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ARTS AND CULTURAL ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT

Social Impact and Innovation

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Social innovation via revitalization of traditional cultural heritage

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The classical economic paradigm of liberal economic theory is based on the concept of free movement of capital to the area of high profitability and margin of return of investment. By design, this model is based on cyclical development and is not crisis resistant. The four phases of the classical market economic cycle – expansion, peak, recession, and depression are inevitable, irrelevantly of all attempts for their rationalization and management by various macroeconomics theories and practices, for distribution of the powers and responsibilities between the various market agents. The decision-making process is often based on the consideration which generation should be valued the most – the current or the future. None of the models and theories can describe without an extremely high level of oversimplification the current situation nor predict accurately the future. They have been constantly incrementally updated after each economic crisis to diminish the probability of reoccurrence of similar root cause scenarios in the future. Yet, I am preparing this report during a period of a worldwide declared state of emergency due to a black swan event that is not directly provoked by liberal market economy forces disbalance but will have a massive consequence on the society worldwide to shape the post-COVID-19 economic landscape. This is just another proof, that the complexity of socio-economic dynamics as beyond reliable mechanism for prediction. Nevertheless, a shift in attention is observed for redesigning and rethinking the existing economic paradigm, reflected in the engagement of the EU circular economy action plan 2020. By the same token, sustainability, social impact and innovation have been highly stimulated also in creative and cultural endeavors. The concept of social enterprise is gaining popularity as a hybrid in the capitalist neoliberal environment, based on the minimal state principal for public service providers, by bridging the gap between private profit-oriented commercial enterprises and public or municipality or non-governmental organizations.

According to the Stanford business dictionary, social innovation is the process of developing and deployment of effective solutions to challenging and often systemic social and environmental issues, in support of social progress. In the realm of art and cultural enterprise, these practices might affect according to the Handbook of Cultural Economics, the patrons' needs which are addressed like education oneself, being with friends and relatives, reviving the past, expressing its own identity to others, having fun, relaxing, living intensive emotions. The diversity of the needs predetermines the different markets agents a cultural organization is serving state, donors or sponsors, partners or the ultimate customer. Putting it all together, the aspects of social innovations might have derived by rethinking, redefining and intervening in any of these dimensions.

In this paper, I will explore the effects of the social impact and innovation by the revitalization of traditional cultural heritage, illustrated with a case study of the social enterprise Bread House Network, which has a rich history during the last 10 years. This social enterprise has been selected for various reasons just to name a few: we are sharing a common national identity and familiarity with the local Bulgarian context, the level of commitment and enthusiasm of its founders and members, their origins in traditional universal cultural heritage, the innovative approach used for network expansion and exploration, the innovative approach for audience engagement, the innovative approach of the developed set of practices and their huge social impact, which was recognized as an award-winning in 2016 by UNAOC for social intervention. In practice, this organization is addressing the main semantic layers of social innovation i.e. policy as a partnership between the private and public or NGO sector, it is driven mainly by the actors and the social demand, rather than market-oriented, its practices are based on participatory and co-creation models though started as a local venture, its reach beyond national borders to more than 20 countries.

The Bread house network has been founded more than 10 years ago with the intention of creating a sustainable social enterprise and determined for bringing of positive impact on the local community and the larger society. In the context of the 'connected difference' theory of social innovation described in the work of Social innovation, What it is, why it matters and how it can be accelerated, the project under research, has an impact on the key dimensions of social innovations: "as it is a new combination of existing elements, by putting them into practice involves cutting across organizational, sectoral or disciplinary boundaries and they leave behind compelling new social relationships between previously separate individuals and groups which matter greatly to the people involved, contribute to the diffusion and embedding of the innovation, and fuel a cumulative dynamic whereby each innovation opens up the possibility of further innovations."

The focus of the practice evolves around the idea of the revitalization of the universal traditional bread-making process. Bread is a universal traditional symbol in many cultural contexts, preparation of bread has a central part of various religious rituals and is also emblematic for the traditional Bulgarian folklore. It is almost as old and universal as the concept of food sharing as a form of community building practice since the beginning of the history of our civilization. The universality of the symbol of bread and the ritual of food sharing, make them easily recognizable in different countries and helps the participant in the practice to associate with ease with the social services offered in the community. The simplicity of the process of bread making itself and the developed established artistic practices, creates an opportunity for successful model replication in multiple locations, agnostic of the dominant local culture, with or without public contribution. As Nadezhda Savova-Grigorova mentioned during the interview: "Our key social impact is that we provide an opportunity for interaction for people who would never otherwise have a chance to meet – there are no other free, open, and so easy access and engaging activities that do not require any skills but at the same time make everyone feel welcome and interested. This is how we have been able to break many social boundaries, prejudices, to prevent conflicts in feuding communities as in South Africa and the Middle East, in low-income ghetto areas like Harlem and Trenton in the USA and Roma slums in Eastern Europe."

The Bread House Network is organized around the delivery of paid services in a physical space, either social bakery or community center, and the generated income from these paid services is used as a source of funding for social activities. These paid services include different pieces of training and corporate team building events, space rental for various events, organization of breadmaking workshops. The social artistic activities are at the center of the organization and they are delivered by trained professionals on developed innovative art therapy methods by the network. These methods are tailored to facilitate the needs of different groups of people like refugees, people with impaired vision, people with development problems, elderly people, institutionalized people. The services offered vary on the specific needs of the community, just to mention a few: bread in the dark, theater of crumbs, kitchen music, traditional Bulgarian breadmaking. As Nadezhda Savova-Grigorova mentioned during the interview: "I tried the artistic method I developed (called Theater of Crumbs) with many different groups and cultures around the world, and it really proved to be universal. This is both a great benefit and a challenge, because now as an organization we do not have one specific target group whom we help, but we literally try to bring everyone together, we mixed very diverse people, and thus we also have a hard time to pro-actively approach potential stakeholders interested in getting trained – usually, they found us themselves online."

The participatory method is used not only for the services provided but is also in the base for Bread House network expansion in new physical locations locally and worldwide. The choice of locations is curated around the social impact created and the accessibility of the services, it is not profit-oriented though the strategy for sustainability of the organization is based on self-funding of the pro-bone services offered. The expansion of the network is rooted in the access model towards the know-how of the services provided and the mentorship offered. There are not artificially build access barriers for exclusivity, which are often a characteristic of other club models. Bread House network is open for everybody, interested in the creation of a venue with the same concept anywhere. This is achieved by the intensive training service offered to interested parties at affordable prices and continuous mentorship. Both public organizations and private individuals have found this model beneficial, as the artistic methods used have been proven efficient for improvement of the quality of life, the sense of belonging to a community and the level of happiness of its participants, which is yet another proof for the high reach of the social artistic innovation. From the perspective of public/municipal service providers, by joining the network they gain a solid partner, helping them enrich the social community services provided in their area, which are not normally famous in Bulgaria for being with high quality. From the perspective of an individual interested in developing or enriching a social-cultural enterprise, the know-how provided would accelerate the process for the development of sustainable participatory social artistic practice.

Bread House Network has an active presence on the internet and social media. It has been represented with a web site, local TV channel, YouTube channel, TED and other social platforms. The wide reach of the network and its quick expansion is leading to engagement with various groups of stakeholders. Social media is used as a communication channel, but the diversity of the audience requires a tailored approached to be reached. The communication strategy is not yet tailored to offer diverse messages for the various communities it is working with. The level of technology involvement of the organization is high, as though the services offered are mainly focused around co-creation in a physical space, due to the current State of Emergency declared in Bulgaria and worldwide, under the #StayAtHome slogan they have quickly adapted and offered their services via free web-based video conferencing platform.

By capitalizing on the accessible network effect, Bread House Network managed for just 10 years to achieve expansion, which would have been beyond imagination and currently it is operating in 20+ on 6 continents, engaging more than 18 000 people and offering more than 1600 events. As the venture has started in a local house in a city in Balkan Mountains with a rich history but with a current population of fewer than 60 000 people, without building on top of the network effect, the initiative could have hardly expanded. The wide reach of the network and its quick expansion is leading to engagement with various groups of stakeholders.

Social innovation is associated with building sustainable solutions for a problem. The Bread House Network is, in my opinion, a good example of social activism via artistic practices for filling the gap in the public services provided. It is creating a sustainable positive change in the communities it is operating locally, by putting in practice active methods for the revitalization of universal traditional cultural capital, participation and co-creation without building high entrance barriers, network theory and redefining the concept of public-private partnership. During the years, the number of physical locations and the variety of services provided has been enriched in order to reach the specific social needs of communities. The process of social innovation via artistic practice in the organization is constantly

developing, so I would say that the focus of the network is on the process and services to be more widely accessible, by building long term partnerships with public and private organizations.

### **Appendix one:**

Interview with Nadezhda Savova-Grigorova, founder of Bread House

[www.breadhousesnetwork.org/](http://www.breadhousesnetwork.org/)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxy1Ge8QMg#action=share>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMg3Nv45UCbZfRoA6gHrC6Q>

- 1. What is the focus of your activities and audience engagement strategies? How do you develop your network in different cities - are you growing organically, or you are using another model, franchise for example?**

Our main strategy for replication and growth is to train stakeholders in our methods. These usually are individuals or social organizations (social activists, organizations working with refugees and with people with various special needs using the methods as Bread Therapy, community artists, art therapists, teachers, social entrepreneurs, bakers), who then start applying the methods in their own communities, both for free and by offering them as paid services (teambuildings, educational programs for schools, etc. – see the section SERVICES on our website for full information). The trainings are paid (700 Euros for 2-day in-depth training), followed by a licensing agreement (a kind of social franchising) allowing them to offer the methods in their contexts.

- 2. How have you narrowed down the focus of the activities performed? What was the starting point of your exploration? Was that reviving traditional bread making, the experience of sharing food as a community-building factor, or more oriented towards the instrumental value of art and culture in terms of social inclusion and engagement?**

I started being interested in bread-making both as a traditional experience of home and fellowship (lost in many modern societies and in need to be revived) and also from the artistic side of turning it into a community art for social inclusion – this was the topic of my anthropology dissertation at Princeton. Thus, I tried the artistic method I developed (called Theater of Crumbs) with many different groups and cultures around the world, and it really proved to be universal. This is both a great benefit and a challenge, because now as an organization we do not have one specific target group whom we help, but we literally try to bring everyone together, we mixed very diverse people, and thus we also have hard time to pro-actively approach potential stakeholders interested in getting trained – usually, they found us themselves online.

- 3. How would you define the impact of social intervention by the innovative approach of your practices?**

Our key social impact is that we provide an opportunity for interaction for people who would never otherwise have a chance to meet – there are no other free, open, and so easy access and engaging activities that do not require any skills but at the same time make everyone feel welcome and interested. This is how we have been able to bread many social boundaries, prejudices, to prevent conflicts in feuding communities as in South Africa and the Middle East, in low-income ghetto areas like Harlem and Trenton in the USA ad Roma slums in Eastern Europe.

#### **4.What are the main challenges your organization is facing now?**

Precisely to narrow down our very wide activities and to define more concrete stakeholders around Europe, USA, and the globe. An issue is how to communicate proactively with them what we do and the benefit to their work, since usually when they first hear about breadmaking it does not make it clear how this applies to community building, refugee integration, or therapy. But once they see our presentational video (and we work on a new one with bread puppets), people get very inspired about the very different ways in which they can use our methods. We simply have to further improve our communication strategy.

#### **Literature:**

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4. Social innovation, what it is, why it matters and how it can be accelerated, Geoff Mulgan
5. Place of bread in the culture of the traditional society in Bulgaria, Yoanna Ninova