

COMMUNITY CENTERS – FACTOR FOR THE PRESERVATION OF BULGARIAN CULTURE AND TRADITIONS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTOR

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Abstract: The community centers have a major role for the preservation of Bulgarian culture and traditions because they enable a wide range of people to learn about the traditions, customs, crafts and activities typical for a specific area. Despite the fact that in recent years people spend less money and time to visit cultural events, community centers have managed to gain the attention of young people. The main objective of the present study is to trace the activity of community centers in a specific area – namely the municipality of Slivnitsa. The community center is a major factor for the preservation and popularization of traditions, customs and culture of residents of the municipality. For the purpose of the study I have used an original questionnaire with questions concerning the work and structure of community centers and their libraries. The role of the community centers in the development and promotion of the cultural and creative sectors in the municipality has been analyzed by means of the inquiry. They will play a special role in the development of cultural and creative industries on a local level and will also allow for the expression of many young talents. The community centers can become schools of new cultural and artistic activities, thus contributing to the revitalization of the area. There is a natural process aimed at widening the fields in which they could be considered initiators and innovators.

Keywords: creative industry, crafts, traditions, innovations and culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

The community centers have a major role for the preservation of Bulgarian culture and traditions because they enable a wide range of people to learn about the traditions, customs, crafts, and activities typical for a specific area. Despite the fact that in recent years people spend less money and time to visit cultural events, community centers have managed to gain the attention of young people. The main objective of the present study is to trace the activity of community centers in a specific area – namely the municipality of Slivnitsa. The community center is a major factor for the preservation and popularization of traditions, customs and culture of residents of the municipality. For the purpose of the study, I have used an original questionnaire with questions concerning the work and structure of community centers and their libraries. The role of the community centers in the development and promotion of the cultural and creative sectors in the municipality has been analyzed by means of the inquiry. There are three community centers in the municipality.

2. RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF THE COMMUNITY CENTRES IN THE MUNICIPALITY AND THEIR ROLE IN THE PRESERVATION OF BULGARIAN CULTURE AND TRADITIONS.

Community center „Saznanie – 1907“ – town of Slivnitsa¹⁷⁰. In 1907, part of the teachers in the town of Slivnitsa and the clerk from the train station founded the first community center in the town, which they named “Probuda”. In 1921, the community center was renamed “Saznanie”, and has kept that name ever since. The authentic spiritual art of our people, the magic of their folk music and dances have been stored in the diverse and rich repertoire of the dance groups that have showed their talent on the stage of the community center. The painter Simeon Georgiev has had a permanent exhibition in the lobby of the community center since 1992. He graduated the Art Academy in 1973 with a major in "Illustration and Book Design". He creates the scenography of the community center's theater and the posters dedicated to the celebrations of the community center, the school and the city. Simeon Georgiev and his students have won numerous awards from participations in competitions on national and international level. In 1990 was inaugurated the Children's Musical Theatre, which gives a chance for performance to many young talents from our town. The continuity at the theater is ensured by the two theater groups – the one of the community center and the one of the school. The activities of the community center are diverse: choral studios, dance, puppetry, drama

¹⁷⁰ culture.slivnitsa.com/читалище-съзнание-сливница – Activities and history of “Zaznanie-1907” community center, town of Slivnitsa

Twelfth International Scientific Conference
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theater, and musical theater. The children's workshops on piano, accordion and guitar contribute to the musical development of the talented children. Special attention is paid to the workshops on fine arts, sports and ballroom dance, photography and chess; training courses in languages and Esperanto are also organized. The library has an important role in the overall activity of the community center – it actively promotes books and reading. At the library there are 55 000 volumes of literature, versatile periodicals, computers and Internet connection. The community center has been repaired and modernized.

Community center „Svetlina 1919“, village of Aldomirovtsi, Municipality of Slivnitsa¹⁷¹. Community center „Svetlina 1919“ in the village of Aldomirovtsi, Sofia Region, was established in 1919. It is one of the tens of newly founded community centers in Bulgaria in the period after WW I. Its founders named it “Svetlina” (“Light”), which was a clear sign that the newly founded center of culture and education would be a guiding light in the life of the village. In 2009, an ethnographic collection was exhibited in the community center. One of the main activities of the community center are the library and information activities. The library is located on an area of 120 square meters and has a reading room with new ICT equipment under the "Glob@l Libraries - Bulgaria" program, Department for Children and Adolescents, Department for Adults, and a book depository.

Singing group “Denitsa”. The female folk songs choir “Denitsa” has always been the pride of the community center. Some of its members are still singing to this day, and the love for folk songs and amateur art activities are alive in them. The singing group “Denitsa” has won lots of awards – in the past and now. Folk dance group “Meldia” Our community house has substantial traditions related to Bulgarian folk dance groups. The folk dance groups have walked a long way in their development. The youth dance groups from the recent past have also given their contribution to the popularity of Bulgarian folklore. Their contemporary successor is “Medlia” dance group which has won awards at folklore festivals on national and international level. Children's dance group. Bulgarian dances, songs and customs have to create young people's love for the homeland, preserve their roots, and build a clear national identity conscience and belonging in them, thus making them proud of the fact that they are Bulgarian. Community centers have the honor to be one of the institutions that could and should preserve the treasure of our cultural and historic heritage. They accept that as a mission, as a major task and goal. That's why the preservation and popularization of Bulgarian folklore and its transmission to future generations are some of the main priorities of our community center. An arts club with a manager was founded in 2011 at the community center. The young artists in it enthusiastically master the various techniques of printmaking, figural composition and painting. The aim of the arts club is its members to acquire the needed skills for passing exams in arts, participation in national and international art competitions, exhibitions. Another goal is to promote this kind of art among the younger generation. Community center "Kitka-2008"¹⁷². Community center "Kitka-2008" is located in the "Burel" ethnographic region, in the northwestern periphery of the Sofia valley. The mission of the community center is to keep the Bulgarian spirit alive and to return the people to their roots, helping them honor the legacy of the Christian virtues and national traditions, thus educating the young generation in patriotism and love for the home. At the community center, there is an ethnographic exhibition named “Traditions and Hard Work of the People of Barlozhnitsa”. It arises great interest and brings pleasure to the guests not only from Bulgaria but also from abroad.

3. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR STRENGTHENING AND MODERNIZATION OF COMMUNITY CENTERS ACCORDING TO RESEARCH ON BULGARIAN COMMUNITY CENTERS.

The strategic goals for strengthening and modernization of the community centers according to research on Bulgarian community centers are as follows¹⁷³:

- ✓ Improvement and update of the existing regulations;
- ✓ Modernization of community centers as one of the main prerequisites for optimizing their activities as self-governing bodies;
- ✓ Improvement of the qualification and skills of staff in community centers for work in modern conditions;

¹⁷¹ <http://svetlina-1919.slivnitsa.com/> - Activities and history of „Svetlina-1919“ community center, village of Aldomirovtsi

¹⁷² <http://www.slivnitsa.bg/bg/node/126> Activities and history of „Kitka-2008“ community center – village of Barlozhnitsa

¹⁷³ Shishmanova, M., 2012, Bulgaria rusticana, Educational issues facing the Bulgarian village, the community center – symbol of Bulgarian culture and education, page 256.

- ✓ Implementation of the scheme for urgent repair works within the supplementary subsidy for community centers;
- ✓ Expanding the social range of the community center activities, including work with minority groups, people with disabilities, young people with special needs, etc.;
- ✓ Applying different models to support local development through a network of community centers - cultural tourism, local crafts, training and adult education, IT consulting and administrative services, and others.
- ✓ Strengthening the dialogue with the municipalities, other cultural and educational institutions, and non-governmental organizations for the implementation of joint programs

4. STRATEGY FOR PRESERVATION OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF SLIVNITSA (2016-2020). DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY CENTERS IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF SLIVNITSA AND THEIR ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTORS.

Major objectives, priorities and development of the community center activities¹⁷⁴ Community centers as centers for preservation of the cultural identity of the Bulgarians are the main cultural institution in the municipality of Slivnitsa. The deep relationship with the past, the traditions, the process of education, culture and charity are the basis of the authority of the community centers and their legitimacy in society. The main objectives of community centers are to meet the needs of the citizens related to the development and enrichment of cultural life, preserving the customs and traditions of the Bulgarian people, education and affirmation of national identity, broadening the knowledge of people and their adherence to the values and achievements of science, art and culture. Priorities of the community centers are strengthening the dialogue among them (participation in all activities included in the cultural calendar of the municipality), as well as work in partnership with the Municipal Administration Slivnitsa, educational institutions and clubs, restoration of "Prosveta" community center in the village of Galabovtsi.

Main problems and challenges facing the community centers. One of the major problems faced by the community center institutions in the municipality are the limited financial resources. It is necessary to seek additional funding through projects under different programs, either alone or as partners. The community centers also need to seek various forms of cooperation with different businesses and NGOs and undertake joint initiatives with them, thus contributing to the expansion and popularization of their activities. Maintenance of the material and technical base is a major problem for the community centers. Repairs, upgrading of equipment, participation in projects are being carried out with joint efforts and excellent cooperation between community centers and the Municipality. Community centers fulfill their goal of being educational cultural centers, as they create the cultural image of the small towns and villages. With their diverse activities they preserve the local traditions, rituals and customs. There is continuity between generations, which contributes to both the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage and the contemporary role of the community centers as cultural institutions. One of the priorities of the strategy is "Development of Cultural and Creative Industries". The following objectives have been set for the implementation of the priority: creating infrastructure for distribution and access to cultural content as conditions for return on invested effort and money; turning the community centers into multifunctional cultural centers; renovation of the community center buildings in the municipality; upgrade of the equipment of the community centers; support to the emblematic for the municipality crafts and their transformation into local industry; stimulation of the development and preservation of traditional crafts and development of local creative industries; organizing an exhibition of crafts and other events; projects for development of local creative initiatives

5. RESULTS, ANALYSIS, DISCUSSIONS

The survey results are presented in the following figures, which I have examined and analyzed.

Fig.1 shows the distribution of age of the people involved in the community center activities in the municipality. An interesting fact is that at the urban community center the children are involved in cultural events from a very young age. All three community centers in the municipality have involved in their activities people from 5 to 65 years of age, as well as people from the "third age".

Fig. 2 shows the number of employees of the community houses. Usually, those institutions employ up to 10 people, including chairman, secretary, maintenance person etc. 5 people are employed at the "Saznanie 1907" community center in Slivnitsa; 3 people work at the "Svetlina 1919" community center in Aldomirovtsi, and "Kitka-2008"

¹⁷⁴ www.slivnitsa.bg/sites/default/.../%20Стратегия%20културно%20ист%20насл.pdf – Strategy for Preservation of the Cultural Heritage in the Municipality of Slivnitsa (2016-2020).

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community center in Barlozhnitsa has secured employment of 2 people. Fig.3 shows that the surveyed community centers have 100% Internet access and provide computer equipment and supplies to employees, amateur artists, visitors and guests of the community centers and readers in libraries. The computer equipment at the community center in Aldomirovtsi has been acquired thanks to a project within a European program.

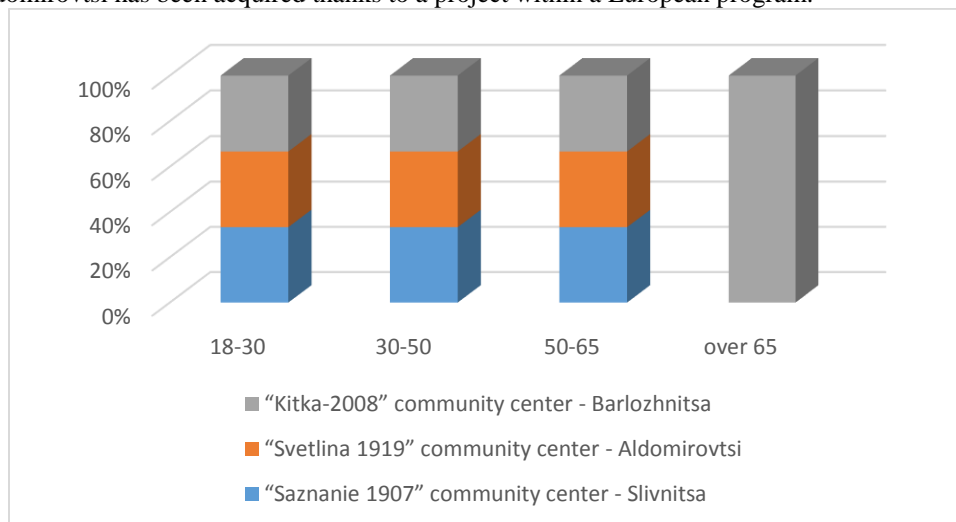


Fig.1 Age of the people involved in the community center activities ¹⁷⁵.

Fig.4 shows the frequency of cultural events co-organized by the community centers in the municipality. "Saznanie 1907" community center – Slivnitsa organizes cultural events twice a week, in the village of Aldomirovtsi and Barlozhnitsa such events are organized once a week. The following cultural events are organized at "Saznanie 1907" community center – Slivnitsa: plays and theater performances - 2 times a month for adults; once a month for children; concerts - folk, classical music, old city songs; folklore and other festivals - "Festival of the Traveling European Theater" – a different Bulgarian or foreign theatre performs each day within one week. The festival has a competitive character, there is a jury, which determines voting for the winner, but it also takes into account the vote of the audience.

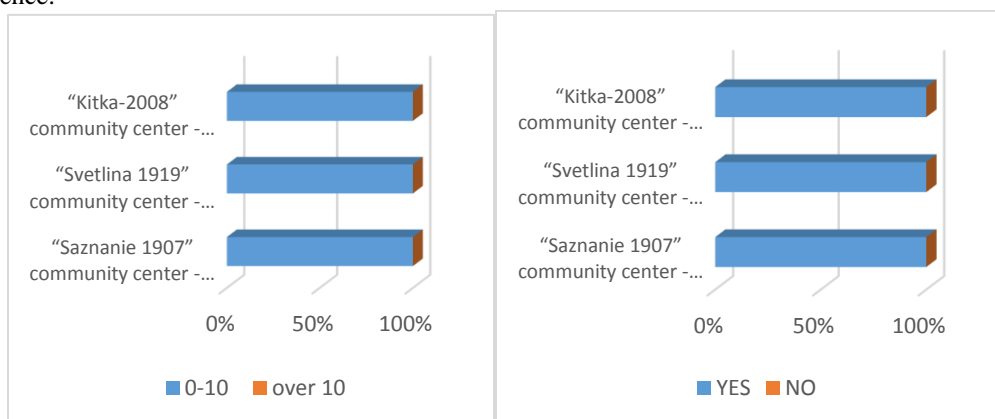


Fig.2. Number of employees

Fig.3. Internet access at the community center of the community center

The following theatre plays were recently organized by the community center: "Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll" - Theatre of the Bulgarian Army; "The wonderful world of Annie" and "Mad Money" – Montana Theater; "Festival of Japanese Culture", "Mrs. Natural Disaster. The cultural events that take place at "Svetlina 1919" community center

¹⁷⁵ Source: Plamen Stoyanov

Twelfth International Scientific Conference
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– Aldomirovtsi are: plays for children; concerts for anniversaries, local and municipal holidays; recitals and mono performances commemorating important dates; participation of amateur groups in international, national, and regional festivals. The following cultural events take place at “Kitka-2008” community center – Barlozhnitsa: plays and theatrical performances, literary readings, discussions; concerts during the feast of the village. The last events organized by the community centers are the commemorations of the anniversary of the death of the Apostle of Freedom - Vasil Levski. In the two community centers in the villages there are ethnographic collections – one in each community center.

Fig.6 shows the richness of the library collections of the libraries in the municipality. The librarians keep annual statistics on the number of readers, as well as distribution by age, education and occupation, and even the type of taken and supplied library documents, attendance of the library, and other indicators.

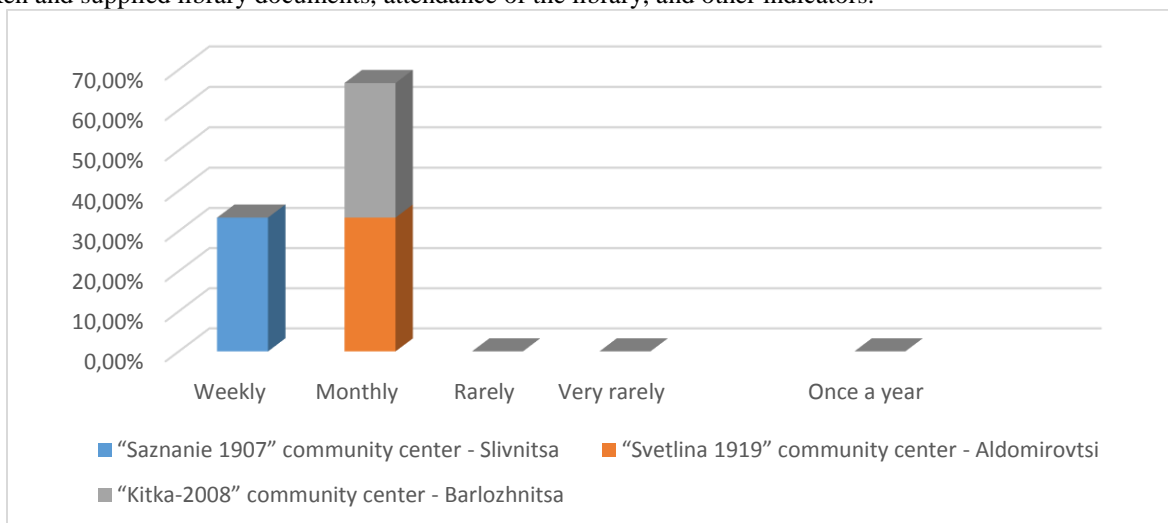


Fig.4 Frequency of the cultural events at the community center.

Fig.5 shows the number of people that attend the cultural events as audience

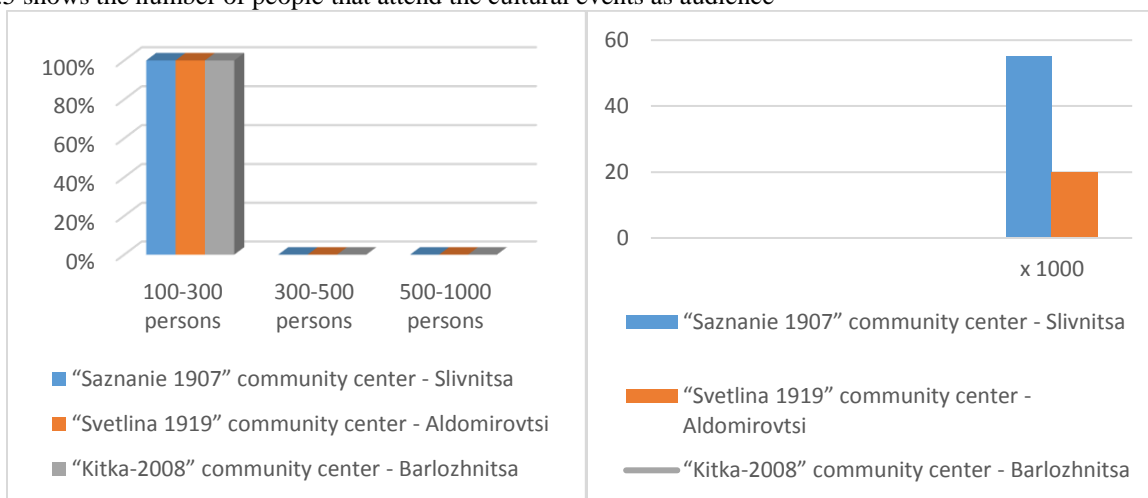


Fig.5 Number of audience at cultural events

Fig.6. Number of books in community center libraries

6.CONCLUSION

The problems faced by the community centers in the municipality, according to their managers, are:

- ✓ Low wages of the employees that are not adequate to the current economic situation in the country; need of repairs in community centers in small towns and villages of the municipality; problems with the heating of the halls;

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- ✓ Need for additional subsidies and methodical leadership by the Ministry of Culture, regional and municipal administrations, and other bodies;
- ✓ Insufficient advertising and media interest towards the community center events;
- ✓ Community centers are public municipal property, so municipalities, regional administrations and the Ministry of Culture do not care about the collapsing and crumbling buildings in the villages;
- ✓ Chairmen of community centers in villages are forced to seek sponsorship from local businesses or even to fund some of the community center events themselves;

The following conclusions could be drawn after the analysis of the activities of the community centers in the municipality of Slivnitsa and the detailed review and analysis of the author's questionnaire:

- ✓ Community center activities in the municipality of Slivnitsa are on the rise in recent years;
- ✓ There are greater opportunities for repair and modernization of technical and material base of community centers, due to the implementation of projects under EU programs;
- ✓ The community center as an institution with its activities is a guardian of Bulgarian culture and traditions in the region, thus attracting more young people to its cause and activities;
- ✓ Cultural institutions meet the socio-cultural needs of the citizens of the municipality by organizing and conducting various cultural events, for which there is a pre-made cultural calendar;
- ✓ The managers of community centers are aware of the existence of the sector of cultural and creative industries and realize the role of the community centers in their development and promotion. They express their readiness to work in this direction together with the municipal administration, artists and craftsmen.
- ✓ “Library therapy” is now introduced in our country. Children and teenagers could read and entertain themselves at the community center library, thus getting to know the nature of the cultural and creative industry. That encourages the younger generation to set their interests and activities to work for the development of innovation in the traditions and culture of the area.

SOURCES

- [1] www.culture.slivnitsa.com/ - Activities and history of “Zaznanie-1907” community center, town of Slivnitsa
- [2] <http://svetlina-1919.slivnitsa.com/> Activities and history of „Svetlina-1919“ community center, village of Aldomirovtsi
- [3] <http://www.slivnitsa.bg/bg/node/126> Activities and history of „Kitka-2008“ community center – village of Barlozhnitsa
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- [6] Fig.1-Fig.6 are subject to copyright.