

CULTURAL SECTOR IN THE PANDEMIC PERIOD: A CASE STUDY OF OKSID ASSOCIATION

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken up all aspects of socio-political systems. While some of these aspects were recognized as more priority and thus received special financial stimulus from public sources throughout the period of the global crisis, the cultural and artistic sector turned out to be one of the biggest losers. The ubiquitous uncertainty about the duration of such a crisis situation and the mentioned inability to “survive” in the new circumstances forced many individuals and organizations to discontinue their previous activities. On the other hand, many have turned to the only possible way of survival – the Internet.

Organizers of online concerts, exhibitions, performances, and various other programs found different, creative ways to reach target audiences in culture and art, which was also deeply affected by the new situation. In this article, we will present a case study of one of the Šibenik-based associations to show the field perspective “from below”. Oksid, an association for the promotion of culture and art, has been active on the local cultural and artistic scene for 9 years. After the interruption of “normality” in March 2020, which was quite a shock just a few days before the association’s birthday concert, a plan for the continuation of activity and adaptation was soon made. The association applied the project titled Culturally Networked for funding through the Culture and Art Online competition from the European Social Fund and thus managed to offer at least some cultural and artistic content despite the locked doors of its premises. A case analysis was chosen as a research strategy, primarily due to its analytical possibilities of placing a particular research object in certain contexts. Subsequently, an participant observation method was chosen to report on the real situation in everyday life, the situation in the field, and concrete insights into the project procedure and administration during the preparation and implementation of the project.

KEY WORDS

creative and cultural industries, pandemic, culture and art, Oksid Association, Šibenik

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INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the syntagm of the creative and cultural industries was used as a kind of umbrella term covering different activities that maybe should not belong to the same category at first impression [1-8]. This ambiguity and wide definition of the concept, i.e., the awareness of it, are of great importance when it comes to methodological approaches to researching the practice within the studied sector. Consequently, the ambiguity and the width of the definition are essential for understanding and analyzing the data collected in the field, as well as potential strategies, policies, and action and operational plans that will be adopted on the basis of such data [9]. If we are talking about architecture, we are certainly not talking about music performance art; likewise, if we are discussing museums or theatre, we are certainly not discussing video games or graphic design. All these activities in practice have quite clear distinctive threads and specific features that will be difficult to understand without a separate analysis of each of the mentioned areas. This, somewhat unusually, classification of quite different specifics into the same sample is a sign of the still underdeveloped theoretical and research concept of creative and cultural industries, which will need to be further elaborated and (sub)categorized in the coming period in order to interpret and use the data (which are included also in this article) more validly and reliably for analyses, conclusions, strategies, and plans.

However, it is clear that the whole range of activities covered by the aforementioned concept is where it is “for a reason”. These are areas of activity that achieve a certain market value in creative ways, by producing and offering a certain experience. Some of them thus achieve self-sufficiency and self-sustainability, however, most also need a kind of “helping hand” from public budgets or private sources [10]. Even before the corona crisis, research on work in the cultural and creative sectors pointed to many elements of the sector’s vulnerability; from precarious forms of work, insecure and unstable financing of the sector, through insecure project work, volatile incomes, and participants being forced to have additional jobs, to various forms of self-exploitation [11, 12]. However, all this was successfully blurred by the resilience of the sector in times of crisis, which was most often attributed to the “flexibility” and “creativity” of its employees [11]. The global pandemic, therefore, has only exposed what researchers have been pointing to for years, i.e., the vulnerability and uncertainty of cultural work and the cultural sector and the unsustainability of the current model of cultural financing, which focuses on the project and the market approach, considering that data at the global level indicated a critical situation in the sector, lack of jobs, a drastic decline in employing cultural workers, and the need for urgent action in the sector [11]. Creative and cultural industries represent, therefore, a broad category within which various activities are located and there is a whole range of research and field reports across the EU and the world that deal with different aspects of the creative and cultural industries [13-18]. Given that the research part of the work will analyze the case of an association in culture and art, but also taking into account the already mentioned kind of conceptual ambiguity, we consider it more methodologically correct to narrow the focus of the work, so that in this work we will primarily focus on a narrower definition of the concept – cultural sector – and the circumstances and directions of its functioning during the pandemic.

While some aspects of the socio-political system were recognized as more priority and thus received special financial stimulus from public sources throughout the period of the global crisis, the cultural and artistic sector turned out to be one of the biggest losers during the corona crisis. Rigorous pandemic measures that radically limited socializing and gatherings (including cultural and artistic performances) disabled generating income from cultural and artistic events and programs, while the lack of sensitivity on the part of decision-makers (or the lack of their financial capabilities) for the cultural and artistic sector left a large number of cultural professionals, artists, organizers, and institutions to survive and independently navigate the

labor market, as well as the market of products and services [12]. The lack of the necessary assistance measures can also be attributed to the continuous marginalization of culture in general, the marginalization of cultural work in particular, and the strengthening of market discourse for culture; in the Croatian case, this is evident through the low status of cultural policy as public policy and through the low level of culture funding, where the budget for culture has not exceeded 1% for years [19]. The ubiquitous uncertainty regarding the duration of such a crisis situation and the mentioned inability to “survive” in the new circumstances forced many individuals and organizations to discontinue their previous activities. On the other hand, many have turned to the only possible way of survival – the Internet.

Given the aforementioned subject, but also the circumstances, grounded theory can be used as an appropriate theoretical-methodological approach to research, which, using inductive methods from field data and materials, establishes a kind of theoretical and empirical material for further research and scientific analysis. Related research with a similar approach has been undertaken around the world, which further supports the justification and applicability of this type of research.

Grounded theory originated in the mid-1960s with the groundbreaking work in medical sociology of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss [20-25]. Given that the focus and framework of this article do not allow us to delve deeper into discussions and the possibilities of applying grounded theory, for a more detailed insight into it we suggest reviewing some of the series of papers that deal with that topic [26-35], as well as some recent ones that have used the approach and method of grounded theory to analyze processes caused by the Covid-19 pandemic [36-39].

INSIGHTS INTO THE ACTIVITIES OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CROATIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Civil society surveys show that quality is achieved by obliging and motivating those who work on programs, and their (partly volunteer) work lowers the price of services. User orientation and willingness to cooperate and transfer good practice to other organizations increase the effectiveness of these programs [40]. These advantages, which were identified by looking at civil society theoretically and in other research, were largely confirmed also in the analyzed cases/stories. The dimensions of social needs that civil society has responded to in Croatia largely overlap with those found globally. The perspectives of experts from thirty-nine countries suggest that civil society played different roles in addressing the needs created by the COVID-19 pandemic, including responding to the health crisis, providing social assistance and services, mobilizing funds, advocating for the most vulnerable, raising awareness and combating disinformation, and coordinating and cooperating with both governments and the private sector [41].

Case studies of countries around the world show that the crisis has encouraged civil society organizations (CSOs) to accept emergency assistance roles to help manage the effects of the pandemic by filling the gaps left by governments in their often limited and chaotic reactions [42]. Globally, CSOs have been recognized in mitigating the impact of state policies that have imposed blockades and stopped many aspects of everyday life, thus strongly affecting vulnerable groups, and in advocating for the rights of those for whom access to rights is additionally difficult [43]. During the pandemic in Croatia, the Strong Civil Society Initiative researched [44] the needs of CSOs and found that organizations managed to adapt to new conditions and develop responses to support the community in mitigating pandemic measures and earthquakes in Zagreb and its surroundings – from direct support to beneficiaries, especially vulnerable groups, through monitoring transparency and providing certain social services [41]. Baturina [41] further concludes that the results of the research are in line with wider experiences according to which many CSOs are taking on new functions and identities in the

crisis. Research in 25 European countries shows that COVID-19 is transforming the approach of European non-profit organizations when it comes to providing services and raising funds, in terms of the increasing use of digital tools [45]. The results of research conducted by Garcia, Carrigan, and Wiepking [46] suggest that the pandemic has accelerated social and technological innovation, which has benefited the work of CSOs as well as the services they provide.

Research conducted by Krolo et al. [47] on a limited area of activity (culture) in Croatia between March and June 2020 showed that CSOs are vulnerable and endangered. On the other hand, similar to the results of our research, it is also suggested that CSOs are resilient and have the ability to respond quickly and adequately to the crisis, by transitioning to the digital sphere and adapting cultural and artistic activities to the virtual space. Baturina [41] points out that CSOs in Croatia have shown flexibility and mobilized additional human (and partly financial) resources to respond to pandemic challenges. In addition, in challenging times, they have shown certain stabilizing functions, strengthening cooperation in solving social problems and fostering trust among citizens and vulnerable groups. The results of this research are also in line with the preliminary analyses of Puđak et al. [48], which show that the pandemic emphasized the need for the work of associations, significantly increased the scope of work of some associations, changed the nature and dynamics of work, and in some cases created new focuses. Organizations in the sector also confirm delays in opening and evaluating competitions and bureaucratization as a trend in the work of organizations that launch EU projects [49], which may limit the space of their activities. Furthermore, recent events testify to the difficult conditions of the activities of CSOs, given that the key strategic document – Strategy for the Creation of an Enabling Environment for the Civil Society Development 2017-2021 – was not adopted [41].

CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN A (POST)PANDEMIC WORLD

The concept of cultural industries has been present in analyses of cultural policies for many years and was subsequently joined by a different version of the same phrase – creative industries [1-7, 50]. Galloway and Dunlop [51] point out that the terms “cultural industries” and “creative industries”, due to the vague difference between them, are often used interchangeably. According to the “Mapping of Cultural and Creative Industries in the Republic of Croatia”, conducted in 2014 and 2015 by the Croatian Employers’ Association (CEA) for the Croatian Cluster of Competitiveness of Creative and Cultural Industries, the sector of creative and cultural industries in Croatia consists of 12 subsectors with a total of 45 activities: museums, libraries, and heritage; art; music and performing arts; film; photography; electronic media; computer programs, games, and new media; crafts (artistic and traditional crafts); architecture; publishing; design, advertising, and market communication [52]. According to the aforementioned CEA research, the cultural and creative industries in Croatia are at the forefront of strengthening the “culture of creation” and the “creative economy” in the Croatian economy and are the bearer of innovation with an above-average number of self-employed. In Croatia, before the COVID-19 pandemic, they generated more than HRK 15 billion in annual revenues and employed over 42 thousand people [52]. Forms of intellectual property protection represented in the activities of cultural and creative industries are copyright and related rights, industrial design, trademark, geographical indications, and informal forms of intellectual property. Cultural and creative activities provide great opportunities for entrepreneurship and are particularly important for the management of intellectual property rights [8].

Looking at the last decade, cultural and creative industries are one of the most important and profitable branches of the economic sector, especially in the area of investments and employment, and have rapid economic growth, faster than most other industries in the European Union [53]. For example, in the year before the pandemic, cultural and creative

industries represented 4,4% of the GDP of the European Union, with an annual turnover of EUR 643 billion and a total added value of EUR 253 billion [54]. In 2019, they had rapid growth (2,6%) compared to the average of other industries in the total economic sector of the European Union (2%), while their trade balance was up EUR 8,6 billion. Cultural and creative industries played a leading role in investments and employment before the COVID-19 pandemic, employing more than 7,6 million people in 2019 [53].

As already pointed out in the introductory part, cultural and creative industries were not only unaffected by the impact of the corona crisis, but were even more affected than the tourism sector [53]. Consequently, the main challenges in the pandemic period were revolved around the question of how to continue business, provide liquidity, and retain jobs [55-64]. The study [54] entitled “Rebuilding Europe: The Cultural and Creative Economy before and after the COVID-19 Crisis”, conducted for the European Copyright Society, states that cultural and creative industries together experienced financial losses of more than 31% in 2020, amounting to more than EUR 216 billion, while losses in certain sectors of cultural and creative industries, such as the music and arts sectors, reach up to 90%. The sectors most affected by the pandemic are, therefore, music (-76%) and performing arts (-90%); losses in the radio industry at the European Union level reach 20%, while the only branch that has gained profits is the video game industry (+9%). The study also recommends a triple approach to recovery through “finance, empowerment, and leverage”. It suggests relying on “massive public funding and the promotion of private investment, a solid legal framework to create the conditions necessary to revitalize the creative economy and ensure its long-term growth and harness the power of cultural and creative industries and individual creative talents to drive social progress” [54].

There is a whole range of research papers that we recommend for a more detailed insight into the topic, from the analysis of European developments within the European Union [56, 57, 59, 62] to the analysis of consequences around the world, including the USA [55] and ASEAN countries [58, 60, 61]. We will not elaborate on them in this article, but we will focus on the national and local levels within the context of the Republic of Croatia.

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE CULTURAL SECTOR IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

Research data from the Kultura Nova Foundation are in line with many other studies conducted in other parts of the world on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the cultural sector [65-68] which indicate that the cultural sector is one of the most affected by the pandemic-induced crisis. The key findings derived from the data presented in this report can be summarized in several groups related to general insights, the situation before the pandemic, the situation during the pandemic, and development prospects [12]:

- During the pandemic, culture confirmed its importance for society.
- The crisis pointed to the disordered structure of the cultural sector before the pandemic.
- The negative effects of the crisis are not equally distributed among cultural sector participants.
- The crisis has had immediate negative and positive effects on many aspects of the work of the cultural sector.
- The crisis has influenced the change in the way people participate in culture and the change in the habits and behavior of the audience.

Further in the text we will briefly present the summarized conclusions of the conducted study by the analyzed categories.

RELEVANCE OF CULTURE

The exceptional relevance of the everyday work and functioning of the cultural sector in terms of its contribution to the preservation and development of sociability has been confirmed, while its relevance is also visible at the level of mutual relations within the cultural sector and relations with the audience. The crisis period confirmed that culture in a unique way develops relationships that form a widespread network of society and that it contributes to the general state of compassion and connection [12].

DIVERSE AND FRAGMENTED CULTURAL SECTOR

The legal basis governing the field of culture is extremely heterogeneous, and legal acts and data are numerous. Although comprehensive and partly consistent, from the point of view of practice, the legal system can be assessed as extremely complex and confusing and unsuitable for modern ways of working. The crisis has just shown that the segmentation of the cultural field is more of a weakness than an advantage. The cultural sector in the Republic of Croatia consists of natural and legal persons (natural persons are independent artists outside the employment relationship, natural persons acting independently in culture, employees in the cultural sector, pensioners; legal persons are within the public, private, and civil sectors) [12].

INCOMPLETE DECENTRALIZATION

The research data confirmed the centralization of the Croatian cultural system and policy at several levels regarding the concentration of territorial representation of cultural activities (the highest area of cultural and artistic activity is mostly reserved for the City of Zagreb), the structural focus on the institutional status of cultural participants and the orientation and dependence of cultural participants on the central body of the state administration responsible for culture – the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia. The research showed that cities (except for a negligible number of exceptions), and especially counties (except for a negligible number of exceptions), have failed in crisis response and in providing support to the cultural sector [12].

DIGITALIZATION

The shift towards digital technologies in the cultural sector began before the pandemic and had a positive and negative impact on the ways of production, distribution, and consumption [12]. However, digitalization has gained momentum in the cultural sector as a result of the pandemic, as the participants have replaced the physical public space with a virtual one in an effort to find quick solutions to stay in touch with the audience. Participants in the cultural sector in Croatia very quickly accepted and adapted to the new circumstances, but the advantages and disadvantages of digitization in culture were also visible in Croatia. It turned out that the capacities of participants in cultural sector were different, and the resources for digitization were not available to all participants. Research data also showed that the transfer into a virtual environment is not a solution for those cultural and artistic areas where live performance and direct communication with the audience in the physical space is the only natural medium [12].

PARTICIPATION IN CULTURE

Participation in culture is directly related to social cohesion, quality of life, and health (especially mental health), while the potential of culture in providing comfort during isolation has become even more important [12]. One of the most visible effects of the implementation of anti-epidemic measures in culture is visible precisely in the sphere of participation in culture – from how much culture can mean during isolation and physical distance and how much it can

unite us, through how cultural content is transmitted to the audience and whether there is access to digital content, to the impact on the decline in revenues due to the impossibility of selling tickets, smaller audience, fear of infection, and generally changes in audience's behavior and habits.

Despite the increased demand for cultural content, most of the content was available to the audience free of charge in their homes, whether they reached them through digital channels, some other electronic media, or by moving artists and cultural professionals close to the audience's homes. Participation in culture received a new dimension in the experience of watching and listening to cultural and artistic works – it was no longer necessary to leave the apartment or house and pay a ticket to walk through the museum, see the exhibition, listen to the concert, enjoy the theater performance – all of those activities came for a “home visit” [12].

BUILDING CAPACITIES

The pandemic has indicated that artists and cultural professionals can no longer survive without the specific knowledge and skills necessary not only in an unstable context and pandemic-induced challenges, but also needed to continuously adapt to the unpredictable, rapid, and dynamic changes affecting the cultural sector. Considering the speed of these changes and the new requirements placed on the cultural sector, it is necessary to continuously monitor the development of new knowledge and skills required in the sector, especially those that go beyond the expertise of one specific area and enable the management of transformation processes [12].

THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN CULTURE

The results of the research have undoubtedly shown that the issue of culture in the Republic of Croatia is still associated with the idea of a social state, with the public interest, with the broad availability of culture and free access to cultural content, with social sensitivity, responsibility, and agility of different stakeholders. Such interpretations of culture enter the domain of disputes between neoliberal visions of society and democratic principles within which governance refers to the introduction and preservation of equality, accessibility, and general care for society – institutions, organizations, and individuals that make it [12]. In other words, future steps in the planning and (re)structuring of the cultural system and policy should not lead to a backlash or reduction of support for culture by public bodies under the argument of economic viability and/or ensuring supposed market freedoms. The vulnerability of the cultural sector is based on the marginal position within the general system of public policies and socio-political priorities, but also on the fact that the market positioning of culture in Croatia has not moved further away from the ill-advised and often harmful commodification of cultural resources for the needs of service industries such as tourism [12].

A PERSPECTIVE FROM BELOW: AN ANALYSIS OF THE ESF-FUNDED PROJECT “CULTURALLY NETWORKED”

METHODOLOGY

A case analysis was chosen as a research strategy, primarily due to its analytical possibilities of placing a particular research object in certain, relevant, and significant contexts [69-77]. This strategy offers a historical and contextual perspective since the article will clarify the circumstances and experiences of a civil organization in culture before the very beginning and throughout the duration of the corona virus pandemic in Šibenik, Croatia.

A research strategy is a certain way of collecting and analyzing empirical records, and each strategy has its specific logic. Case analysis as a research strategy represents a complex, pluralistic, integrative, and interdisciplinary approach and its main goal is to enable future research of the development of the phenomenon by undertaking further comparative and longitudinal analyses [78]. Some of its most significant characteristics are the ability to adequately answer research questions of how and why, examining the phenomenon within its real-life context, specific methodological and technical procedures, including all potential methods, procedures, and techniques, etc.

The research method employed in the article was participant observation. Since the co-author of this article is also an active member of one of Šibenik's cultural associations (Oksid), and he was also the project manager of the European social fund project which is the subject of this analysis, it seemed logical to choose this research method, both for technical reasons of access to the field part and participants, and for analytical reasons, i.e. the possibility of understanding and interpretation that will certainly be increased since the activities and actions through the association are literally "lived" on a daily basis and as such are experienced and understood from the perspective of the members and institution who are the subject of the research. This article presents conclusions based on the activities of the association in the period from 2020 to 2022.

Oksid, the association for the promotion of culture and art, has been active on the local cultural and artistic scene for 9 years and after the interruption of "normality" in March 2020, which was quite a shock just a few days before the association's birthday concert, a plan for the continuation of activity and adaptation was soon made. The association applied their project titled Culturally Networked through the Culture and Art Online competition from the European Social Fund and thus managed to offer at least some cultural and artistic content despite the locked doors of its premises.

OPERATIONAL PROGRAM EFFECTIVE HUMAN RESOURCES 2014-2020

Operational Program Effective Human Resources 2014-2020 (OPEHR) is a planning and programming document detailing and elaborating measures and activities for the effective implementation and use of the European Social Fund, one of the main instruments of the European Union aimed at providing support for investment in human capital and strengthening the competitiveness of the European economy, which was adopted by the European Commission's Implementing Decision¹ of 17 December 2014 C(2014)10150. The main objective of OPEHR is to contribute to employment growth and strengthening social cohesion in Croatia, and it elaborates investments in four basic areas: employment and the labor market, social inclusion, education and lifelong learning, and support to public administration [79].

Art and Culture Online (UP.02.1.1.14)

The "Art and Culture Online" call seeks to provide members of vulnerable groups – under the age of 25 and over the age of 54 – with a digital experience of cultural and artistic content and encourage their participation in artistic and cultural activities, thus working towards improving their creative skills and knowledge, increasing social interactions and reducing feelings of isolation, and overall improving the quality of life. Artistic and cultural activities should ensure the inclusion, interaction, and mutual communication of participants in the digital environment in the form of online workshops that can be implemented using various online tools and may include moderated conversations, group curation of virtual exhibitions, or co-creation of literary, audiovisual, and other content [12; p.15].

General objective: increasing the social inclusion of people under 25 and over 54 by participating in cultural and artistic activities online.

Specific objectives:

- developing social and creative skills and knowledge that contribute to the social inclusion of members of target groups,
- improving the access of members of target groups to cultural and artistic content and activities.

Target groups:

- children and young people under 25 years,
- people over 54 years.

Purpose of the Call

Culture plays an important role in strengthening social cohesion and building an inclusive society [80] and cultural participation contributes significantly to personal development and improving overall quality of life. Equally, participation in artistic and cultural activities has a beneficial effect on a person's physical and mental health [81]. Encouraging access to culture is therefore embedded in policies combating social exclusion and poverty [82], while ensuring preconditions for equal access to and participation in culture for all citizens is aimed at increasing social inclusion and raising the level of living conditions [79].

Extraordinary circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have prevented physical access to artistic and cultural activities for members of all social groups, which can have a particularly negative impact on members of vulnerable groups. Reduced opportunities for the participation of members of vulnerable groups in artistic and cultural activities may adversely affect the maintenance of their social ties, the development of skills and knowledge that prevent antisocial behavior, and their overall psychophysical state [79]. According to the interpretation of the Ministry of Culture and Media [79], people over 54 years of age and children and young people under 25 were particularly at risk of social exclusion. The recommendations of the National Civil Protection Headquarters related to social distancing mostly affected children, young people, and the elderly because they were especially recommended to stay in homes and avoid physical contact.

The new circumstances required that members of vulnerable groups who are most at risk of social exclusion be provided with access to artistic and cultural activities that are alternative to physical ones. Such access is enabled by digital technologies, whose application in the field of art and culture was widely present², and the readiness to intensify digital activities was recently confirmed by numerous employees in the field of art and culture in Croatia [79]. In this context, the Ministry of Culture and Media recognized the significant potential of new technologies for including those social groups that are traditionally distant from cultural institutions and content, which is often the case with these vulnerable groups, and in the new technologies they also recognized the possibility of contributing to the strengthening of the community.

The "digital shift" aimed to increase the possibilities of creating a more accessible and inclusive culture and to create tools that help eliminate not only physical, but also psychological and social barriers. At the same time, digital technologies should have facilitated taking action on the part of users of cultural content, so that users would cease to be passive recipients of cultural offer, and through participatory processes become active creators, critics, and commentators. Digital tools also provide particular potential in increasing the accessibility and adaptation of artistic and cultural content to persons with disabilities. Therefore, all of these aspects of digital technologies need to be used and developed in order to adapt participatory artistic and cultural activities in the digital environment to the interests, needs, and opportunities of members of vulnerable groups [79].

Project report

In Element 1 *Preparation and implementation of online participatory artistic and cultural activities aimed at social inclusion of members of target groups*, all measurable outcomes were fully met:

- 70 days of participatory cultural and/or artistic activities (Multimedia/digital literacy, Workshops for children – production and decoration of canvas bags, Workshops for children – production of recycled paper and artistic expression, Workshops for children – eco workshop for making pine tree decorations, Workshops for children – reading eco-themed picture books, Workshops for children – art eco workshops, Movie nights) conducted for 65 members of the target group – persons under the age of 25. They completed the program of selected participatory cultural and/or artistic activities, for which mandatory data have been collected in accordance with the point 1.5 Indicators – persons under the age of 25.
- 42 days of participatory cultural and/or artistic activities (Multimedia/digital literacy, Literary corner, Old school media night, Quizzes) conducted for members of the target groups – persons over the age of 54. A total of 29 participants completed the program of selected participatory cultural and/or artistic activities, for which mandatory data were collected in accordance with the point 1.5 Indicators – persons over the age of 54.
- People who were not members of target groups also participated in the project because they were in the age range of 25 to 54 years, so they did not enter measurable outcomes.
- A virtual exhibition with 54 selected works created at workshops for children.
- For the purpose of implementing the activities, the necessary equipment was procured.

In the element *Promotion and visibility*, all measurable outcomes were fully met:

- An initial conference with 25 participants was held.
- An online final conference with 16 participants was held.
- 411 pieces of promotional material (roll-up banner, posters, leaflets, canvas bags, ballpoint pens) were made. The project website was created.
- 106 posts were published on the project website (the measurable outcome was 60 posts – 5 posts per month).

In the element *Project management and administration*, all measurable outcomes were fully met:

- 12 meetings of the project team were held.
- 4 requests for reimbursement of funds were prepared and submitted.

Description of the problems

The problems included the distrust on the part of members of the target groups or their guardians who did not accept that workshop participation required submitting an identification document, a child's birth certificate, having a camera on, and filling out a number of required documents. The lack of available devices for printing documentation was also a problem for the target group.

Furthermore, a major problem arose in the lack of experience of members of the target group on the Zoom platform (especially the elderly population). Also, the vast majority of members of the older target group were limited with the mobile data on their phones. This made the implementation of the activities quite difficult, since it was necessary to meet with the participants beforehand, install the necessary application, and educate them on how to use it. Assistance from younger family members of participants was often needed, which required additional engagements and agreements with family members on times when they should be available to help.

Ultimately, most participants expressed a desire to continue similar activities, but in person or in a face-to-face interaction. Certainly, the two-year pandemic-induced isolation caused an increased need for live communication, as well as for concerts, quizzes, exhibitions, workshops, and similar programs that were minimized due to extraordinary circumstances. Although the conducted workshops were useful to participants in a period of general isolation, they were nevertheless perceived only as a necessity upon the inability to participate in “normal” conditions which allow more direct and productive engagement, especially when it comes to cultural and artistic activities.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken up all aspects of socio-political systems. While some of these aspects were recognized as more priority and thus received special financial stimulus from public sources throughout the period of the global crisis, the cultural and artistic sector turned out to be one of the biggest losers. Rigorous pandemic measures that radically limited socializing and gatherings (including cultural and artistic performances) disabled generating income from cultural and artistic events and programs, while the lack of sensitivity on the part of decision-makers (or the lack of their financial capabilities) for the cultural and artistic sector left a large number of cultural professionals, artists, organizers, and institutions to survive and independently navigate the labor market as well as the market of products and services. The ubiquitous uncertainty about the duration of such a crisis situation and the mentioned inability to “survive” in the new circumstances forced many individuals and organizations to discontinue their previous activities. On the other hand, many have turned to the only possible way of survival – the Internet. Organizers of online concerts, exhibitions, performances, and various other programs found different, creative ways to reach target audiences in culture and art, which was also deeply affected by the new situation. In this article, we presented a case study of one of the Šibenik-based associations to show the field perspective “from below”.

As pointed out in the study of the Kultura Nova Foundation, the crisis in the cultural sector has made visible the problems that have accumulated over the past three decades, and part of these problems date back to the time before Croatian independence [12]. The state of crisis is the continuity of Croatian culture and society, which is in accordance with modern definitions of the crisis, which no longer denotes a specific time of intense difficulties or dangers; today’s crises do not include a separate situation, but a permanent state, the so-called experiential category, and crisis solutions no longer provide a path to radical changes, but rather confirm the existing principles that structure society [12].

The thematic analysis of “Our Stories for Well-being” [41] showed that civil society organizations during the pandemic were mostly directed towards the general population and different vulnerable groups. Vulnerable groups are specifically identified as needing additional support at the time of a particular story. Activities towards the general population were directed in the sphere of new needs related to civil protection. Different types of activities were conducted to preserve the daily life of the community, from psychological support in uncertain times, to cultural content, support to volunteering, active aging, and humanitarian action in the community to environmental aspects. Information and education were aimed at creating new and retaining existing information and educational practices that were adapted to pandemic circumstances. The results of the research also show that organizations have changed significantly, but also quickly adapted their work using technology in different ways. In addition, they adopted work-from-home practices and in some elements new ways of organizing work [41].

The above includes, for example, concert performance for only 20 people, listening to a rock concert while sitting, theatre performance in front of a half-empty theater with at least 1,5 m

distance between each viewer, breathing under masks, feeling exposed to the risk of infection, etc. Constant changes in anti-epidemic measures made it difficult for participants in cultural sector to adapt the program to the new conditions. At the same time, the experience of citizens and their habits of participation in culture have changed, which will have long-term consequences on the ways in which the cultural sector functions. Knowing and monitoring both old and new habits and behaviors of citizens and their participation in culture are vital for making decisions and introducing appropriate measures in culture. Bearing in mind that culture is extremely important for the recovery of society, its resilience, and quality of life, it is crucial to ensure conditions for safe participation in culture both during the crisis and in post-pandemic conditions [12].

REMARKS

¹OPEHR was amended on 6 April 2020 (version 5.0) by implementing European Commission's decision C(2020)2209.

²In this context, we should also mention the project “e-Culture – Digitization of Cultural Heritage” which aims to increase access to cultural heritage in digital form and protect heritage by offering systematic, standardized, and permanent storage in digital form in one place. The project is implemented under the Operational Program Competitiveness and Cohesion 2014-2020. The project holder is the Ministry of Culture and Media in partnership with the Croatian State Archives, the Croatian Radio and Television, the Museum of Arts and Crafts, and the National and University Library in Zagreb.

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