

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT. CHALLENGES AND CARDINAL COURSES OF ACTION

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Introduction

In spite of the diverse museum management practices, there are some manifestations and directions of development common to museums all over the Globe. Among the most important ones is the interest in the efficiency of managing a museum's activity, measured from different points of view: financial, administrative, cultural, educative, and social.

Reference points in the process of defining the managerial strategy of Romanian museums

Museum management efficiently handles the cultural heritage, the facilities and the staff of the organization, depending on the laws, the practices and the context of each country. In Romania, even if some activities are lead by other institutions, museums have a rather great liberty to develop specific activities concerning both the internal affairs and the design of public activities.

According to the laws in force during the last few years, a museum's general director position is filled by contest: the candidates must present a 3 to 5 years management project. This obliges the museums' general directors to be professional managers, as opposed to experts

in each museum's collection, as it traditionally was the case. The management contract is made based on the winning project. Subsequently, a periodic activity evaluation is being performed, and if the project fails to be achieved, the respective manager will be dismissed. Even so, the external evaluations aren't usually made public, and dismissals are not carried out (the conclusion being that the directors' main objectives are being accomplished); consequently, at the time being we cannot speak of a true professionalisation of the museum manager position in Romania.

In this context, even the messages coming from the Ministry of Culture are contradictory. On one hand, the law emitted by the ministry in 2005 states that the management projects must refer to diversifying the cultural offer of a cultural public institution; to knowing and satisfying the cultural needs of the communities they are part of; to promoting competition between cultural institutions, in what concerns their offer to the public; to promoting excellence, experiment and innovation; to further train the staff's professional skills; to applying the efficiency, efficacy and economy principles in managing the financial means and

human and material resources of the cultural public institution. On the other hand, the evaluation reports that have been made public show these desiderata to be achieved, even if the museum activity's beneficiaries do not perceive them entirely as such – the conclusion in this situation is that the evaluation criteria are quite low. Moreover, museums under the Ministry of Culture require for the candidates to general director positions to be specialists in their specific research field, as well as doctors in science, thus making the managerial and economic qualifications of the candidates irrelevant.

Museum management priorities in Romania

Keeping in mind that a Romanian museum cannot cover the necessary funds for its existence by Ministry support or by its own earnings, the only way for it to become self sustained and to satisfyingly achieve its mission is to formulate clear objectives, to efficiently manage the available funds and to permanently attract sponsors, collaborators and as many visitors as possible.

The first thing to do is to formulate a specific museum mission: a public declaration that describes the museum's long term goal, reflecting its fundamental belief, values, aspirations and strategies. This mission must be known inside and outside the museum and it must be acceded by all categories of public. It is generally considered that a museum's mission and existential purpose consists of *culturally disseminating its specific research field*.

Each museum should define its mission as to reflect both its activity concerning the heritage's preservation, research and development, and its activity serving the society or the local community. The mission should be attractive for the public, stimulating for the staff, representative for the museum, and comprehensive enough to include various activities and not to hinder the future development of the organisation.

The mission statement could thus be a very important instrument to attract sponsors and to communicate with them, being at the same time a promise to the public. It is the manager and his team's responsibility to define the mission and to promote it.

Currently there are rather few museums in Romania that have a mission statement, even if their number is growing. Among those that have such a statement, there are even fewer that actively promote it. One of the reasons for this is the fact that most museum general directors are specialists in their museum research field and have little knowledge in management and marketing. People with better organizational skills are more suited for this position than scientists are. Individuals with experience in administration, management, marketing, public relations etc. could also find a common ground with the business world representatives, with which museums interact more and more often. But not having any background in the museum's research field may also have some disadvantages: museum specialists

might feel unappreciated and disregarded; one inexperienced in the specific needs of a collection might not understand them properly; competent individuals with management experience might not accept working in a non-profit organisation, where the salaries are low, unless they have no other alternative. Some of these disadvantages could be rectified by assigning certain responsibilities regarding the patrimony's protection, preservation, research and valorization to the museum's scientific council.

Another way to enhance museum activities' efficiency is to design an adequate organisation chart, to clarify each employee's responsibilities. Positions that must necessarily exist in a museum are that of a public relations person, a designer, a public programs coordinator, and of specialists in working with children and other categories of visitors. Naturally, the organization chart's dimensions and the positions' degree of specialization and diversity depend on the museum's complexity. Regardless of the museum's dimension, each employee should know his/her responsibilities and should have a job description.

In what concerns a museum's administrator, he/she is in charge of the technical features of the building. Only recently have some bigger Romanian museums started to hire or to collaborate with specialists in marketing or journalism or communication graduates to administer museum activities. Marketing is becoming

increasingly important for a museum, providing more efficient and successful ways to reach the organization's objectives. It is useful in managing the museum's connections with other institutions, in solving fund-raising problems, in expanding the museum's public programs offer, and in better understanding its public. In the light of these, Romanian museums should assign a greater importance to marketing activities, in spite of the staff's usual reluctance, which is based on the preconception that marketing is nothing more than a set of techniques to raise the sales, to attain by all means a greater income. Actually, well conceived marketing strategies benefit the process of reaching the mission statement, the use of available resources, and the creation of constructive partnerships between museum and society. Moreover, they can contribute to eliminating the numerous problems a museum confronts with: small number of visitors, insufficient funds for adequately managing the patrimony and for collection development, low popularity of the specific cultural products, etc. The most popular marketing strategies that large museums apply are organising blockbuster temporary exhibitions, as well as restoring or enlarging the building; smaller museums can transform their visitors into active users and discussion partners, involving the community in museum activities as much as possible. A museum should always have a marketing approach, whether it has a marketing department or not. In

other words, it should organically assume the role of serving the cultural patrimony and especially the visitor and the society.

A good strategy is always one based on a marketing research that very clearly shows what the characteristics, needs and wishes of the public are. A study made in 2008 by Zbucea and Ivan shows that national and county Romanian museums have a great interest towards this kind of research, but they lack specialised personnel to make it. Consequently, the research results cannot be used to significantly improve the museums' activity. Hence, a managerial strategy should be devised to include employee trainings in this field.

Concerning the managerial strategy, a museum should organize at least some of its public and scientific activities through project management; this way, museum undertakings are well managed by streamlining the employees' activities and by achieving multiple tasks in a certain period of time. Another efficient method is to use budget management (circumscribing financial resources optimally guides the offer development) and objectives management (long and short term planning requires an entire hierarchy of objectives, from the most important to the most pressing ones, to be assigned down to every individual in the organization).

Managing human resources is yet another important part of the managerial activity, since the organization's success relies on the

staff's performance. Professionals are needed but hard to get by Romanian museums, since the salaries are low and since many specialists consider working in a museum unsatisfying compared to other jobs they might find (due to a generally unattractive museum image). Once a team is put together, it is essential to create a stimulating environment: an organizational culture that motivates the staff and imposes certain quality and behavioral standards. An exact system of values must exist for measuring and awarding the individuals' performances, and precise regulations for all museum activity and for formal and informal relations must be established. But creating and promoting an organisational culture takes time and requires a charismatic person to support it, and resistance to change in itself is hard obstacle to overcome. Due to these reasons, most Romanian museums do not have an organisational culture; thus, cooperation is faulty, visitors are not always adequately treated, and some employees consider their main role to be that of making scientific research instead of helping to achieve the museum's mission regarding the visitors and the community. Actually, quite many staff members think of working for the public as a burden and they don't realize that exhibitions are made for the visitors and not for them or a small group of specialists. One of the general director's tasks is to change this attitude, using his/her diplomatic and leadership skills, by implementing the organizational

culture, giving the employees the feelings of belonging and of pride that they work in an organization that helps the society.

Also concerning the organisational culture, it is better to make the working hours flexible (in order to increase the employees' job satisfaction and performances), to make the annual schedule of activities so that it includes regular public activities organised by different museum departments (in order to raise the staff's interest, motivation and awareness towards them), to plan these public activities carefully and to include research specialists in their development, to further train the staff in relevant fields they might feel attracted to (in order to improve their skills, their knowledge, their will to do their best for achieving the museum's mission, as well as their sense of worth), and to set adequate criteria for performance evaluations (the scientific and public related criteria should be equally important, keeping in mind the museum's mission).

Another great challenge for Romanian museums concerns the financial resources' management. When costs for temporary exhibitions, public programs and other museum activities are high and funds received from the state and from sales are low, fundraising must become one of the priorities. In this respect, the general director has an important role in developing profitable relations with opinion

leaders, cultural, politic and scientific personalities, and with major contributors. He or she should be an advocate of museums' interests among influential groups and individuals.

As a conclusion, management practices should continually develop. Even if the Ministry of Culture has a positive influence in this matter and if there is a certain pressure coming from some museum employees to "modernize" and to streamline the activities, the good results are still overdue. To make them happen, evaluations must be stricter and the public more exigent, the general director must participate in additional, systematic and continuous training, and museums should better collaborate with the business sector and with other non-profit organizations. Moreover, learning from other museums that have had successful managerial activities could be constructive, as well as anticipating future society developments.

If more Romanian museums could abide by these management practices, as some already do, they would become more attractive to the public and become models for similar organizations, thus imposing always higher standards in the benefit of the national cultural heritage and of the communities.

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