

GDN Regional Research Competition Project

"The Reform Process: How Cultural Organizations Have Adapted to the Changed Circumstances"

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Non-Technical Summary

The experience of this project showed that building a good working relationship between the research community and the institutions and executive authorities in the sphere of culture is not going to be an easy job. Firstly, the artistic community in general (at least in Bulgaria), including the management of the cultural institutions, does not believe in the reliability of numbers when it comes to the processes in culture. Attempts to refer to the marketing aspect of the functioning of these institutions are apparently not particularly welcome. Considerations of this type are viewed as an undeserved burden imposed on the directors of art museums whose understanding of their mission tends to be purely idealistic. The common belief exists that public cultural institutions should not be dependent on the market and that it is the obligation of the state to fully ensure their support.

The data-assembling phase of the project concluded that the collecting of empirical evidence for research purposes as far as art museums are concerned presents a serious challenge. This suggests a total lack of any previous practice. Not only annual numbers of key performance indicators are not easily available but also any written documentation on major areas of operation is quite scarce. What we mean here will be documents like mission statements, written standards or best practices, development visions or strategies for managing change. There is no sufficient clarity even in the interpretation of roles and responsibilities of the personnel.

Still a lot remains to be done in identifying the needs and parameters of cultural statistics and policy research. No thought is given to reflecting and representing the needs of museum audiences (not to mention that the museums do not know who their audiences are). The only visitor information that the galleries collect is their number, broken into paid and free admission. The governing authorities have not considered soliciting any input from their audiences to diversify the process of evaluating the museum's performance or planning for its future.

One positive fact of the project experience requires attention, namely that some of the directors expressed interest in being informed about the research findings and their meaning. Others used the interview to explain what their financial needs and grievances were and to ask whether the project could offer them financial support. The common complaint was that the management of public art museums had no information about fund-raising possibilities and no project-writing competences. The biggest problem everywhere was described as "diminishing quality of the collection", "impossibility for new acquisitions" and limited opportunities for effective management of the collection.

On the other hand for the project implementing organization and the research team this was a very useful learning experience. It has introduced new insights into the way research for policy purposes should be done, and familiarized us with the methods and practice of colleagues in other countries. Studying the reform process in the huge variety of its aspects is a very demanding task that requires broad knowledge of realities and empirical evidence in the country and abroad. And one important thing we have learned while working on the project was that we have way to go in this endeavor.