Local Culture in the Era of Globalisation: Focused on the Zlín Region

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Abstract

The advent of globalisation touched practically all areas of human activities and culture is not an exception in this regard. On this basis, considerations about cultural homogenization emerged which attracted attention of prominent scholars. The fears are now whether local culture will be able to survive in the competition with its commercial counterpart. To preserve cultural diversity, various financial mechanisms were developed to support local culture. Local culture in the current era of globalisation is the main interest of this paper. Problems, financial mechanisms and spatial disparities of local culture are analyzed in the Zlín region as a model area. The most important findings are discussed with respect to the homogenization–heterogenization framework.

Key Words: Local culture, globalisation, homogenization, Zlín region

1. Introduction

The advent of globalisation touched practically all areas of human activities and culture is not an exception in this regard. Archer et al. (2007) provided a comprehensive overview of the relationships between globalisation and culture, emphasizing especially two approaches:

- the cultural turn in globalisation studies and
- the global turn in cultural studies.

The former approach regards culture as a unifying framework for the global processes which change the society of these days. In this way, culture becomes an important economic commodity. The latter approach is concerned with the global spread of traditional cultural commodities such as music, film, fast food and others, evoking the frequent ideas about the death of local uniqueness. Such a stance is typically mentioned in strategic documents concerning cultural development as well. The Czech Cultural Policy for the years 2009-2014 claims that globalisation creates new conditions for an intensified exchange of knowledge and information in the field of culture. However, the Policy also admits that globalisation can be a source of threats for cultural diversity (Ministry of Culture 2009). In other words, globalisation may homogenize unique characteristics of local culture.

There is an extensive scholarly literature on cultural homogenization in various domains now. Hollis (2009), for example, dealt with the importance of culture in competition...
between global and local brands of various products. Comparing opinions of consumers from eight countries, he concluded that global brands were more successful in most of the surveyed attributes. However, local brands were mentioned more frequently when respondents were asked about a brand which is part of their own culture. Moreover, Hollis (2009) showed that the brands which were perceived as part of local culture were sold better, regardless of their global or local character. Based on these findings, he is sceptical that the world will become homogenized. Similar conclusions were formulated by Russell and Valenzuela (2005) who used the term glocalization to describe the coexistence of homogenizing and heterogenizing processes in the global society. Friedman (2007) pointed out that the best practices in human resource management were often not transferred across cultural differences and therefore, to be effective in human resource management, he called for a balance between the need to standardize best practices across national boundaries (homogenization) and the need to adapt to local practices and customs (heterogenization).

The homogenization–heterogenization framework may be also applied for conventionally understood meanings of culture. Commercial culture, symbolized e.g. by multiplex cinemas or pop music, may be regarded as a homogenizing feature in this respect while local culture, symbolized e.g. by non-professional artists in marginal segments of culture, as a heterogenizing feature. Consecutively, the fears are whether local culture will be able to survive in the competition with its commercial counterpart. Not surprisingly, various financial mechanisms were developed to support local culture. Note that this is not our objective to define a sharp distinction between the commercial and local forms of culture and that this will be understood rather intuitively on an imaginary line with two extremes represented by pure commercial culture and pure amateur culture respectively.

Because of its history and location on the intersection of three ethnographic areas, the Zlín region is characteristic by a number of specific forms of local culture. Especially folklore and folk crafts have been well preserved in the region (see Tomas Bata University 2008). Thus, the aforementioned considerations may be regarded as relevant for the Zlín region. As a reaction the Cultural Fund (the Fund hereafter) was established by the Zlín Region in 2001. This paper focuses on the local culture in the Zlín region and the research questions were formulated as follows:

- What are the main problems declared by actors of local culture in the Zlín region (Section 2)?
- What are the main sources of financing of local culture in the Zlín region (Section 3)?
- What are the hot-spots of local culture in the Zlín region (Section 4)?

Finally, the homogenization–heterogenization framework is discussed in conclusion.

2. Problems of local culture in the Zlín region

In May and June 2008, Department of Regional Development, Public Administration and Law at Tomas Bata University in Zlín realized a questionnaire survey to identify problems perceived by actors of local culture in the Zlín region. First, 94 actors of local culture were asked about problems of their activities. Subsequently, these findings were complemented by problems declared by 22 representatives of municipalities from the Zlín region. The following findings were drawn from the questionnaire survey (see also Tomas Bata University 2008):

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41 Naturally, this contention may not be regarded as a general rule. Hollis (2009) mentions several exceptions in this respect, including Russians who preferred brands which are not ingrained in local culture.

42 Przybalska (2007), Tomas Bata University (2008) claim that public subsidies are the dominant source of financing for professional cultural institutions in Poland and local cultural actors in the Zlín Region respectively. In this respect, Toepfer and Dewees (2005) warn against negative impacts of fiscal problems and privatization on local culture. Note that Przybalska (2007), Tomas Bata University (2008) denote lack of funds as one of the most serious problems for culture.
Lack of funds was the most frequent problem mentioned by both groups of respondents (see Figures 1 and 2). This problem limits the opportunities for actors to renew their equipment (e.g. folklore costumes, digital recording of music and others) and to realize a higher number of their performances outside the region or abroad, necessary conditions for a qualitative development of local culture. Moreover, municipalities are not able to increase their contributions to local culture because of insufficient financial means.

Also other problems, mentioned by either actors of local culture or representatives of municipalities, are closely related to the limited financial means. Thus, unsatisfied rehearsal space or insufficient personal capacities may be solved especially through increasing funds in the sphere of culture.

Actors of local culture differed in their opinion whether the interest of young generation in their activities decreased or not. It seems that there are some differences between particular segments of local culture. Thus, the interest of youth was not mentioned as a problem in folklore but it was seen as a threat by members of cimbalom ensembles. However, the competition between local culture and other leisure activities was perceived generally as a problem. It is noteworthy that practically all respondents saw young generation as their future.

Other problems were mentioned rather rarely by actors of local culture. They included excessive administration\(^\text{43}\), preference for commercial culture given by mass-media, interest of audience or distance from the main cultural centres of the Zlín region. Representatives of municipalities added e.g. decaying cultural infrastructure, uneven distribution of cultural events during the year or political importance of local culture.

Figure 2: Problems of local culture perceived by actors of local culture in the Zlín region

Source: Questionnaire survey realized by Department of Regional Development, Public Administration and Law at TomasBataUniversity in Zlín in 2008; see also TomasBataUniversity (2008)

\(^{43}\) Especially with respect to project management
3. Financing local culture in the Zlín region

There are various national and transnational sources now, which may be used for financing local culture in the Zlín region. Typically, two types of cultural projects may be distinguished, with one focused on infrastructural development (cultural centres, restoration of cultural monuments and others) and the other one on cultural activities. At the national and transnational level, the former type of projects has a larger choice of financing alternatives,
including EU Structural Funds, Norwegian Financial Mechanism and others. The latter type may be supported from EU Structural Funds as well, but the opportunities are narrower compared with the first type of projects. Other financial sources include the State Cultural Fund of the Czech Republic or the Visegrad Fund (see Ministry of Culture 2009 for a comprehensive review).

### Table 1: Cultural grant programs in selected regions of the Czech Republic

| General information | Various segments of culture may be supported in all Regions, including folklore, traditions, dance and music, exhibitions, publishing, film and others. Professional and non-professional cultural institutions may submit an application, regardless their legal status (physical entities, municipalities, civic associations, foundations, joint stock companies, and others). However, institutions established by the Regions are excluded from the programs. MSR and SMR limit the number of eligible applications at two and three respectively. MSR, OCR and SMR announce a call for applications at the end of the preceding year. Only ZLR announces more calls during the year. Financial rules differ from grant program to grant program. Minimal and maximal contributions are specified by MSR (50,000-200,000 CZK) and SMR (10,000-2,500,000 CZK), but not by ZLR and OCR. In MSR and JMR, the maximum level of grant support is 50% while 75% in the ZLR and not specified by OCR. The grant programs differ also in the costs which may be covered. In this regard, wage costs are allowed to be covered by MSR but not by SMR and ZLR. However, non-investment costs such as printing and publishing, rent of premises, transportation costs or advertising are usual eligible costs.

| Financing | A straightforward methodology based on predefined criteria is generally used in the selection procedure of projects. The criteria include especially:
- territorial importance of the project (international, national, regional, local),
- quality of the project – e.g. accordance of goals of the program and of the project, project viability, budget credibility,
- other – e.g. contributions of the project to the care for traditions, the relationship between the project and other strategic documents of the Region.
This multi-criteria procedure serves as a support tool for the decision making process on the choice of projects. Note that the final decisions are made by political representatives of the Regions.

| Selection process | Note: MSR – Moravia-Silesia Region, OCR – Olomoucký Region, SMR – South Moravia Region, ZLR – Zlínský Region
Source: Cultural Funds in MSR, OCR, SMR, ZLR – Rules of the Programs

Cultural grant programs, focused on the restoration of cultural monuments on one side and on cultural activities on the other side, were established also at the level of Czech Regions (see table 1 for a brief characteristic of cultural grant programs in selected Czech Regions). The Zlín Region initiated its Fund in 2001 with the goal to provide a financial support to:
- cultural activities of regional and trans-regional importance,
- restoration of cultural monuments.
Especially the first goal of the Fund is relevant for local culture in the Zlín region. However, the total amount of financial means in the Fund, allocated for cultural activities, is rather modest. In the year 2008, 216 projects were supported from the Fund with the financial

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44 E.g. Integrated Operational Program, Regional Operational Programs or Program of Rural Development in the programming period 2007-2013
45 Especially Regional Operational Programs and Operational Programs - Cross-Border Cooperation
contribution ranging from 3,000 to 160,000 CZK per project and with the total budget of 4,1 million CZK.

There are also other financial sources used by actors of local culture in the Zlín region. These include (see Figure 3):

- communal grants as the most frequent source of financing mentioned by the respondents of our questionnaire survey,
- sponsorship,
- foundations, churches and others.

4. Hot-spots of local culture in the Zlín region

Naturally, there are spatial differences in the richness of local culture across the Zlín region. Some parts of the Zlín region have preserved their traditions better than others. Similarly, some parts of the Zlín region may be regarded as hot-spots of modern cultural genres. We dare to say that it is important to recognize the spatial pattern of local culture if we want to influence its development, either to reduce inter-regional disparities or to support hot-spots of local culture. Our spatial analysis of local culture in the Zlín region was based on two variables focused on spatial distribution of important events of local culture in the Zlín region in 2008 respectively on spatial distribution of the projects supported from the Fund in 2008 in the area of cultural activities. Conclusions may be summarized as follows (see also Pekajová 2009):

- The main centres of settlement (Zlín, Uherské Hradiště, Vsetín and Kroměříž) and their surrounding areas may be regarded as natural hot-spots of local culture in the Zlín region. However, there are also other culturally rich areas such as Valašské Klobouky, Bystřice pod Hostýnem, Luhačovice or Rožnov pod Radhoštěm and their surroundings (see Figures 4 and 5).
- On the contrary, Figures 4 and 5 show the existence of “local culture deserts” in the Zlín region. These include especially the Vizovice, Uherský Brod counties and some parts of the Kroměříž county.
- There are differences in the relative presence of particular segments of local culture in the Zlín region. Folklore has been strongly preserved especially in the Slovácko and Zlinsko regions. Music and theatre activities are concentrated in the main centres of settlement while folk crafts are overrepresented in the Slovácko and Valašsko regions.
- The previous spatial pattern is reflected also in the existence of small communities which are successful in preserving some genres of local culture in the Zlín region. Thus, important folklore events are organized in the communities of Kunovice and Strání in the Slovácko region while a number of craft folk events are held in Velké Karlovice in the Valašsko region.

It is noteworthy that, according to statistical evaluation, the Fund reduces inter-regional disparities of local culture in the Zlín region (see Pekajová 2009).
5. Conclusion

Local culture still represents an important part of social life in the Zlín region, although respondents of our questionnaire survey mentioned competition from commercial culture as a problem of their activities. Thus, cultural heterogeneity seems not be threatened in the Zlín region so far. There are also several hot-spots of local culture which ensure that local traditions will be preserved. However, actors of local culture in the Zlín region face several problems in their activities.
Lack of funds is doubtless the most important development problem of local culture in the Zlín region. However, to find a solution to this problem is not an easy task because local culture belongs to the topics with a low political priority. Moreover, actors of local culture usually have only limited opportunities to draw funds from generous financial sources, such as the EU structural funds. This is caused not only by the thematic focus of the funds but also by their poor skills in project management. In the improvement of fundraising and project management skills of the actors of local culture we see a great opportunity for the preservation and promotion of local culture in the future.

References


