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## Cultural Mediation and the 2030 UN Agenda - Transforming Library in a Space for Encounters

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### Abstract

*The UN 2030 Agenda addresses issues such as poverty eradication, education and health, creation of peaceful and inclusive societies. Through advocacy of The International Federation of Libraries Association (IFLA), issues such as access to information, ICTs and culture were included as part of the UN 2030 Agenda. This paper uses a narrow characterisation of culture to include the arts, museums, libraries and heritage that receive public funding, as engines for sustainable development.*

*When thinking about the functions of culture, the first thing that is mentioned is its use for various purposes (social, economic, political, etc.). Publicly funded cultural institutions generate three types of value – intrinsic, instrumental and institutional. However, what is the primary importance of culture for society is less visible. It is the impact that culture has on individuals- the inherent or intrinsic value of culture- less visible, less touchable that has great importance for society at large, but also in the local community. It affects the minds of people, changes attitudes. It makes people more open to new trends and, through the individual, culture's final goal is to change the society. This is why this intrinsic value is more useful at long distance, for society than the economic or other advantages.*

*The ongoing democratization and digitization processes in our society pressure cultural institutions to become more prone towards communication and dialogue. The cultural places become spaces for encounters, where people who know something get to meet people who know something else. The library, known primary as a space for offering information and education should find ways to be transformed in a space for encounters and the library's managers in cultural mediators.*

*How are libraries going to employ cultural mediation techniques in order to be transformed in spaces of encounters? The purpose of this paper is to make a qualitative analysis on the role of cultural mediation within UN 2030 Agenda as a useful tool for transforming the library in a space for encounters.*

**Keywords:** cultural mediation, library, encounters, cultural mediator, education

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## **Introduction**

The research method used in this paper is qualitative content analysis on a set of documents (UN 2030 Agenda, national and local cultural strategies, IFLA toolkit, national barometer of cultural consumption, Timisoara2021 bid book, press, and official web sites) and relevant academic literature. The purpose of the article is to make a qualitative analysis on the role of cultural mediation within UN 2030 Agenda, as a useful tool of communication and democratization that aims to transform library in a space for encounters.

The New Agenda adds to the Millennium Development Goals, addressing issues such as poverty eradication, education and health, two new ones, peaceful and inclusive societies. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Romania fully supports the idea that the New Agenda must be implemented by local institutions, responding directly to citizen's needs. The competent bodies are reviewing the National Strategy for Sustainable Development to include the new SDGs. It is stated that the needs of Romanian citizens must be addressed by formulating local and national development strategies. The article emphasizes that social exclusion is a major challenge to implement the goals. For creating a more inclusive society, there is a need for social cohesion policies addressing the persons with disabilities, the youth and women<sup>1</sup>. The Permanent Representative of Romania to the UN, Ion Jinga emphasized at the UN Political Forum on Sustainable Development, on July 2016 that "the strategic objective of Romania's development assistance is to contribute to the sustainable eradication of poverty, mainly by promoting security and prosperity, supporting the rule of law, stimulating sustainable economic development, fighting climate change and investing in education, in complementarity with other international initiatives"<sup>2</sup>.

The previous statements are on the same line with the advocacy policy of IFLA regarding the role of libraries as engines of local development, therefore libraries and access to information should be part of national and regional development plans. Furthermore, an increased access to information and knowledge across society, assisted by the availability of information and communications technologies (ICTs), supports sustainable development and improves people's lives. The SDGs must be adapted to the local context and priority areas depicted from the local cultural strategies. The toolkit designed by IFLA for use of the libraries in working with the UN 2030 Agenda's Strategic Goals indicates the increasing of cultural management (cultural mediation) skills as a solution for a better advocacy for resources and increasing access and boosting participation of audiences<sup>3</sup>.

## **The Role of Cultural Mediation**

Cultural mediation is an umbrella term for a wide variety of practices ranging from audience-development activities to participatory and community art. The term was coined in the cultural field in France in the 1960s, but it really emerged in the library and museum sectors

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mae.ro/en/node/35918>, February 2016

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nineoclock.ro/permanent-representative-of-romania-to-the-un-presents-national-priorities-at-un-high-level-political-forum-on-sustainable-development/>, July 2016

<sup>3</sup> *Toolkit: Libraries and implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda*, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, October 2015

in the 1980s. In the museum and library environment, primary concerned with the transmission of knowledge, learning, and objects, mediation was at first used within a classical perspective of the dissemination of art, literature, and heritage<sup>4</sup>.

When thinking about the functions of culture, the first thing that is mentioned is its use for various purposes (social, economic, political), etc. Publicly funded cultural institutions generate three types of value- intrinsic, instrumental and institutional. It is the impact that culture has on individuals- the inherent or intrinsic value of culture- less visible, less touchable that has great importance for society at large, but also in the local community. It affects the minds of people, changes attitudes. It makes people more open to new trends and, through the individual, culture's final goal is to change the society. This is why this intrinsic value is more useful at long distance, for society than the economic or other advantages<sup>5</sup>.

Cultural mediation actions have the following purposes: to raise awareness and contribute to the reception and transmission of information, knowledge (in the case of libraries) and to stimulate and facilitate expression and participation by individuals. The cultural places become a space of encounters, where people who know something get to meet people who know something else. The library, known primary as a space for offering information and knowledge might find ways to be transformed in a space of encounters and the library's managers in cultural mediators. The cultural mediator is a total sum of "knowing" (knowledge of the field, organizational and interpersonal skills) and "doing" (sharing, learning, transferring knowledge, support, coaching, monitoring)<sup>6</sup>.

### **Community vs. Society**

In the 2030 UN Agenda, the plan of action focuses on creating a global community. "Our journey will involve Governments as well as parliaments, the United Nations system and other international institutions, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society, business and the private sector, the scientific and academic community and all people. Millions have already engaged with, and will own, this Agenda. It is an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people and this, we believe, will ensure its success"<sup>7</sup>.

First of all, here comes the necessity to make a distinction between a community and a society, which are two extreme social organizations, according to Toennies. Communities are based upon organic relationships, the family being the most basic constituent. On the other hand, a society implies ideal relationships, dependent on contracts made between individuals<sup>8</sup>. Aristotle has argued that the best type of state is based upon the friendship between citizens<sup>9</sup>. Friendship does not imply automatically a relation between equals. They are friends because they share something which is important to them, offer mutual support to each other and the ultimate purpose is to create a safe environment for each member of the community. The

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<sup>4</sup> Quintas, E., Contributors: Fourcade, M.-B., Pronovost, M., *Cultural Mediation: Questions and Answers. A Guide*, Montreal, 2014, p.1-2

<sup>5</sup> Holden, J., "Cultural Value and the Crisis of Legitimacy", Demos, Open Access (demos.co.uk), 2006, p.14-16

<sup>6</sup> Quintas, E., Contributors: Fourcade, M.-B., Pronovost, M., *Cultural Mediation: Questions and Answers. A Guide*, Montreal, 2014, p.5-6

<sup>7</sup> *Transforming Our World: The 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development*, United Nations, A/RES/70/1, sustainabledevelopment.un.org

<sup>8</sup> Sorgner, S., "Community, Multiculturalism, and the Good" in "Integration and Tradition", Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Beograd, 2003, p. 257-258

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, "The Complete Works of Aristotle", edition by J. Barnes, vol. 2, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, 1262b5-10

contemporary equivalent of friendship is solidarity. Global Partnership for Sustainable Development is “based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people”<sup>10</sup>.

### **Boosting Access and Participation**

Nowadays, culture is about participation, conversation, contribution. People participate in the conversation, comment on it, share it with others, and become ambassadors. As a consequence, the cultural manager is indeed becoming a moderator, a mediator. He is mediating between the demands of different kinds of publics and the demands of sponsors and politicians and the demands of creative individuals. Instead of offering something, information and education in the stated case of the library, we are now shifting towards a culture of sharing, whereby the cultural manager has to make sure that this moment of sharing, these encounters, and these events stimulate civic imagination. The cultural spaces are becoming spaces where all kinds of issues can be raised about: sustainability, access to education, discrimination, sexual discrimination, religious discrimination, inequality, etc.

Library has three key roles in the same time: cultural, public and economic role. It helps people to come to grips with the pressure caused by general ambiguities in society by providing access to interpretations rather than ready-made solutions. The ongoing democratization and digitization processes in our society pressure cultural institution to become more prone towards communication and dialogue.

Participation becomes a key concept in the communication studies, especially after the popular web 2.0. By active cultural participation, we mean a situation in which individuals do not limit themselves to absorb passively the cultural stimuli, but are motivated to put their skills at work (for example: not simply reading texts, but writing). By doing so, individuals challenge themselves to expand their capacity of expression, to re-negotiate their expectations and beliefs, to reshape their own social identity<sup>11</sup>.

Access and interaction does not equate with participation; they are its conditions of possibility. Participation implies a decision-making process and an equalitarian and balanced nature in the power relationships<sup>12</sup>. Through enhancing participation, library becomes a reflexive knowledge cultural institution<sup>13</sup>. The post-modern society needs reflexive citizens. Instead of providing ready-made solutions to its audience (information and education), library should encourage and support development of critical thinking and reasoning skills in its public, processes that later on help citizens to make informed decisions, increase awareness and the level of active participation and results in a culture of sharing.

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<sup>10</sup> *Transforming Our World: The 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development*, United Nations, A/RES/70/1, [sustainabledevelopment.un.org](http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org)

<sup>11</sup> *Culture 3.0: A new perspective for the EU 2014-2020 structural funds programming*, Pier Luigi Sacco, on behalf of the European Expert Network on Culture (EENC), produced for the OMC Working Group on Cultural and Creative Industries, April 2011, p.5-6

<sup>12</sup> Carpentier, N., “*The Concept of Participation. If They Have Access and Interact, Do They Really Participate?*”, in *Communication Management Quarterly*, Year 6, Number 21, Novi Sad, 2011, p.27

<sup>13</sup> Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, P., Runnel, P., “*When the Museum Becomes the Message for Participating Audiences*” in *Communication Management Quarterly*, Year 6, Number 21, Novi Sad, 2011, p.175

## **Cultural Mediation in Romania**

The Barometer for Cultural Consumption dedicates a whole chapter to the cultural management in the 12.280 cultural public institutions from Romania. It is only in 2006 that legislation (provisions of the Governmental Ordinance nr.26) specifically provides that the management of cultural institutions should be performed through a cultural project. The moment is regarded as a step forward, due to the fact that before, managers of the cultural institutions, even if they were specialized in their field, were removed from their positions when a new political party came to power. Unfortunately, the legislative framework does not include criteria to remunerate performance and to specifically ask for it. The cultural management regards only the administration of the institution and management of the resources. Universities have to come up with new cultural management educational programmes to fill the demand and update the level of professionalization<sup>14</sup>. Our national and local strategies emphasize a need for skilled cultural mediators, in order to increase and engage new audiences, and also the financial capital, not only the spiritual one. On local level, citizens would like to have an improved cultural offer in terms of: advertising (26%), quality (22%) and diversity (20%). They want libraries and museums to be opened until 8 pm at least once a week, and to find relaxing spaces inside public cultural institutions.<sup>15</sup>

Another challenge, at national and also local level, in implementing the SDGs is social inclusion. Timisoara, having once a multicultural and intercultural community, faces now an increase of social exclusion, mainly regarding: Roma people, disabled, migrants and low-income people<sup>16</sup>. In order to increase cultural access of migrants and ethnic groups, *The Intercultural Institute from Timisoara* has created in 2014 a network of 20 intercultural mediators in Timișoara, Cluj, Iași, Constanța and București. Intercultural mediators act as liaison between the migrant and ethnic communities and the public authorities, on one hand, and civil society, on the other.<sup>17</sup>

Romania, being member of European Union, contributes to the implementing of the SDGs at international level as well, through sharing the challenges it faced during the transition process with the developing countries and participating in cultural programmes, such as European Capital of Culture (Sibiu2007, Timisoara2021).

At the moment, there is a big opportunity for libraries to work on the SDGs together with Timisoara- European Capital of Culture Association. Timișoara has been a city of small sparks that ignited transcontinental transformations: the first city in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to have street lights, the first city in continental Europe with electric street lights, the first newspaper in German from East-Central and South-Eastern Europe, the only European city with three state theatres in three different languages; the first newspaper, public lending library, telegraphic and phone service, cinema screening, public swimming pool, football stadium in Romania and the spark of the civic revolution from 1989.

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<sup>14</sup> Croitoru, C., (coordinator), Becuț, A. (coordinator), Ceobanu, I., Crăciun, A., Dragomir, A., Iuga, L., Mateescu, O., Manea, M., Oană, I., Pălici, B., Voicu, Șt., “*Barometrul de consum cultural 2015. Preferințe, practici și tendințe*”, Institutul Național pentru Cercetare și Formare Culturală, Editura Pro Universitaria, București, 2015, (also available at culturadata.ro), p.30-32

<sup>15</sup> *Strategia culturală a municipiului Timișoara 2014-2024*, Primăria Municipiului Timișoara, November 2014

<sup>16</sup> *TM2021 Bidbook*, Timișoara- European Capital of Culture Association, 2015

<sup>17</sup> [www.intercultural.ro](http://www.intercultural.ro)

The proposed cultural programme is under the theme “Shine your Light- Light up your city”, structured around three “territories”: “People”, “Places” and “Connections”. At the centre of the scheme is the Power Station, a capacity building project with multiple strands, acting like a sharing, interactive platform between the cultural, creative community and citizens. The credo of the programme is that “culture transforms a city, a country and a continent”. The cultural programme is the medium that stimulates and generates a proactive civic involvement. Just to spot out one example of partnership with a public library, in the Capital of Culture 2021 programme, I chose the *Ana=logic festival*. Timis County Public Library will be a partner in the *Ana=logic festival*, which teaches the young about the benefits of a lifestyle embracing slow and low-fi technologies, such as analogue art and technology (books, photo, sounds, film, created by artists and amateurs without digital processes).<sup>18</sup>.

### Conclusion

To sum up, cultural mediation in the library environment has positive effects on boosting access and increasing cultural participation. The cultural manager has to develop mediation skills for a successful outcome in the mediation process between the demands of different kinds of publics, creative individuals, the demands of sponsors and policy makers. Instead of offering something, we are now having a culture of sharing, whereby the cultural manager has to make sure that this moment of sharing, these encounters, and these events stimulate civic imagination. Library, as a cultural institution transforms itself from a ready-made solutions provider to a supporter and developer of critical thinking and reasoning skills in its audience, processes that increase the informed decisions making process, awareness and the level of active participation in citizens. The ultimate result is having a culture of sharing.

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12. \*\*\* *Transforming Our World: The 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development*, United Nations, A/RES/70/1, sustainabledevelopment.un.org

**Internet resources:**

1. [www.intercultural.ro](http://www.intercultural.ro)
2. [www.fiveoclock.ro](http://www.fiveoclock.ro)
3. [www.mae.ro](http://www.mae.ro)