



*Original Contribution*

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**THE ROLE OF LOCAL CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS FOR LOCAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. THE CASE-STUDY OF BULGARIA.**

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**ABSTRACT**

The increasing role of cultural institutions for sustainable development is associated with initiation and realization of activities related to conservation of natural and cultural heritage. The **purpose** of this study is to assess the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the future development of local cultural institutions in Bulgaria, in the context of their role in local development, mainly of small settlements. **Methods:** By applying the dynamics index the trends in cultural institutions in Bulgaria are examined. A survey also has been conducted in order to investigate the components of SWOT analysis, on which base the problems are summarized and specific recommendations are made. **Results:** The data show divergent trends in the number of individual cultural institutions. Notably, if the number of rural cultural clubs decreases, the trend in the number of their members is increasing, despite the reported demographic crisis in the villages.

**Conclusions:** Only through an integrated approach, including the constitution of cultural institutions in network format may increase the attractiveness of areas for investment and for building a quality living environment while preserving the regional identity. The community club is a unique Bulgarian cultural institution, which takes place especially in the history of Bulgarian society in which it was hoped to mobilize the local community and to enhance local development processes.

**Key words:** cultural institutions, local development, Bulgaria, community club

**INTRODUCTION**

Modern concepts in the theory of local development are characterized by more active presence of the institutional approach to the analysis of the local economy, recognizing that behind the economic development of local level stands the potential of institutional assets. The process of overall rethinking and redefining the objectives and priority areas in the development of cultural activities at national and regional level is becoming an essential part of sustainable local development.

Culture is an integral part of development - both nationally and locally: culture is related to creating jobs, raising incomes and exports. The contribution of culture in employment ranged

from 3 to 7% and sometimes exceeded this limit (1) Whether we speak of entire regions, cities or small towns, culture is an essential component of quality of life, income from tourism and is a source of new goods and services.

As Greffe (1) argues, contemporary contribution of culture to local development is not limited just to tourists attraction, but it has a greater impact as a catalyst for other activities and initiatives as a tool for social integration of people and communities in disadvantage, which is one of its contributions for local sustainable development.

In the society based on knowledge, the important mission and role of cultural institutions as a studying environment for children and adults should be promoted and developed more. Although today's clash between global and local requires cultural institutions to be more active, flexible and innovative, many of them face difficulties to adapt and use only part of their potential to

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meet the needs of local communities and users. Moreover, cultural institutions face the need to establish their place in the network connections locally and in a new environment: new communication technologies, improved computer technology and global economic processes. Conti and Springer (2) summarize that the links between economic, social and political dimension is organized in network format because it is not possible to ignore the impact and feedback that is between the socio-cultural and political ties, on the one hand and economic, on the other.

Within the EU, and globally, recently a rapid progress is achieved in the development of cultural institutions in the management and implementation of innovative projects such as projects to support the population of European countries to become part of the "e-Europe" by digital services (European Business History Association 2011). Cultural institutions in Europe also pay more attention to the training of the employed staff to be more prepared in areas outside the cultural sphere as management, accounting, statistics, law, economics and computer skills. According to Jocelyn Harvey the effective management "can contribute to the survival of a cultural organization in crisis" (3).

Savova (4) examines the role of small local cultural institutions by observing many countries (America, Cuba, Brazil, Mexico, Ethiopia, India), including the network of the Bulgarian cultural clubs. In Brazil and Cuba the local cultural organizations (*casa de cultura*, *pontos de cultura*) are similar to Bulgarian cultural clubs. Some of them are historically associated with the cultural clubs from the Russian cellar-reading room and in a later period with the houses of culture in socialism, but in Bulgaria, in their fundamental principles, they are democratic, civilian institutions. Savova shows that it is Bulgarian cultural clubs who are one of the first non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Europe based on network principle. She draws attention to the role of local cultural institutions for sustainable development in social and economic aspect. In the countries where she makes her research, Savova found destructive force of a GMO, hybrid crops and biofuels on traditional cultures, exchange and biodiversity. Local cultural institutions in these countries are civil organizations that demonstrate and advocate for the protection of

economic resources for present and future generations.

In Gabrovo, Bulgaria, Savova creates a cultural center called the Bread House ([www.bread-art-house.org](http://www.bread-art-house.org)), where people gather in the evenings to bake bread together and around this round table they discuss the local development, plans to sow their land, beekeeping, as well as Orthodox writings on nature and food's place in our live.

The increased role of cultural institutions for sustainable development is associated with initiation and realization of activities related to preservation of natural and cultural heritage, transformation of local cultural institutions into contemporary spiritual centers for the dissemination of information, knowledge and skills; encouraging new forms and models for sustainable social and economic activities. Only through an integrated approach, including constitution of cultural institutions in network format may increase the attractiveness of regions for investment as well as for establishing a quality living environment while preserving the regional identity.

**The purpose** of this study is to assess the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the future development of local cultural institutions in Bulgaria, in the context of their role in local development, mainly of small settlements.

For the realization of this purpose the following *tasks* are going to be carried out: highlighting the importance of cultural institutions for local development, detect trends and policy for development of main cultural institutions at local level in Bulgaria, a survey, on which base the problems are summarized and specific recommendations are made.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

By applying the dynamics index the trends in cultural institutions in Bulgaria are examined. National statistical survey of cultural institutions (libraries, cultural clubs, museums, cinemas, theaters, radio and television) include the dynamics in their number and also covers the activities of the cultural institutions themselves. This statistic is consistent with UNESCO, European audiovisual observatory and distribution by kind of radio and TV programmes.

A survey also has been conducted in order to investigate the components of SWOT analysis, on which base the problems are summarized and specific recommendations are made. The survey was conducted in 2011 in two districts of Bulgaria (Bourgas and Stara Zagora), under the project "Study of the cultural heritage of historical and geographical region Thrace - a prerequisite for national identity and socio-

economic development" (The duration of the project is three years (2008-2011) and is financed by "Scientific Researches" Fund, Republic of Bulgaria).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Cultural institutions - Trends and Policy

Data for last 10 years are presented in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Dynamics in the number of cultural institutions in Bulgaria

<i>Institution</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2005/1998</i>	
Libraries (number)	7483	7283	6942	4552	60,83	
In towns	3064	2971	2828	2006	65,47	
In villages	4419	4312	4114	2546	57,61	
	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2007/1999</i>	
Cultural clubs(number)	3056	3027	2838	2895	94,73	
In towns	510	511	539	548	107,45	
In villages	2546	2516	2299	2347	92,18	
Cultural clubs- members (thousands)	180	170	164	168	93,33	
In towns	81	74	68	67	82,72	
In villages	99	96	96	101	102,02	
Museums	<i>2002</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2009/2002</i>
	220	229	227	222	231	105,00
Cinemas	<i>2003</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2009/2003</i>
	149	66	62	57	56	37,58
In towns	130	59	54	50	52	40,00
In villages	19	7	8	7	4	21,05
Theatres	<i>2000</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2009/2000</i>
	75	75	78	78	80	106,67
	<i>2003</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2009/2003</i>
Radio operators	89	95	107	114	104	116,85
TV operators	98	102	110	119	113	115,31

Source: Statistical Yearbook of NSI, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010

The data in **Table 1** show divergent trends in the number of individual cultural institutions: an increase in the number of museums, theaters and media; a decrease in the number of libraries, cultural centers, cinemas (in the villages they are near to disappearing). Notably, however, that if the number of rural cultural clubs decreases, the trend in the number of their members is the opposite - increasing, despite the reported demographic crisis in the villages.

In the National strategy for regional development of Bulgaria, 2005-2015, in Priority № 3 is written: "The natural and cultural treasures of Bulgaria and its development is part of the European natural and cultural diversity and its preservation and good governance is the foundation of sustainable development which will be one of the highlights of the regional policy of the country by 2015"(5). A specific objective of the National Strategy is related to the preservation and enhancement of natural and

cultural heritage, taking into account their role and places among the strategic factors for sustainable development of Bulgaria and through their socialization- a transformation from and object of protection into a tool for development. Thus, regional policy in Bulgaria, based on various existing regional potentials and the multiplier effect on the development of other sectors, contributes to the preservation and exhibition of natural and cultural heritage.

In 2000 the Council of Europe makes a research in the regions of Europe (35 countries) from Iceland to the Russian Federation on the responsibilities, resources and priorities of local and regional authorities in the field of culture (6). Portugal and Greece are the only EU countries that include in the programming period 2000-2006 operational programs in culture. Greece sets program's priorities for service of the tourism sector, which leads to the creation of 5,000 new jobs meant only in the cultural sector. In its program, Portugal makes a serious demand to improve the territorial balance in access to cultural assets and in developing a network of local cultural centers. Besides creating thousands of new jobs in culture, the country is developing its capacity to use their cultural resources, mainly through decentralization of networks for arts and culture, support of local folklore and providing technical assistance. (7)

### **The Community Club - a main cultural institution for local sustainable development in Bulgaria**

Local government and local civic formations in Bulgaria have a long history. Based on the historical roots and believing in the irreversibility of democratic changes in Bulgarian society, great hopes are assigned to local civic initiative groups as a foundation of democracy in Bulgaria.

In recent years, the third sector in Bulgaria gained unprecedented influence and is recognized by both the government and international donors. A significant number of NGOs are involved in processes of decision making through participation in expert groups with central and local governments in developing laws and working groups with international organizations and institutions.

The division of the Bulgarian civil society over the past two decades and tentative civil participation are problems whose solution must

be sought primarily at the local level. According to Savova, decreasing role of the care for inner, spiritual life leaves an empty space for formation an externalization of inner spiritual life into more organized social activities and structures. In this sense, in Bulgaria is defined the understanding of social life and development and for engaged, though a static attitude particularly of local cultural institution - the cultural club, in working with people locally. Thus, the existing network of cultural clubs is becoming one of the pillars of local development and civil society. These cultural centers have been called to meet the cultural needs of the citizens at local level as well as to stimulate the development and civil participation at local level, to be intermediaries between citizens and government.

Bulgarian cultural club is a unique institution in its essence, which takes a special place in the history of Bulgarian society. The first cultural clubs appeared in the 50s of the 19th century as "public reading rooms", but their role is changing gradually and begins to implement additional activities such as educational and charitable. Moreover, then in still amorphous society, they contribute to social networking, which preceded the birth of the nation. In this sense, cultural clubs are a traditional form of social capital and one of the most respected institutions as playing a critical role in strengthening and modernization of the nation.

By limiting the role of the other cultural institutions over the past two decades, great hopes were assigned to the Bulgarian cultural clubs for activation of the local community and to enhance local development processes.

Basic operating principles that distinguish the cultural club as a cultural institution are: openness and transparency, partnership, accountability, effectiveness, efficiency (8).

At state-level the policy of encouraging the development of cultural clubs is part of the overall national cultural policy. The main points on which it is built are based on the following facts:

- National cultural club carries the meaning of sustainability, preservation and development of the Bulgarian people's values;
- Cultural clubs have a strong reputation in society due to their correlation with past, the traditions, the educational process, culture and charity;

- Cultural clubs rely on their roots as a national, social, cultural, educational and information organizations, and meet the challenges of the modern world.

These characteristics, such as sustainability, legitimacy and flexibility differ cultural clubs from other NGOs and with the historical experience allow them to respond to the new needs of the Bulgarian society, becoming an important factor in achieving social change and strengthening the civil society as a whole. The existing network of cultural clubs can be defined as national wealth and competitive advantage for Bulgaria.

Government of the Republic of Bulgaria is pursuing a dynamic policy aimed at strengthening and modernizing the traditional Bulgarian cultural and educational organizations - cultural clubs. This policy is based on several key points:

- Institutional strengthening of the cultural club as self-governing cultural and educational civic associations on the basis of the Bulgarian legislation;
- Expanding the scope, content and partnership for realization of a national training program aimed at improving the qualification of personnel in cultural clubs and achieving better management in their work;
- Extending the content and social scope of cultural clubs' activity to attract a wider population, including minority communities, marginalized groups and people with disabilities;
- Improving the mechanism for funding cultural clubs, the distribution of state and municipal subsidies and implementation of public scrutiny;
- Technological renovation of cultural clubs' activity on the basis of protected programs and projects.

By mid-1996 regulatory activities of cultural clubs is governed by the Regulation on the cultural clubs. At the end of 1996 People's cultural clubs Act (PCCA) is adopted.

Under the law the cultural club is registered as a non-profit organization whose aim is to satisfy the cultural needs of people at local level. The law itself inherently provides plenty of opportunities for cultural clubs. It transforms them from an organization with full

state budgeting into a nonprofit organization which is supposed to receive state or municipal subsidy and also to raise funds through its own revenues. A new project for the repair of the PCCA is being discussed, which although is intended to improve what is achieved, is very controversial. In the context of the main points in PCCA (financing, management and community clubs' activity) the changes project does not give a sufficient answer to these questions, leaving a loophole for bureaucratization of their work, making it harder for cultural clubs in operating their main activities. Thus, according to a declaration addressed to the Ministry of Culture signed by a number of cultural clubs—changes in PCCA are not necessary.

*Activities of cultural clubs* under Article 2 PCCA are as follows:

- Arrange and maintain libraries, reading rooms, photo-, phono-, film and video materials;
- Development and support of amateur arts;
- Organization of schools, workshops, courses, clubs, film and video exhibitions, festivals, concerts and celebrations
- Collecting and spreading of knowledge about the homeland;
- Creation and preservation of museum collections;
- Perform of additional activities which support the implementation of their main functions.

#### **A Survey about community clubs**

Cultural clubs are the main cultural institution in the villages and smaller settlements of the surveyed areas. In these areas are concentrated 17% of cultural centers in Bulgaria as the survey covered 70% of the total number. All respondents were cultural clubs within the villages and small settlements. Among the main activities in all the studied cultural clubs in the first place is the library activity.

#### *Library activity.*

Across the country namely the cultural club's library is the one which acts as mass, public libraries, such as widespread in other countries. On the basis of the observations can be made following visitors profile. (**Fig. 1**)

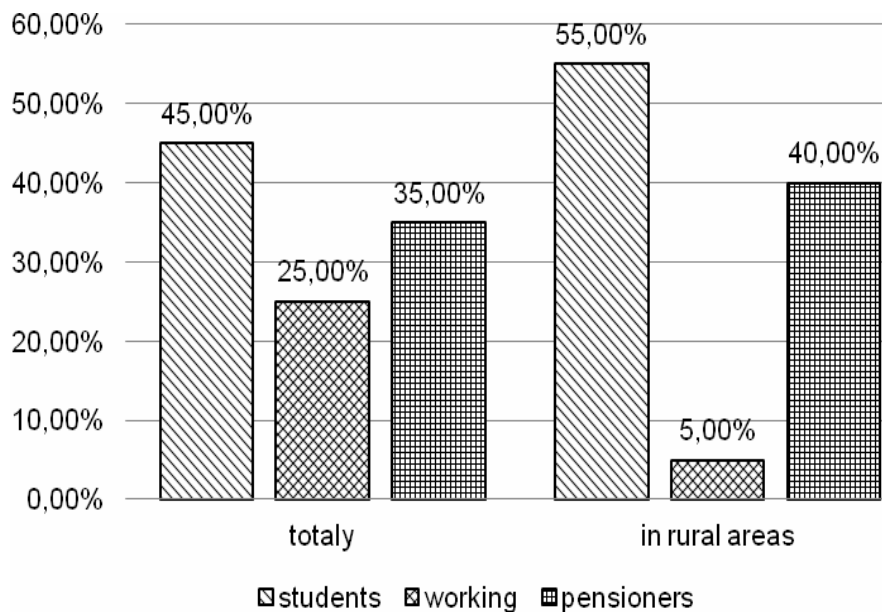


Fig. 1. Attendance in cultural clubs' libraries in general and in the rural areas by age (in percentage)

*Amateur art (schools, workshops, clubs).*

The cultural club remains the place where amateur creativity is widely practiced (94%). Almost in all community exist and operate various in their scope amateur groups. Most of these are mainly folklore groups - dance and music ensembles, authentic folklore groups, singing groups.

In the groups for authentic folklore and old-time city songs population in retirement age predominates. All this determines the characteristics of cultural clubs attendance as well as the type of development of various forms of amateur art. Of course the variation is associated with the type of demographic characteristics and profile of the location.

In the study of holidays and festivals were found important role played by community clubs as the main organizers. In fact, according to Bulgarian legislation the purpose of community clubs is to develop and enrich the cultural life and to help preserve the customs and traditions of the Bulgarian people. It is also important to emphasize that community clubs' workers maintain a permanent and fruitful relationship with mummings groups. An interesting fact is that they themselves, members of their families and even chairmen of local community clubs are participants in amateur groups (8)

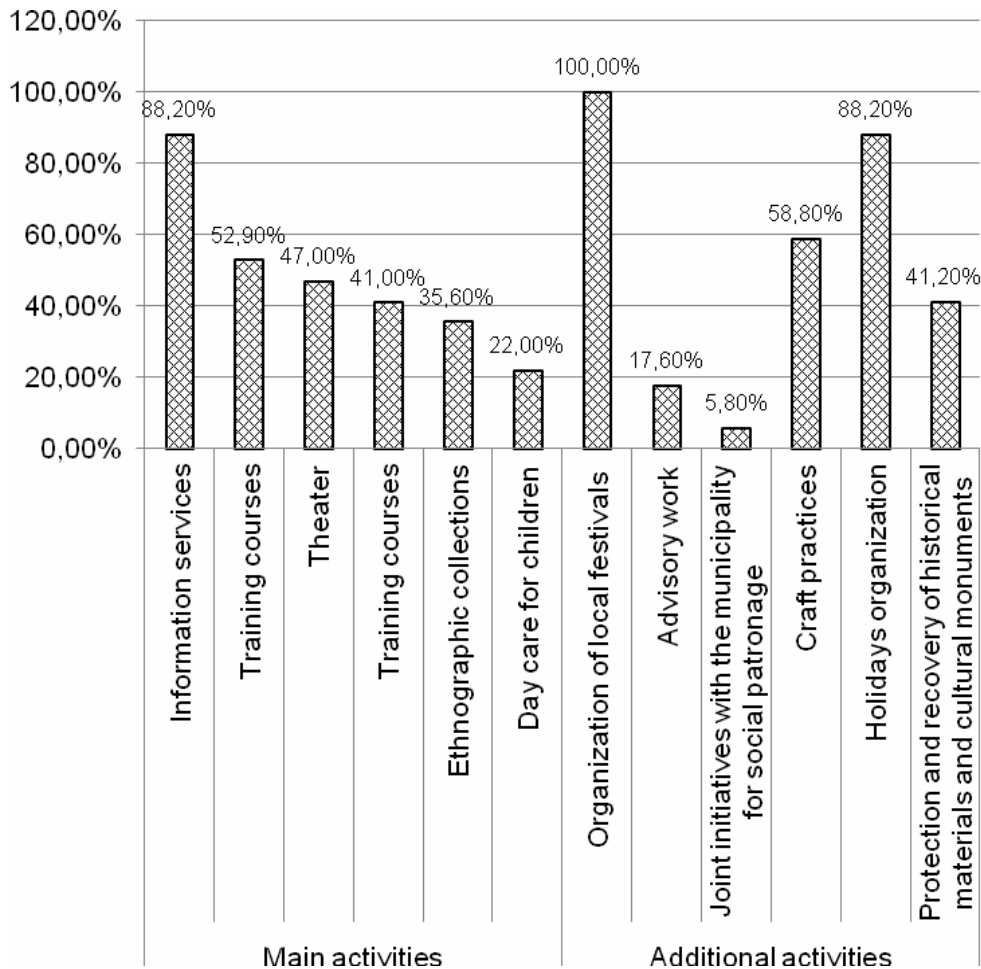
Unlike responses to other questions, the opinion of population on the role of cultural clubs as information centers highly differs

from the opinion of the cultural club workers - only 10% of the surveyed population thinks that cultural clubs develop real information activity. However, I believe that this is not entirely realistic assessment, given that it is not clear whether all respondents reflected the completeness of "information services".

The processes of modernization challenge cultural institutions, including cultural clubs to overcome the painful problems of the communities and take active steps towards the needs of people in these communities. Through their activities and forms of work, cultural clubs are places to overcome the isolation of different groups through equal participation in various forms of work and activities. In many places in the cultural clubs people from minority groups or people in disadvantage are involved as volunteers. 33.3% of surveyed cultural clubs point that in the activities created in a certain cultural club participate disadvantaged people and 37.5% are people from minorities.

It is notable that the cultural clubs of the villages and smaller settlements stand out with more detailed work toward small communities. Here the percentage of cultural clubs with art schools is very low. Notably large is the number of cultural clubs, having authentic folklore groups, groups of old-time city songs, children and youth folk ensembles.

*Additional activities (Fig. 2)*



**Fig. 2.** Main and additional activities of the cultural clubs (%).

In recent years, the perimeter of the activity of cultural clubs increasingly expands: all of the surveyed cultural clubs organize public meetings once or twice a year, on which are discussed issues related to development of the settlement and the lifestyle of the population; the charity events (29,4%) are another increasingly expanding initiative of cultural clubs; the project cycle also is already widely spread among the cultural clubs and many of them are additionally financed by work on national and international projects and programs.

Among the other activities of cultural clubs are: organization of local festivals - 100% advisory activity (17.6%), joint initiatives with the municipality for social patronage - 5.8%. Through cultural clubs: craft practices are recovered - 58.8%; holidays are being organized - 88.2%; material historical and cultural monuments are being protected and recovered - 41.2 percent- (**Fig. 2**). Responses

related to public participation in the activities of the cultural club are as follows: a majority of the population - 53%, a minority - 23.5%; only individuals - 23.5 percent. The evaluation of facilities shows a predominantly good mark (47.1%), the very good follows - 29.4%. 23.5% of respondents set an average mark.

As concerns the works with other institutions the answers show a relatively active work with the local administration - 52.3% of respondents. Other institutions with which active joint work is indicated is the Union of People's cultural clubs, Bulgarian Academy of Science (BAS) and regional advisory and information centers "Cultural clubs".

Less than half of the respondents (cultural clubs) participate in projects (41.2%), which explains that 76% of them rely on sponsorships for the implementation of their activities and initiatives.

Overall assessment of population activity of the cultural clubs is graded into 3 levels: excellent (50%), very good (33%) and good (17%). Behind this assessment stand specific problems, needs and ideas that respondents give. The main issues that respondents indicated are inadequate funding of cultural clubs, lack of facilities, unadapted to the needs of disadvantaged people, an aging population that is not motivated to participate in the activities of the cultural club. According to population and cultural club workers there is a strong need of additional funds as well as additional training and technical assistance for development of projects from cultural clubs, for keeping the accounting and for better understanding of the normative documents. Interesting ideas are initiatives that can be arranged mutually by cultural clubs and the local population: organization of the initiative "Donate a book and enrich the library"; expansion of activities related to working with children and youth with disadvantages, participation in projects related to rural areas; writing the history of the settlement; familiarize the local teachers with internet sites, search engines, portals to help the learning process; courses for basic computer skills for retired people; organizing sports events; closer cooperation between cultural club and local pensioners club.

#### **Strengths of the community clubs:**

- Distribution across all the country. Cultural club appears to be the most widely spread institution, called to meet the cultural needs of the wider population
- Identified as a basic, and in some places as the only cultural institution
- Has a wide range of activities and the opportunity of attendance;
- Experienced in training programs;
- Ability to strengthen their own competence and to retransmit experience to the network of cultural clubs in the locality - municipality - region - country;
- Introduction of new activities;
- Reliable partner;
- Recognized as a key and quality partner in realization of various type of projects;
- Flexibility

#### **Weaknesses:**

- *Need of institutionalization*  
The new status of the cultural clubs provides them with opportunities for real self-

government and civil participation. In this direction, however, a number of cultural clubs face difficulties mainly due to lack of competence and immediate response in specific situations arising from the new conditions for development of the cultural club institution. Still strongly dominating among cultural club activists is the mindset that they function as state institutions which affects their activity.

Due to the lack of regulations for implementation of PCCA, the Ministry of Culture is developing further mail-instructions on the application of certain texts from the law.

- *Uneven distribution of cultural clubs network in the country.*

There are areas where in one village there is one cultural club. At the same time, there are other places where there are two or more cultural clubs. In some places there is a real danger of commercialization of their activities at the expense of their basic cultural, educational and social tasks. A problem also is the continuously increasing process of registration of new cultural clubs in many small villages where there are no real opportunities for development as civil formations. There are cases where in a small village there is more the one registered cultural club.

The average distribution of cultural clubs in villages and cities is very different. The comparative analysis shows that near a cultural club in the city there are nearly 2,500 people and in the villages they are under 300 people.

- *Incomplete staffing capacity*

Insufficient trained personnel able to cope with the new conditions, including implementation of the responsibilities of self-government; Members of the board of Trustees of most cultural clubs are generally representatives of the older generation that has not acquired modern management approaches and involving young people in activities of the cultural clubs; Misses the expected activity of the cultural club leaders to attract new members, expansion of social and ethnic composition, for search of new forms of self-financing and financing as PCCA gives them at preferential tax regime and privileges;

Not enough developed relations and exchange of information between cultural clubs and authorities dealing with the cultural policy at local level.



Still, however, a practice of cultural clubs' management exists to ignore the educational requirement when they appoint professionals in the cultural clubs. This applies largely for employed in cultural clubs' libraries and occurs mainly in rural areas.

- *Outdated facilities*

Overall, cultural clubs have rich facilities, which include a number of buildings and equipment, but much of the cultural club buildings were built in the mid-20th century, so all require a large in volume and investments repairs in order to be updated.

95% of the cultural club buildings are registered as municipal public property, which under the PCCA and the Municipal Property Act (MPA) is given for use and management of cultural club trustees. In turn, this weights cultural club trustees with the care of maintenance and modernization of facilities as well as for the buildings. Essential is the fact that the cultural clubs' buildings are the only ones where concerts and community gatherings can take place in the small settlements. This makes it very naturally cultural clubs attractive. This is most typical for small towns and rural areas.

Most of the facilities in cultural clubs' buildings are physically and morally obsolete. Cultural clubs' salons need urgent renewal of stage equipment. Tools, costumes and others also need to be updated. In this regard, the Ministry of Culture allocated additional funds to help repair buildings, acquisition of new literature, purchase and implementation of computer systems, support of artistic activities of cultural clubs.

- *Limited financial resources*

In the late 90s cultural clubs remained with minimum means of subsistence, activities of many of them started dying, material base began to ruin. Despite the difficulties, recognizing their importance, since 2002 the state placed them in the category of so-called "Delegated budgets". This makes a prerequisite of increasing need to attract their own income, which means better managerial, economic and financial qualifications of the cultural club workers.

The adopted in 2006 State Budget Act of the Republic of Bulgaria for 2007 and entered into force on 01.01.2007 repeal Article 6 of the Transitional and Final Provisions of PCCA.

This amendment repealed the exemption of cultural clubs of "any government fees and local taxes and duties coming from activity and properties associated with them." The change in taxation of cultural clubs affects their activity taxation under the Corporate Income Taxation Act, VAT Act and Local Taxes and Fees Act. This is a step backwards as concerns state support of culture and especially the policy of cultural clubs.

Negative trends are observed among the members of part of the cultural clubs: in terms of age the members of the cultural clubs in average age are missing; the main reason for the students to go to cultural clubs is because they organize courses, study rooms and as many parents are unable to care for them, they include them in the cultural club activities; young people have little interest due to lack of information and communication technologies and obsolete book fund. It is impossible to use only the library as alternative informational source to motivate the young people to attend cultural clubs; cultural clubs are attended by more women than men; people with higher educational degree do not go to cultural clubs, because they cannot provide them with adequate opportunities for their social and cultural development.

### **Opportunities for future development**

The institutionalization of cultural clubs as non-profit civic associations under the PCCA provides great possibilities for multilateral initiatives through which citizens regardless of education, gender and social class get access to cultural products and in the outermost regions of the country. Moreover, developing the new conditions, cultural clubs expand their activities beyond their usual cultural area and implement programs to assist socially disadvantaged people and minority groups. Many of the researchers of the cultural clubs' work characterize it as a natural place to overcome social problems, as a place for identifying and implementing local development strategies and overcome the local differences.

Improving the capacity of the employed in the cultural clubs, which is facilitated by the participation and implementation of various in type and scope projects, stimulates the reunification of local communities, strengthen civil society through mobilization from below; provides support for capacity building of

various traditional local organizations, especially cultural clubs.

More cultural clubs set as their main objective participation in local government as a key prerequisite of civil society on local level. The trend toward administrative capacity improvement facilitates the creation of horizontal networks, which increases the potential of local communities to solve problems creatively and to engage in compliant development projects.

The tendency from the last five to six years when in the cultural clubs used to work people with secondary and secondary special education is being overcome.

In 2008 a new joint project between the Ministry of Culture and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) - "Global Libraries - Bulgaria" started. Project partners are also the State Agency for Information Technology (SAIT), National Association of Municipalities in Bulgaria (NAMB), the Union of Librarians and Information Workers (ULIW). The program is funded by the Foundation "Bill and Melinda Gates." "Global Libraries - Bulgaria" aims to facilitate access to information, knowledge, communications, digital content and community services through the network of public libraries. It aims within five years to increase the use of libraries to make them accessible place for information and communication for everyone and to help the Bulgarian citizens to integrate into the global information society. Public libraries are expected to expand its scope of activities, becoming more attractive places for visitors and to play an increasingly important role in local development. The program will have a balanced geographical coverage to help the overcome of the internal and regional disparities in social and economic development.

Regional Expert Consulting and Information Centers "Cultural clubs" (RECIC) are bodies that also support the national policy to cultural clubs based on the principles of decentralization, preservation of local traditions and active citizenship. They perform activities for cultural clubs throughout the region on which territory they function.

Through projects on various programs also is used the opportunity to increase the capacity of local and regional authorities, NGOs and business associations, educational and cultural

institutions and others in the development and implementation of joint projects in the field of cultural institutions, cultural and educational networks and cultural environment as a whole: Regional Development Operational Programme 2007-2013, Programme for Rural Development, 2007-2013, Black Sea Operational Programme 2007-2013; Programme for transborder cooperation between Bulgaria and Turkey; Programme for transborder cooperation between Bulgaria and Greece and others.

**Main threats to the future development of cultural clubs as a major local cultural institution in Bulgaria:**

- Adverse changes in PCCA and insufficient legal basis for survival and development of cultural clubs
- Lack of cooperation between cultural clubs and local government representatives, business community and other local institutions
- Deepening demographic crisis and depopulation of small settlements

**Some general recommendations can be offered according to the reported weaknesses and problems:**

- Standardization according to European requirements and criteria for the establishment and operation of similar institutions, according to which the financial funds and working places for cultural club employees will be distributed.
- Cultural clubs must acquire the ability to earn revenue, in other words to learn business by raising funds for projects as well as by expanding the additional activities that are profitable. Otherwise they cannot expand their activity and to maintain and expand their facilities.
- It is essential to make cultural clubs to be used not only as spiritual, but as modern data centers. This is rooted in the need for more extensive, timely and relevant information of various kinds, from all areas of life. Cultural clubs should be developed not just as places to provide books on paper, but as places of local and inter-regional communication with conference rooms for teleconferencing to other communities in the municipality, region, country, Europe and worldwide. This should be done in collaboration with the program "Development of information centers in rural areas in Bulgaria". They will be also a base for

development of local action groups under the LEADER approach of the Programme for Rural Development.

- To implement the mission and goals of cultural clubs the presence of intelligent, initiative and competent leadership is needed. It should make active efforts to create conditions to attract different segments of the population in different areas of activity of the library.

- To focus on building partnerships. It is a presumption that the cultural club is not only a unit of cultural and educational process on local level, but it would logically would take a place in building a strong partnership, both in vertical and in horizontal direction: with representatives of local municipal administrations; representatives of public authorities, especially with the Ministry of Culture, with the regional administrations. There is still unused potential for partnership with education and research institutions.

- Other important steps to be taken in the short and medium term for the further integration of cultural clubs in local sustainable development are as follows:

- Improve and update of existing legislation - to define and detail the articles of PCCA, and making rules for its implementation.

- More effective enforcement mechanism for allocating the annual subsidy (state and municipal)

- Determine the number of cultural clubs to the density of settlement

- Participation of cultural club workers in courses and seminars for administrative services, project work and computer skills to improve their qualifications.

- To be implemented: full automation of cultural clubs' libraries; transformation of ethnographic collections into museums; ban on sale of cultural clubs' buildings in small towns.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, although the issues discussed here, in accordance with the requirements of the emerging civil society in Bulgaria in a market economy, the cultural clubs are still given a major role. Their very nature of a unique cultural institution that has occurred more than 150 years ago as expression of the aspirations of the Bulgarians towards enlightenment and spirituality, contributes to their level raising. Cultural clubs will continue to play a significant role in society if they promote diversity of

cultural and educational activities and succeed to develop and maintain the largest network of publicly accessible libraries in the country. In the future, essential for optimizing the operation of cultural clubs should be given to the direct partnership between the cultural club structures at national and international level, and the crucial partnership with municipalities and other local actors.

I also believe that the cultural club is a resource and environment for the so-much-needed transformation of every local community from a civic assembly of individuals involved in the general economic and political principles into an assembly, which is committed to a common spiritual and material food.

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