THE CINDERELLA OF EUROPEAN CULTURAL POLICIES

The emancipation of festivals

We are witnessing the continuing emancipation of festivals from conditions of neglect and lack of visibility. Conditions described by Nina: festivals are still absent from the radar of her country's statistical office, which monitors all areas of cultural activity from libraries, archives, botanical gardens, and collects information as a basis for strategic decisions and planning. Those absent are left out of mainstream political discourse and practice.

Her complaint appears in a volume[1] that testifies about a milestone in the course of successful emancipation of festivals onto the European scene. The EFFE Labels and the EFFE Awards are important markers of the aspirations of festivals to gain a position centre stage, or at least a place on the stage of European culture, especially cultural policies. By this the ascent of the genre of festivals, which has characterised the past half century (namely that festivals have multiplied in numbers and importance across Europe) has found its reflection in the thinking, talking and acting about culture.

Festivals have had at least one strong point in this pursuit: their name. Although there is no standard definition (which leads to recurrent disputes), and in several languages it has important rivalling terms and synonyms, the word *festival* is widely used and is generally accepted. (One cannot help citing the bon mot of the American judge about pornography: I cannot define it "but I know when I see it"[2].) The absence of a common name is probably the greatest obstacle in the road of emancipation of another similarly important sphere of culture.

Life without a name

Spheres of culture are most commonly identified by the name of their most representative institution like museums, libraries, festivals or more often in singular like theatre, circus, cinema. Realms of culture are sometimes denoted by a generic expression like heritage, arts (also performing or visual arts), dance etc, or by naming the activity like art education, cultural relations, protection of monuments etc. Each of these names can stand for the entirety of a (sub)sector: activities, professionals and institutions.

There is a realm of culture which – no matter how big it is in certain parts of Europe – exists without an established consensual name, not just in the lingua franca of cultural policies (English) but in other vernaculars, too. Cultural centres or houses of culture are most often used but similar approximations do not prevail for the professionals and the activities connected to those houses. In the next pages the term **socio-culture**, a loan translation of the German *Soziokultur*[3] will be applied.

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[1] Nina Čalopek: All that politics… but what about the festivals? In: European Festivals Association Europe for Festivals, Festivals for Europe, Tielt, Lannoo, 2015

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_know_it_when_I_see_it

[3] For a moment in time, impressed by the advances of socio-culture is Latin America the term *cultura viva* seemed to play the role as a consensual name of the sector: http://www.budobs.org/narchive/14-memo/426-memosep2014.html#viva. Earlier we experimented by concocting an acronym, MILC – multifunctional institution of local culture: http://www.budobs.org/other-projects/socio-cultural-institutions.html

Why socio-culture?

The German term *Soziokultur* suggests two essential features of the concept: it is a *sector* at the crossroads of the cultural and social spheres, a *hybrid*. Socio-culture is more than the aggregate of a type of institutions, which indeed constitutes its essence, and most other definitions are limited to them (most importantly the relevant chapter in the Compendium[4]: *8.4.2 Cultural houses and community cultural clubs*).

At defining the content of *Soziokultur*, the most authentic source[5] resorts to describing what the socio-cultural institutions do. Typically, these institutions carry a variety of names: *Kulturzentren, Kulturhäusern, Kulturläden, Stadtteilzentren, Bürgerhäusern.* Similar is the case in Poland, where the taxonomy lists *centra kultury i sztuki, domy i ośrodki kultury, świetlice i kluby*; or in Denmark: *lokale kulturhuse, aktivitetshuse, medborgerhuse;* or in France: *centres culturels, sociaux et socioculturels, maisons des jeunes ou de la culture, foyers ruraux* etc. but we shall stop here[6].

What is socio-culture? A contracted version of the *Soziokultur* definition[7] states:

> Socio-cultural centres are basically cultural institutions. *Socio-* recalls that the cultural action is closely linked with the society. To reach the desired impact it extends to areas which in the classic sense do not belong to the field of culture, such as children and youth care, education, social services, urban development and the environment. The particular value of these links is in the manner in which they relate to one another and to the local environment. Socio-cultural centres *service* a neighbourhood, a city or a region. They are culturally, socially or politically active associations, initiatives and groups, their premises and technical facilities provide rehearsing and production opportunities for music and theatre groups, as well as studios for artists and others. They offer open space for debate and socialising. Important feature is the great use of volunteers.

At an earlier attempt[8] we ourselves defined socio-culture as a cluster that combines:

- Non-professional (amateur) artistic and cultural activities;
- (Certain types of) community or collective leisure activities;
- (Certain types of) non-formal out-of-school training.

Citing *centres socioculturels* above showed that the term is in broad use in some languages (also in Spanish) in adjective form but not as a noun, which would have more of a connotation of a sector.

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[4] http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/countries-profiles-structure.php on the website of the Compendium programme of the Council of Europe and EricArts.

[5] http://www.soziokultur.de/bsz/node/80, on the website of the German Socio-cultural Association.

[6] A somewhat broader attempt at mapping the national variation was begun a decade ago and never succeeded in taking off in lack of official backing – http://www.budobs.org/cultural-centres.html

[7] http://www.soziokultur.de/bsz/node/80

[8] http://www.budobs.org/other-projects/socio-cultural-institutions/comparative-research-outline.html

A sector in hiding

The argument is that socio-culture is a sector. A hybrid subsector on the crossroads, which also means that on the peripheries. A sector consisting of institutions, professionals and activities of its own. They indeed exist but are barely visible on most cultural policy screens, and certainly fully invisible in the institutional folklore of the European Union. Socio-culture is not a target of investment, a calculated asset or resource in any EU strategy or action. Socio-culture cannot be identified even in obvious contexts like tackling poverty, urban regeneration, addressing migration crisis or other aspects of social integration. Due to its semantic shortcoming it is never cited directly, and is rarely acknowledged indirectly via synonyms. Politics does not count with socio-culture as a resource embodied in an established social practice, a professional force with relevant experience, and a network of institutions.

Differently from festivals, socio-culture is much more compartmentalised into national boundaries. This generates local sub-species that do not communicate among themselves. Symptomatically, the Wikipedia pages that are portraying them are imperfectly synoptic: *Soziokultur* does not link to *éducation populaire*, and *közművelődés* to either of the former etc. There exist networks at the upper layer, communities of open, almost cosmopolitan and fairly multicultural cultural centres, but they either do not identify themselves with a socio-cultural sector (typical members of Trans Europe Halles[9]) or they do not seem to fully realise the drawbacks of living in the dark (European Network of Cultural Centres[10]).

Conceptual ambiguities and linguistic confusion were mentioned which are to blame for the invisibility of socio-culture. But probably the most important reason is to be found in the following statement: "The UK does not have a legacy of 'cultural houses' in the way they were conceived in Central and Eastern Europe" and „There are no centres that meet this description in Ireland"[11]. The domination of the English language makes operators, administrators, academics and politicians feel uncomfortable and provincial to talk about this issue.

The drawbacks

Drawbacks are threefold, at least. Being non-existent in political discourse, the various segments of socio-culture – the activities, the professionals and the institutions – fail to present strategic targets of investment. Socio-culture is nowhere between the dedicated targets of the Creative Europe programme and does not occupy its place in the social innovation projects or other programmes of the European Social Fund.

Second, if socio-culture is absent from mainstream European parlance, its status remains secondary (or worse) on the national stages.

Third, this neglect prolongs the introvert isolation that characterises a great part of the sector as opposed to the lively interactivity of librarians, museum people, artists and professionals in the creative industries. Operating in rural areas (which a large part of the sector is doing)

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[9] http://teh.net/

[10] http://encc.eu/

[11] From section *8.4.2 Cultural houses and community cultural clubs* of the country profiles of the UK and Ireland in the Compendium, http://www.culturalpolicies.net/. Nevertheless attention may be called to the Youth Arts Hubs in Scotland, http://www.creativescotland.com/funding/archive/youth-arts-hubs.
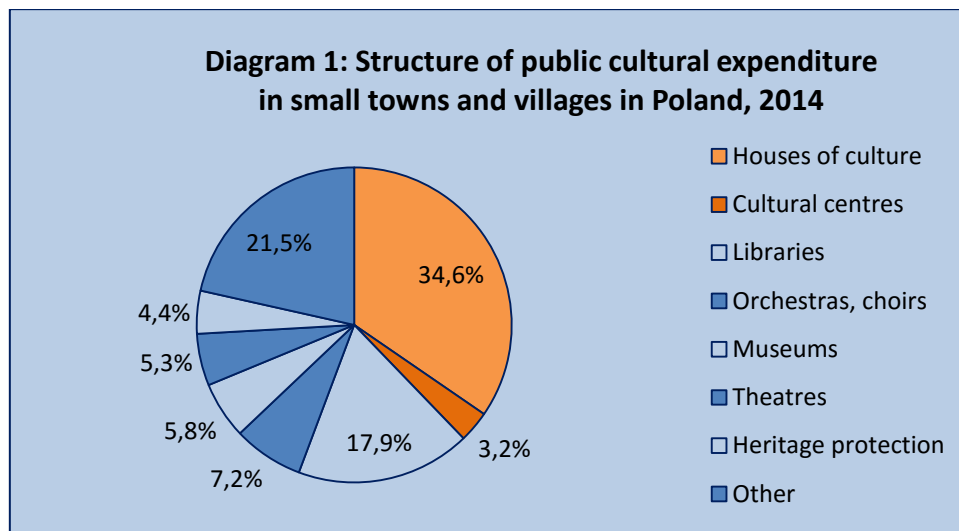
must not be synonymous with provincialism, which is the obvious threat. But without massive virtual and physical international interaction the destiny gets fulfilled and twenty-first century skills and values receive less attention than the cultivation of nineteenth century folklore in the programming.

Evidence about the dimensions

How do we know that socio-culture exists and is no *quantité négligeable*? By looking into certain national statistics or local sources like city budgets.

There are countries like Belgium, Bulgaria or Hungary, where the fundamental logic of cultural policies includes socio-culture "by definition" (under various names[12]). In those places the national statistical services offer abundant information on the sector. Some of these are lost in details (e.g. the relevant statistics of the Hungarian culture ministry record dozens of variables from literally thousands of institutions), and time series or international comparison are available from the most conventional cultural performance indicators only. One cannot detect the slightest attempt at international harmonisation of statistics on socio-culture as such[13].

There are nevertheless a few windows that allow for learning about the dimensions of the sector. Diagram 1 is one such example, showing that more than a third of public cultural expenditure in the Polish countryside goes to institutions of socio-culture. Since the country has a decentralised financing system, these data represent an important part of all public cultural expenditure of Poland[14].
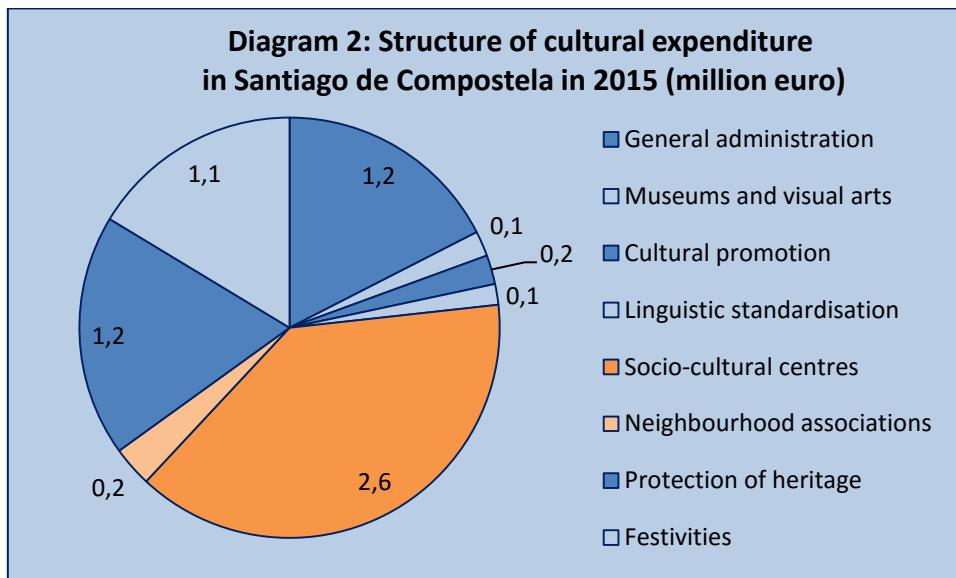

Diagram 1: Structure of public cultural expenditure in small towns and villages in Poland, 2014

- Houses of culture — 34,6%
- Cultural centres — 3,2%
- Libraries — 17,9%
- Orchestras, choirs — 7,2%
- Museums — 5,8%
- Theatres — 5,3%
- Heritage protection — 4,4%
- Other — 21,5%

Source: Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS), Local Databank
http://stat.gov.pl/bdl/app/strona.html?p_name=indeks

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[12] E.g. in the Flemish part the cultural sector is divided to heritage, socio-culture and the arts (*het cultureel erfgoed, het sociaal-cultureel werk, de kunsten*), the same in a number of other countries, with the creative industries as a recent addendum.

[13] Many of these attempts exemplify the conceptual confusion. Examples taken from official translation into English: *dom kultury* (Polish) – cultural establishment, *közművelődés* (Hungarian) – public education.

[14] The total of the diagram is 6.2 bn zloty. The latest total public expenditure on cultural services according to Eurostat COFOG was 10.4 bn zloty in 2012.

Diagram 2 is an illustration of the important share socio-culture represents in the cultural expenditure of a number of cities in Europe.

Diagram 2: Structure of cultural expenditure in Santiago de Compostela in 2015 (million euro)

- General administration
- Museums and visual arts
- Cultural promotion
- Linguistic standardisation
- Socio-cultural centres
- Neighbourhood associations
- Protection of heritage
- Festivities

Source: The website of Santiago de Compostela
http://www.santiagodecompostela.gal/medi/transparencia/Informacion_economica_e_financieira/01._Orzamentos_2015/Orzamento_2015/08_Estado_de_Gastos._Resumo_2015_por_Programas_de_Gasto.pdf

The third example is from Latvia, on Diagram 3.

Diagram 3: Number of cultural institutions in Latvia in 2014
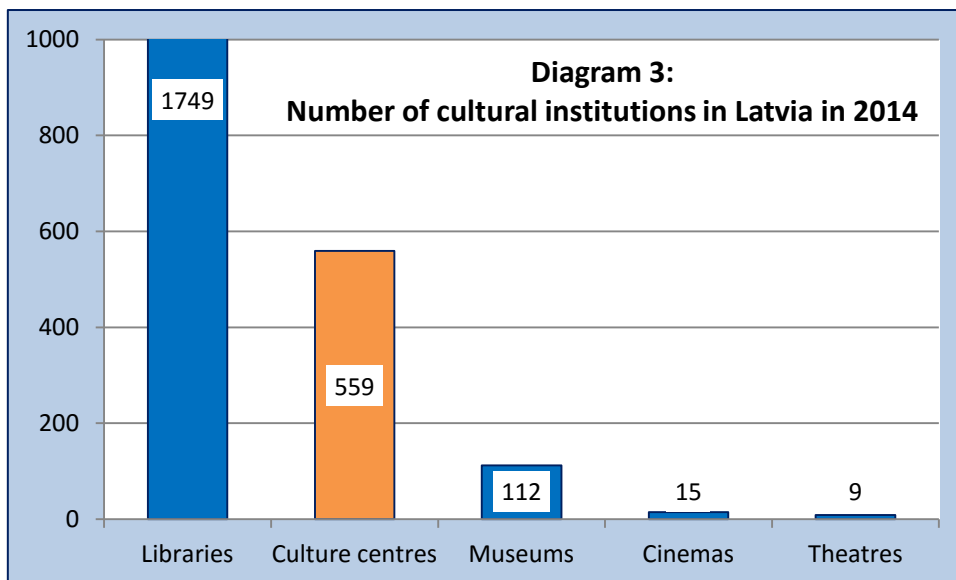
Source: Central Statistical Office of Latvia (CSB)
http://data.csb.gov.lv/pxweb/en/Sociala/Sociala__ikgad__kultura/?rxid=a79839fe-11ba-4ecd-8cc3-4035692c5fc8

The tremendous diversity of structures and conceptions in the statistical sources and our limited space prevents one from cataloguing a greater number of proofs like the above.

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International statistics

The selected examples illustrate that socio-culture is a sector with tens of thousands of institutions, professionals and activities that can be identified and distinguished in a variety of statistics and other means of evidence. Where can you find them in international statistics? Practically nowhere. Which explains the absence of socio-culture from the spirit and letter of high level documents: out of sight out of mind.

Painstaking analysis of the major international statistical systems including the *Unesco Framework for Cultural Statistics*, *Eurostat* in general and *ESSnet-Culture Report* in particular all fail to collect and offer information on socio-culture. The usual defence is that the structure (the framework) of data covers everything: if they play music it is recorded at performing arts, if they run courses it is part of adult education, the expenses are neatly divided between cultural, social or educational grids etc. Yet by this scattering the specificity of socio-culture disappears. As if there was no need for identifying religious orders or monasteries as such, since monks are recorded anyway where they teach, cure, pray, sing, do research, brew beer etc.

In the *international classification of activities for time-use statistics* (ICATUS) "attendance in meetings, participating in community social functions, accompanying adults to social activities" come closest.

In the *international standard classification of occupations* (ISCO) of the International Labour Organisation "cultural centre managers" figure in the *Dissemination* branch of *Sports & Recreation.*

In the *statistical classification of economic activities* in the European Community, (NACE Rev. 2) the socio-cultural pursuits are entirely scattered between categories 90, 91 and 93 of code R – arts, entertainment and recreation.

A generous umbrella

There may be reservations about introducing a common name, in fear of trimming the specificities and autonomy of various components within or neighbouring socio-culture. E.g. amateur artists and volunteers cherish a lively organisational life, so do large urban cultural centres. There are furthermore ambiguous areas like adult education: in some places an important constituent of socio-culture[15] while elsewhere *Volkshochschule* is strictly separated from the cultural sector; also local cultural processes and policies having strong movements behind them (Agenda 21 for Culture, Eurocities).

A process of finding an umbrella concept should take place with fair consideration to what the respective areas should gain and to minimising symbolic losses in terms of identity or in practical terms like organisational autonomy.

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[15] A shocking illustration to this is the latest government proposal to place the state institute for socio-culture (Nemzeti Művelődési Intézet) under the charge of a civic foundation of folk high schools (Lakitelek Népfőiskola Alapítvány) in Hungary.

Proposed measures

The title of this part echoes the same section in the latest review of cultural statistics in the European Union[16] of which this paper is a critique for not mentioning socio-culture in any form, and at the same time the next lines are offered as a supplement to the measures proposed by KEA.

To address shortcomings in overall statistical information it is proposed to the European institutions to

- Entrust a specialised research centre or ad hoc structure to be set up to consolidate the concepts that relate to local community cultural activities, institutions and professionals (aka socio-culture), with the explicit intention to find and introduce a generic name for the area;
- Engage more effectively with national institutions, foundations and associations to work out more and better statistical definitions with a view to addressing statistical gaps with regard to the above;
- Invite Eurostat in coordination with national statistical institutes to propose amendments to existing international codes when a revision of this classification will take place in the relevant international bodies (notably the UN Expert Group on international statistical classifications and UN Statistics Division for ISIC/NACE), in relation to the above (which may require a redefinition of the area and reclassification in existing codes to better take into account specificities, with due regard to the risks of double accounting).

To address gaps in data on cultural employment it is recommended that the European institutions to

- Invite Eurostat in coordination with national statistical institutes to propose amendments to existing ISCO codes when a revision of this classification will take place in the relevant international bodies (notably the International Labour Organisation), for example in relation to animators;
- Gather data on volunteers in local cultural centres.

With the aim of improving information on cultural participation it is suggested that the European institutions to

- Regularly gather data on attendance on a representative sample of local cultural centres across the European Union;
- Engage with relevant organisations in Europe to measure cultural participation in various fields of arts (e.g. European Network of Cultural Centres – ENCC, Trans Europe Halles – TEH, Culture Action Europe – CAE, Amateo, relevant Creative Europe projects, etc.);
- Build capacities amongst alternative data providers, and more particularly amongst the beneficiaries of the Creative Europe programme, to collect more and better data on cultural participation with a view to fulfilling Creative Europe's indicator requirements.

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[16] KEA European Affairs: *Feasibility study on data collection and analysis in the cultural and creative sectors in the EU*, Brussels 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/culture/library/studies/ccs-feasibility-study_en.pdf.