sustainability in all societal dimension

- such issues are core foundations for the professionalism of cultural practitioners that determines their actions in setting the goals of their cultural offers.

The definition of sustainability by the Brundtland Commission in 1987 is widely known, of course: ''development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs''. But the task is the breaking-down of the concept into integrated local development policies with clear-cut operational goals and performance indicators used to monitor.

It was highlighted that the city has defined a development plan for the 2014-2030 period that has put sustainability criteria into the centerpiece of its planning and has aimed at a paradigm shift in local governance stressing the principle of partnership within and outside of the city. The principle of multi-stakeholder approach has been declared.   *Resilience, diversity as a source for renewal, growing efficiency of systems, individual and community responsibility, ensuring access as means for opportunity-growth* - these were named as the 5 horizontal goals mainstreaming all dimensions of sustainable development.

The strategy document has been built on the 3-pillar concept of sustainability, i.e. the role of culture has been raised only as an aspect of social sustainability.   For a „sustainable and integrated local society" several objectives have been set - such as

- overcoming deficits in trust,
- enhancing civic involvement in public issues,
- creating conditions and a support infrastructure for establishing communities
- strengthening the Pécs-identity,
- addressing issues of discrimination and deprivation in neglected areas,
- contributing to the development of local cultural capital through offering opportunities for learning.

For nearly all of these, operational goals have not been translated into indicators, no special policy measures have been formulated, no budgets were allocated.

Of agreement was the need for a well selected group of indicators not only as a policy tool, but as a means that can communicate the importance and meaningfulness of culture to cross-sectoral actors and to the public.

 The culture of change that results in transformative social learning hasn't been elaborated as a necessary condition for meeting the aims of sustainable development in the city.

Culture can be considered in itself AND as the means to achieving other goals. But cultural issues per se, such as the art-world, cultural forms and practices, entertainment, cultural heritage services, digital culture, roles of cultural institutions etc. - these haven't

been mentioned in the document. This is surprising and indicates a relatively under-prioritized role in policy-formulation in „the city of culture". Participants shared the view that they are aware that public policy responds to different and environmental, social, political and cultural pressures. And that is a competitive arena. Consequently, the cultural aspects have to project themselves more dynamically.

The implications of cultural life for local social cohesion and local identity development can't be pushed aside.

Discussion, reflected issues and opinions

1. Everyone welcomed the opportunity for dialogue and there was common agreement that there should be more platforms or roundtables when relevant communications among practitioners and between cultural interested parties and policy-makers are taking place.   The experience of cross-sectoral dialogues happening are even more thin on the ground. Consequently, the city government's mediated structured series of meetings would be welcome.

2. There should be more significant public consultations on long-term cultural policy issues as well. The opinion was voiced that even a sort of formalized manifesto on cultural policy initiatives would be favoured showing high-level commitment from the leadership for developing local culture and attaching sufficient budgets to it. So far a short-term, political election oriented agenda has dominated, and institutions' long-term planning capability has been seriously curbed by postponed funding schemes and the permanent financial shortages in the local funding landscape. It was considered unfortunate that local government has reduced its staff numbers within the department responsible for cultural policies and that mainly political influences are shaping decisions in cultural affairs.

3. Addressing issues of cultural governance should also be reconsidered. There are legally possible consultative boards at the cultural institutions constituted for the involvement of cultural citizens groups and business representatives working in the field of culture but recently they haven't been active and dynamic. Practitioners seem to neglect these potential forums and dialogues with cultural citizens.

4. The Civic Resource Center in partnership with the municipality has initiated the „City Gates" project that aims at stimulating civic communities to be engaged in public issues and to revive local culture in the city suburbs - within the framework of Community-led local development EU 2020. It was raised that among the appr. 100 registrated civic organization they are working with a lot has been learned about how to recruit supporters, how to acquire funding, how to cooperate with

international partners and how to work together with the municipality on large-scale projects.

5. Cultural policy initiatives, projects and programmes are not monitored and evaluated enough. The municipality doesn't have sufficient manpower for the task and no resources are allocated to researching the cultural field. Lack of a coherent data-base is a serious deficit for making informed decisions and planning.   A „City Monitoring" -framework has to be set up, following construction of a data-bank to develop a comprehensive understanding of the city. There has been some research down to the efforts of academics. A complex scheme of Pécs-Studies has to be supported by the municipality jointly with university backing. Leaning about the city should be a continuous effort and practice.

6. The promotion of creating more favourable conditions for cultural participation remains an important issue for cultural policy.   Public cultural organizations are dedicated to this goal.   But reaching and mobilising the culturally inactive are among the key concerns and challenges identified. To do work with and for vulnerable social groups needs more financial resources, programmes and funding schemes.   Nevertheless a few very successful programmes have broadened cultural participation in „non-cultural" institutions such as in elderly care homes or prisons by civicand church-related groups.   Cultural participation correlates with social participation according to reseach and experience.

7. Arts education is proposed to be positioned at the forefront. Being involved in art has great potential for personality development, it can build skills for creativity and expression - both being crucial later for economic and social life. Precisely because the present school curriculum is not generous with the arts, out-of-school engagement with art has to be returned to the spotlight. The number of incubator-programs has to be more supported.

8. There are very good audience development practices that target children and the younger generations. However young adults' participation has decreased and taste preferences seem not to favour high culture offerings. Starting at a very early age and targeting families has achieved impressive results.   It is hoped that familiarization with cultural forms and venues will have long lasting results. Good practices (family festivals, fostering talent) are worth sharing, the employed innovative methods and tools are contributing to an enhanced and more meaningful participation. Deeper audience research would help the institutions to target better but no funds exist for that.

9. There is a real financial sustainability problem with the new cultural infrastructure (Concert Hall, Zsolnay Quarter) brought into being by the ECoC, substantial and constant central state subsidy is needed for their maintenance. But moving towards

carving out a role of regional and international cultural significance can't be achieved without deploying more marked support and cooperation for creating large-scale projects. This again reinforces the political advocacy mechanisms and may distort even further the transparency criteria. The managers would expect the municipality to be much more active in coordinating cross- sectoral stakeholders (cultural institutions, the business sphere, actors representing the agglomeration of the city, the Churches and the University) to create big flagship development projects. Learning how to exist in a partnership - that would be a real action-step for sustainability in the city.

10. In recent times Hungarian cultural policy favoured transformation into a new legal status for cultural operations: the „non-profit company" gives more financial autonomy but demands more business-like operations and market approaches. Low-income citizen groups need culture on offer at specially subsidized rates.   But both the old and the new forms of funding presuppose a degree of money-making and bidding activities on the part of organizational managements.

11. Addressing the issue of deep poverty and social exclusion in the segregated East-Pécs suburb, community coaching methodologies achieved considerable results in 5 complex projects (through accumulating social capital by working together, enabling community self-organization, offering labour market training and givin infrastructural help).

12. The Volunteer Centre has started to work since 2004 and established itself as a credible organization. Their goal is to make residents aware that instead of turning to the „state" to help solving their problems they should nourish proactivity and find the liberating power of action. They find a serious challenge in co-working with different organizational cultures.

13. The Creative Cluster comprises bigger institutions (symphonic orchestra) and small enterprises. The monthly joint breakfast sessions are visited with growing numbers. Despite the „rise and fall" cycles there have been very good projects and are more in the making, stakeholders have acquired collaborative skills. In the field of investing in start-ups and developing creative businesses and in playing a collaborative part in networks – in these areas there is room for improvement.

14. There are excellent examples of projects that target certain social groups (Senior Academy, Autistic people, etc.) but to overcome the cultural inactivity of the roughly 60 % of the remining Pécs population is proving to be a mountain to climb.

15. The „Treasures of Pécs" heritage project shows the municipality's continued committedness to heritage policy. Now the diverse faith heritage (monuments, visitor centres, museums) has gained resources to upgrade and improve church offerings in the field of culture Enabling them to join the rich list elements of Pécs.

In conclusion the workshop surveyed progress made and lack of it. Identified successes and shortcomings. And made a start on identifying improved ways of embedding culture into a sustainability program of Pécs in the future.

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