

The festival - the mark of the city's cultural identity in the context of urban marketing

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Abstract: Should we attach to the notion of identity, that of culture, we will have a more comprehensive and at the same time more precise vision of the relationship that exists between the two terms. The cultural identity is that something that recognizes the human community (social, political, regional, national, ethnic, religious) in terms of values, mentality, commitments, traditions, beliefs, historical memory.

To understand the notions of identity and culture, we refer to the individual and then to the group and to the manner they relate to the community, society and why not, the citadel, meaning the city. The latter becomes cultural when it values the customs and traditions of its inhabitants, its heritage, the works of its artists and craftsmen. This article attempts to analyze the interdependence that could exist between a cultural manifestation, more precisely a festival with its thematic aesthetics specific management and the cultural identity of the city that hosts it.

Nowadays, the culture plays the role of helping to convert cities into dynamic and attractive urban centers. It is commendable that this reconversion is also used by smaller towns in order to promote their identity. The phenomenon itself is known as urban marketing and has, among other attributes, the role of imposing a new way of conduct on civil servants and local public authorities. It also makes us have a certain conception of cities - in our case - thanks mainly to cultural history, but also in depending on the cultural policy they pursue, due to the image they want to promote, or through works of art, through the realization of certain artistic projects: festivals, branded cultural events, etc.

This is the case of the city of Tournai in Belgium, a border settlement entered into the phenomenon of European metropolisation which leads to the formation of centers composed of networks of metropolises and which become economic, social and political pillars, but also cultural, with a whole administrative dynamic and cultural facilities (cultural centers, museums, theaters, universities, etc.). The biennial festival we are referring to is called "Découvertes, marionnettes et images", being the only one in the French-speaking area of Belgium. The reputation of the festival is inevitably associated with the city of Tournai, and this association adds more value, effectively contributing to its image in the region and not only. The cultural identity of the city is linked among other things to the evolution of the festival and vice versa.

It is an international festival dedicated to contemporary forms of puppet animation. From the theater of objects, passing through street art, dance or digital art, each edition of the festival gives access to the wealth of contemporary forms of the puppet and marionette as well as their interdisciplinarity. The analysis of the "Découvertes, images et marionnettes" festival

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in this context, taking into account the quoted references and the specific interferences of a research, is all the more complex and revealing at the same time.

Keywords: festival, cultural identity, urban marketing, puppetry, digital art, interdisciplinarity, theater, technology, network, community, diversity

Introduction

Identity is a complex concept, difficult to define, which covers several aspects of a person's life. It is related to the professional aspect, to the person's origin, to a political ideology that they embrace; even if all these elements refer to different fields, as we have mentioned, they refer to a single person. In other words, identity includes several dimensions in close interdependence: individual, relational, cultural. Identity is a set of criteria, definitions and at the same time an attribute, which is composed of different aspects: unity, coherence, belonging, value, autonomy and trust, all of which are organized around the will to exist." ¹ Since the term of culture is polysemantic, it finds its scientific meaning only in the 19th century. Edward Burnett Tylor in *Primitive Culture* defines culture as follows: "it is the complex which includes knowledge, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capacities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society." ²

If we join the two terms, identity and culture, we will have a more comprehensive and at the same time more precise vision of their relationship. Cultural identity is that something by which the human community (social, political, regional, national, ethnic, religious) is recognized in terms of values, mentality, commitments, traditions, beliefs, historical memory. We observe in these definitions, that in order to understand the notions of identity and culture, we refer to the individual and then to the group and to the way it relates to the community, society and why not, the citadel understood as the city. The latter becomes cultural when it values the customs and traditions of its inhabitants, its heritage, the works of its artists and craftsmen. The identity of a city is based on the recognition of its neighborhoods, the way of life, the valuing of the specifics of the place and giving it back to the locals, then to the regional community. Today, culture has the role of helping to convert cities into dynamic and attractive urban centers. It is commendable that this reconversion is also used by smaller cities in order to promote their identity.

Context, references, interferences

Even if it is not a scientifically regulated method because it does not call for standardization, we have used case study with the aim of analyzing the management

¹Laurant Licata, Audrey Heine *Introduction à la psychologie interculturelle, Bruxelles, De Boeck Supérieur* 2012, p 81.

²Idem ,ibidem, p 50.

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of cultural institutions, because "the case study, above all, discovers the relationships between the phenomenon and the processes."³ We consider it appropriate for this analysis to take a festival with its program and cultural actions. In our analysis we will observe the combination of different empirical research methods, such as: the interview, the analysis of the content of the documents, the programs of the catalogs, and the observation of the work process. Good case study examples are both successful institutions and those that have disappeared or failed to perform managerially. In our approach, we have focused our attention on an institution in the first category that launched an exceptional cultural product on the international cultural market, which we consider to be an example of good practice.

In the specialized literature, the term urban marketing is used with different meanings and connotations, one of them being: "a means of promoting the city, with its characteristics and prospects, able to attract investments and visitors from outside." It can be described as a set of activities aimed at optimizing the relationship between the supply of urban functions and the demand from residents, companies, tourists or other visitors. Elements that are essential to general marketing (such as market research, analysis of target groups and competitors, development of a marketing plan and organization of promotional campaigns) will also be essential to urban marketing. It does not only involve promoting the functions of a city and increasing its competitiveness compared to other cities, but also raising the level of performance of the public administration staff, including the usefulness of the public policies implemented by it. Urban marketing imposes a new way of conduct on civil servants and local public authorities and makes us have a certain conception of cities - in our case - mainly due to the cultural history, but also according to the cultural policy they carry out, due to the image they wish to promote it through works of art, by carrying out certain artistic projects: festivals, branded cultural events, etc. In the recent and current urban background, culture has become a field with multiple values that must be recognized and capitalized on by factors of decision, by local authorities and introduced at the level of urban development projects. In regards to linking culture to urban development, some studies (Hawkes, J., 2001, Stanborough, 2011) indicate the need to recognize culture as one of the four pillars of development alongside economic, environmental and social factors. From this perspective, the quoted authors emphasize the need for the integration of culture in the strategies of governments and local authorities and in urban planning⁴

Tournai is a French-speaking city in Belgium, located in the Wallonia region and part of the Hainaut province. The city was founded more than 2,000 years ago

³ Milena Dragicevic-Sesic, Branimir Stojkovic *Cultura, Management, Mediere , Marketing*, Timisoara, Fundatia Interart TRIADE, 2002, p 291.

⁴ Maria Stanborough, *The Link Between: Culture and Sustainability in Municipal Planning* în *Culture and Local Governance / Culture et gouvernance locale* vol. 3, No.1-2, 2011, p. 97.

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and enjoys a rich and turbulent history at the same time, having been under English, French, Spanish, Austrian and Dutch rule over time. As a consequence, it has an impressive architecture and material heritage that the authorities maintain and exploit abundantly. The oldest bell tower in Belgium called Beffroi is part of the UNESCO heritage, the same for Notre-Dame cathedral in Tournai.⁵ The city also has an intangible heritage that is materialized through religious processions, fairs and an annual carnival. Tournai is part of the Eurométropole Lille-Courtrai-Tournai Eurodistrict, seen as a cross-border concentration in Europe and it is defined as a European administrative entity that regroups urban, rural or mixed areas.

The fact that Tournai is a border town led to its entry into the phenomenon of European metropolisation. More precisely, it is part of the formation of centers, composed of networks of metropolises that become economic, social, political, but also cultural pillars, with a whole administrative dynamics and cultural facilities (cultural centers, museums, theaters, universities, etc.). Based on a policy of enhancing the peripheral regions, Tournai together with the cities of Lille (France) and Courtrai (Belgium) with which it forms the aforementioned network, promotes its own development and offers in the cultural field. "However, the cultural policy of the peripheral regions is often defensive, based on the preservation of traditional values, without looking to the future. Demetropolization introduces a new development strategy - as in the centers, so also in the periphery - and this means local development"⁶, "Maison de la marionnette", the institution that proposes different cultural manifestations in Tournai seems to have found the right measure in the administrative adjustment, in such a way as to meet the European objectives. It takes over a traditional local cultural practice, the handling of marionettes, which it entrusts to contemporary European artists, to which the support of the local community is added.

For anyone who wants to organize a festival that includes a wide range of cultural events, there are some basic rules and we believe the idea of a case study is welcome. One of the first questions we ask ourselves when starting a project is: what message do I want to convey? what is my project about? Since the cultural field is quite large, we should mention that the project consists of a performing arts festival (puppets, street animation, etc.), which narrows and at the same time clarifies the scope of action. The biennial festival we are referring to is called "Découvertes, marionnettes et images", being the only one in the French-speaking area of Belgium. The reputation of the festival is inevitably associated with the city of Tournai, and this association brings it more value, effectively contributing to its image in the region and

⁵ <https://www.tournai.be/patrimoine>

⁶ Milena Dragicevic-Sesic, Branimir Stojkovic *Cultura, Management, Mediere , Marketing*, Timisoara, Fundatia Interart TRIADE, 2002, p 268.

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not only. The cultural identity of the city is linked among other things to the evolution of the festival and vice versa. It is an international festival dedicated to contemporary forms of puppet animation. From the theater of objects, passing through street art, dance or digital art, each edition of the festival gives access to the richness of contemporary forms of the puppet and marionette, but also their interdisciplinary nature. The festival is an initiative of the Puppet Center of the Wallonie-Brussels Federation, the Créa-Théâtre Company and the Museum of Puppet Art, in co-production with the House of Culture of Tournai and Fabrique de Théâtre, the media partners being Notélé and Vivacité. Because it is already a festival with tradition, the themes of the editions are the result of the trends in this field of activity, the feedback from the previous editions and the synchronization with the other festivals, if we consider the most important one, the Charleville Mézières festival.

Generally, festivals are an important way of spreading the culture through which the artistic act is immediately evaluated should we consider festivals as including prizes, thanks to which we can achieve success, but also progress, in the respective field. "Through its celebratory character, the festival is also attractive to the general public, so that it becomes, by itself, a significant advertising factor" ⁷

This year's edition started with the "Géants et Minuscules" event. Giants handled in the traditional way, creatures never seen before, street theater or works of art, up to anthropomorphic forms, all disproportionate figures, declined in all possible forms. The premieres were presented in halls, dedicated to both schoolchildren and the general public, followed by short artistic forms, professional meetings at the European level, creations of emerging artists, workshops. This edition succeeded to bring together more than 40 giant puppets, more than 30 theater companies with more than 25 performances ⁸ highlighting the creativity in the Wallonie-Brussels Federation.

"Géants et Minuscules" took place in the Grande Place, nicknamed "Place des marionnettes" as a tribute to the local tradition of oversized puppets. The presence at this event gave us the opportunity to meet the organizer and initiator of the festival and conduct a short interview:

Ioana -Raluca Zaharia : Dear Françoise, first of all I'd to thank you for the invitation of being present in Tournai at the opening of the festival that you have been organizing for over twenty years. We'd love to find out where this festival is located on the map of similar events in Europe and beyond.

Françoise Flabat: What sets it apart from other festivals is precisely its association with the border town of Tournai, which is a small urban settlement surrounded by several smaller towns. I must state that it is not a large-scale festival,

⁷ Milena Dragicevic-Sesic, Branimir Stojkovic *Cultura, Management, Mediere , Marketing*, Timisoara, Fundatia Interart TRIADE, 2002, p 166.

⁸ <https://www.maisondelamarionnette.be>

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instead, through the themes addressed, we are connected to the phenomenon of European theater.

Ioana-Raluca Zaharia: I can see around me people who are familiar with cultural events in general. Am I to understand that the festival is not a singular cultural activity in Tournai?

Françoise Flabat: It is a good observation. We are in a city that hosts different cultural events throughout the year, we also have a heritage that is recognized and protected by UNESCO. These aspects mean that in Tournai there is an influx of international audiences that our festival also enjoys.

Ioana-Raluca Zaharia: I must confess that the display of forces I see in the Grande Place is more than impressive and it is even so amazing since it highlights the oversized marionettes that were created especially for this event.

Françoise Flabat: Throughout history, the dolls and marionettes have been constant presences in the life of the Tournai community, marking the collective psyche. Today the puppet phenomenon is present throughout the whole year through the activity we carry out at "Maison de la Marionnette" and once every two years through the festival "Images, Decouverte et Marionnettes" where we are now.

In the folklore of northern France and Belgium, the oversized puppet is a fantastical or real-life human figure. A legacy of medieval customs, the tradition is for it to be worn on the city streets on carnival days, religious holidays and not only. The oversized puppet was created by a local group that shares common values and symbolizes the collective identity. On holidays, it is carried by one or more people, it moves alone or by a couple or by a family. Each one makes an appearance at a certain local celebration, carnival processions, parades or during a festival, accompanied by the local brass band. Each oversized puppet has its own history, being in a way representative of the city's inhabitants and part of popular culture. Since 2005, the oversized puppets from France and Belgium that participate in various processions have become part of the intangible cultural heritage protected by UNESCO. In Belgium the tradition dates back to the 15th century and today we can count around 2500 oversized puppets. In Tournai, the most popular are « les géants des quatre cortèges », among which is also the character known as the Queen of Tournai.

The particularity of this year's event consisted in gathering together different spectacular forms from the puppetry area that surprise with their size and shape. Some giants recounted ancient local histories, others were handled to the rhythms of brass bands, while works of art invited for contemplation. There were also theatrical performances and interactive installations. Street art highlighted intangible heritage, with the aim of enlivening the city, the place, the region, with the idea of affirming and reaffirming the cultural identity of Tournai. The organizers set out to pay tribute to a local figure that is hardly recorded in the history books: the first Belgian aviator, Hélène Dutrieu, born in Tournai and to whom an oversized puppet was dedicated on

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the occasion of the festival, more precisely a giant puppet with joints and the possibility of being handled like a marionette. On the festival's website, through all the precise information, we find the promise of the organizers that this oversized marionette will become a string marionette over the years, which of course from a technical point of view is more than a challenge. The local community has been preparing for this event since the beginning of the year. "The Puppet Center", the main organizer, sent invitations to interactive workshops for the construction of oversized puppets together with local associations, schools, neighborhood committees, with the clear aim of gathering the public of different ages around an intergenerational concept.

Without a doubt, the success of a festival also lies in the involvement of the local community. The local public is not only a ticket payer but also a co-creator of the cultural events within the festival. The long-term involvement of Tournai residents brings cultural, educational and civic benefits to the community. Their identification with the values promoted by the festival plays the role of perpetuating a cultural manifestation and putting a solid brick to their identity.

In addition to the locals, tourists also enjoy the cultural event, because in Tournai we find both the touristic and the cultural dimension. "A typical form of cultural tourism is the stay in a city with a rich cultural offer, because such a city usually concentrates a density and a variety of cultural opportunities". Only staying in such a city allows a perfect continuity of the most diverse cultural sequences. We can imagine a visit to the « Musée des Beaux -Arts » in Tournai, followed by a walk in the Grande Place and admiring the material heritage of the city, followed by watching a puppet show from the festival we are talking about, without forgetting of course, to end the day with typical local culinary tastings, from the most sophisticated to the very popular fried potatoes, together with Belgian beer. Staying in a city of this type suits culture enthusiasts because it allows chaining visits from one objective to another in a short time, especially if we also add accommodation in the city center. In general, the stay is short-term, between one and three nights, and the city of Tournai lends itself to the concept of a *city-break*, which is so common these days. Short-term stays are (fortunately!) not the most common form of cultural tourism. Other formulas that suit the context we are referring to target a narrower, niche audience. We are mentioning here festival enthusiasts and those who might come to Tournai to attend artistic workshops during the festival. Festival fans are often a particular case of *urban tourism*, but not always, as we must also take into account the festivals that take place in rural areas (The 2022 Rural Film Festival "Atravers Champs" organized in the provinces of Namur and Luxembourg), resorts, etc.

Another category of tourists that can be found in Tournai during the days of the festival is the tourist who practices occasional cultural tourism. His profile could be summed up in a few words as eclectic, curious, eager for new experiences of all kinds, not necessarily cultural. This type of audience is influenced by everything

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related to current affairs, fashionable ideas. He is versatile and docile at the same time, concerned with entertainment more than culture. "In contrast to the traditional vision, which is intended to be literary, selective, aesthetic, the middle class imposed a more visual, emotional, historical, and scholastic and above all identity journey, thus appropriating a historical past, which until then had brought no recognition." ⁹ With the pandemic, the phenomenon of occasional cultural tourism has increased, adding a new parameter, namely proximity. This type of tourist is willing to travel short, less expensive distances that offer a cultural experience alongside a gastronomic or sporting one.

The period of the "Découvertes, images et marionnettes" festival is not chosen by chance, because it takes place at the end of September, when those social categories targeted by the festival are active. In the good Catholic tradition, it can be considered a festival for the whole family, but also one that often goes to children. Another aspect worth taking into account for such a manifestation is analyzing the competition. Are there other festivals of the same theme in the geographical area we are targeting? The question makes sense because the answer determines to what extent the festival is feasible and brings details about how it should be designed. On the other hand, we must not forget that in the same geographical area, an equally important, if not better known, festival is the one in Charleville Mézières.

Since the first edition, the festival has hosted numerous puppet theater and object theater companies from the Wallonie-Brussels Federation, artists from all over the world from countries such as Vietnam, Portugal, Ukraine, Hungary, Iran, Finland, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, Chile, Austria, Taiwan, Great Britain and Spain. Some of the most important contemporary puppeteers were also present: Neville Tranter, Duda Paiva, Frank Soehnle, La Troppa, Turak Théâtre, Ulrike Quade, Senor Serrano, Yeung Fai, Mossoux Bonté Théâtre La Licorne, Tof Théâtre, Clastic Théâtre, Gare Centrale, Point Zéro, as well as young artists who later established themselves on the big European stages. In 2001, the festival debuted as a competition dedicated to young puppeteers from different European schools. Additionally there was an exhibition dedicated to different types of marionnettes, workshops supported by famous professors and debates that had the role of dynamizing the cultural life of the city of Tournai. A year later, the organizers launched the European network Europappets within the festival, with the aim of bringing together several European partners to highlight young talents in the field of animation theater and to facilitate their movement in the European space, both for them as for their artistic creations.

Networks support the acquisition of new skills and knowledge, as they allow greater diversity in environmental research – which is to their advantage as compared to hierarchical organizations. At the same time, networks make it possible to obtain richer and more complex information than in the case for information provided by the

⁹ V.Patin, *Tourisme et culture*, Revue Espaces, nr 37/1994, p 31 (traducerea autoarei)

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market. This is possible in two ways. Firstly, they encourage a rapid exchange of knowledge, achieved autonomously by some of their elements, which are reservoirs of knowledge. Secondly, and more importantly, networks support the innovative synthesis of knowledge, qualitatively different from those already existing in some elements of the network. Thus, the network itself becomes the epicenter, which enables the innovation of knowledge, and not just a simple exchange channel. We could call this appropriation the synergistic quality of the network. "Many bees, but one swarm" said Ortega y Gasset, the Spanish philosopher back in the twenties of the 20th century. It is interesting that Nikolas Negroponte, contemporary guru of the information society, in his bestseller book, *Being Digital*¹⁰ uses a similar figure of speech - of the bird and the flock - when he talks about virtual communities in which they communicate via the network. What differentiates the network from organizations is the absence of visible authority, hierarchy, and implicitly conflicts. When setting up a network, objectives such as providing mutual help, avoiding isolation and establishing contacts that lay the foundations for joint actions are usually encountered. If the foundations are laid at the beginning by a group of colleagues, acquaintances who have the same professional interests, then the network can become a platform for exchanging ideas, best practices, an information center, a system that defends and promotes the common interests of its members. It is no coincidence that in the cultural field, networks work and are vital for artistic dynamics. The operation of the network is also aimed at creating a climate of collaboration and practicing a problem-solving attitude. "The network actually has the role of structuring, allowing the relationship between its members to unfold at different speeds and intensities and to assume various qualities of mutual relationships".¹¹

Instead of conclusion

Through this case study, we have attempted to investigate the issue of interdependence that could exist between a cultural manifestation, more precisely a festival with its thematic, aesthetic marking, the specific management and the cultural identity of the city that hosts it. The phenomenon itself is known as urban marketing and acts as a catalyst that brings together known artists, visitors interested in urban tourism, locals who find themselves in the proposed cultural activities, local and regional authorities involved in promoting the festival and implicitly advertising the city, region and their inclusion in a cultural, social and economic dynamic specific to the configuration of the current Europe.

¹⁰ Negroponte, Nicholas, *A fi digital*, București, Editura ALL, 2009, p.78

¹¹ Dragicevici-pg 272 Milena Dragicevic-Sesic, Branimir Stojkovic *Cultura, Management, Mediere , Marketing*, Timisoara, Fundatia Interart TRIADE, 2002, p 272.

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From an artistic point of view, the festival is the sum of twenty years of research, adjustments and innovations in the field of animation theater. At the same time, due to its importance in the artistic world, the festival is the basis for establishing a professional network at the European level. In recent years, the members of the Europappets network have carried out impactful European projects that have discussed the role of the animation theater in contemporary society, the need to consolidate the state of the puppet artist through access to artistic forms of education specific to the field of animation theater, the adaptation of the animation theater to the technology era that we were crossing. Perhaps the role of a festival is to give the opportunity to meet artists, to give birth to various spectacular forms and to mark the public both from an aesthetic and cultural point of view, with the aim of raising the level of civilization and involvement in the life of the community.

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