An Approach for Valorisation of the Emerging Tacit Knowledge and Cultural Heritage in Rural and Peripheral Communities

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Abstract. Much of the European cultural heritage is embedded in rural areas and remote regions, often closely linked with the natural environment. As the culture sector evolves and changes due to digitization, so do the skills required of individuals active in the sector. These changes can only be met by relevant and demand-sensitive educational offers. The current paper presents the main outcomes achieved so far in the framework of the Erasmus+ Project VAL.oR "Tacit knowledge emerging for a sustainable valorization of the cultural heritage in rural and peripheral communities" aiming to propose new approach supporting and sustaining local and regional cultural heritage and the economic benefits for communities that result from well managed and organized festivals and events.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Tacit Knowledge, Non-Formal Learning Accreditation.

1 Introduction

Cultural heritage is defined broadly as "the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations" (Cultural Heritage). Intangible heritage such as oral traditions, performing arts, crafts and rituals is one of the main sub-categories specified in the UNESCO 2001 Convention for Protection of Cultural Property (UNESCO 2001 Convention). Nearly a quarter of UNESCO intangible cultural heritage is in the EU. At European level, the Creative Europe programme (Creative Europe) together with contributions from other funds (Erasmus+; Europe for Citizens; funds for urban, regional or rural development; and Horizon 2020) are currently co-funding projects focused on the development of intangible cultural heritage practices, appropriate tools and methods to involve practitioners in passing their cultural heritage to future generations (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2018).

Although each person experiences cultural heritage in different ways, it is an undeniable fact that most people have a desire to be part of an association with their local culture and its past traditions. It is perhaps this single reason alone that accounts for the

popularity of locally run cultural festivals and events throughout EU and the on-going commitment of the teams of volunteers that make them happen on an annual basis. Cultural heritage helps a community promote its uniqueness and preserve its practices, history and environment. Cultural events in even the smallest rural communities can help sustain a sense of place, tradition and identity whilst offering newcomers an important insight into bygone eras.

Adult learning material focused on EU cultural diversity and richness is very rarely offered at local and virtual levels, which means it can hardly reach those persons generally not engaged in lifelong learning. Overcoming this deficiency is the main motivation for the project VAL.oR which is funded by the EC under the Erasmus + Programme (VAL.oR Project, n.d.). Educational organizations, vocational training centers, associations and municipalities from 7 European countries are involved in this initiative which aims to develop a new approach in supporting and sustaining local and regional cultural heritage and the economic benefits for communities that result from well managed and organized festivals and events.

2 Related Work

The proposed approach is based on methodologies and technology that have been selected, taking into account the results of both test-based and field-based research conducted in all participating countries with the active involvement of identified key stakeholders at local, national and international level. Country-specific research reports are available on the project website as PDF downloads and as flip-books for online reading. The country-specific data and information were analyzed and systematized in Summary Research Report. Some findings, conclusions, and summaries that outline the main parameters and dimensions of the project's development phase are described below.

In a European context, cultural heritage is recognized as one of the major cornerstones of the tourist industry. Culture heritage and tourism have a mutually beneficial relationship which can strengthen the attractiveness and competitiveness of regions and countries. At the same time, tourism provides an important means of enhancing culture and creating income, which can support and strengthen cultural heritage, cultural production and creativity. Cultural tourism is one of the cornerstones of many small rural economies and supporting the sustainability of cultural festivals and events into the future is of particular importance. Over many years the teams of volunteers who organize and manage the local cultural festivals and events have built up vast reservoirs of knowledge that is invaluable to their communities. While much of this knowledge is explicit and easily transmitted a significant proportion of it is tacit, based on know-how. Tacit knowledge (Goffin & Koners, 2011) is impossible to transmit directly through central media but it can be transmitted by lateral media. Social media platforms are excellent lateral media tools and can easily be designed to support the codification of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge via usage of digital formats and standardized models (Chugh, 2015). This can greatly facilitate knowledge transfer.

It is also recognized that much of the European cultural heritage is embedded in rural areas and remote regions, often closely linked with the natural environment. In this

regard, digital education and innovative forms of community-oriented management can greatly improve their economic and social potential. There is a broad consensus that nowadays the maintaining and developing of cultural heritage requires specialist training and usage of advanced digital technologies and innovative solutions. On the other hand, the on-the-ground reality in many rural areas throughout Europe is that the annual cultural festivals or events are conceived, organized and managed by groups of local volunteers. In a growing number of instances, the leaders of these festivals and events' management committees are older volunteers between the ages of 50 - 70 and most of them have had no specific training. This should not be interpreted to suggest that these volunteers are not skilled. On the contrary, many of them demonstrate high skills (developed and fine-tuned over many years in non-formal and informal settings) in a wide range of disciplines and this in part accounts for the success and longevity of many cultural festivals and events. And in this frame, the narrative of the older people could sustain, through the support of a modern mentoring program, the next generation in valorizing this capital, in engaging themselves in the social and civic life. Moreover, through the relevant digital presentation and valorization of the local events via lateral media tools could be offered the opportunity to a wide audience to take part in inclusive and informal learning activities, fostering key alliances with adult education centers and cultural bodies, e.g. libraries, museums, art galleries, theatres, and etc.

Taking this into account, the following obvious difficulties can be summarized:
- the skills in evidence are not properly recognised and accredited and because of this many of the volunteers don't consider them to be of much value and don't prioritize their transfer to the next generation of festival and event organizers;
- there is a lack of appropriate training curriculum that addresses the specific skill sets required;
- as many of the volunteers get older there is an increasing chance that their knowledge and experience will be lost to their communities unless appropriate presentation, preservation and knowledge transfer tools are provided;
- local festivals and events are increasingly regarded as important social, cultural and economic landmarks in the annual calendar and must be sustained.

3   Methodology

Following an analysis of the status quo, barriers and obstacles to the presentation and preservation of intangible cultural heritage in rural and peripheral communities, the work was aimed at developing an adapted curriculum framework based on the knowledge elements identified as critical to the organization and realization of cultural festivals and events from local stakeholders involved in the research phase. There were taken into account the required learning outcomes in terms of the following students' profiles:
- senior volunteers who participate in local cultural festivals and events;
- emerging community leaders who will comprise the next generation managers of local cultural festivals and events;

- social workers engaged in the valorization of tangible and intangible cultural heritage;
- adult learners, VET trainers, pupils and students.

On the base of the developed curriculum and the identified trainees' needs and expectations were developed e-learning platform and e-course.

The designing of a technology-enhanced mentor training program for older volunteers and induction to mentoring for potential mentees was crucial for the provision of a cost-effective intergenerational learning opportunity as an extension of the adult learning landscape. It was considered as the next important step in the process of the development of the "next-generation" managers of cultural festivals and events.

The next step was related to the development of guidelines for accreditation of non-formal and informal learning as an important addition to the adult and community education in partner countries. The accreditation of non-formal and informal learning in the Member States is a prime example of the open method of coordination. The European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning produced by Cedefop in 2009 and revised at the end of 2015 (Cedefop, 2015) are a practical tool providing expert advice but their impact relies exclusively on their relevance and ability to add value at national or local levels. In this respect, country-specific practical validation guides were developed on the basis of European guidelines and in line with national frameworks, where best practices and validation mechanisms, including debates, declarative methods, interviews, observation techniques, and portfolio methods were incorporated accordingly.

Apart from the above, the efforts were focused on the establishment of an on-line resource to support the processes of digital presentation (the codification) of the tacit knowledge that senior volunteers participating in local cultural festivals and events have acquired and the preservation of that knowledge in digital form for future use.

4   Results

The main outcomes and results achieved so far could be summarized as follows:
- Training Curriculum and Mentoring Framework

It is widely accepted that the current range of festivals and events could be improved and enhanced and could become even more significant from an economic perspective especially as the market for cultural heritage tourism continues to grow. It is essential that the success of these events is guaranteed in the future but it is a fact proved by the conducted research that there is a considerable training deficit especially regarding the use of new technologies for the management and marketing of the events of this kind but also regarding the digital presentation of the intangible heritage and its preservation for the further use by the next generations. The developed modular curriculum targeted to strengthen these competencies regarding the cultural local festivals and aims to engage the team leaders in further training and the whole community in a transnational educational experience. The informal learning occasions are specifically focused on the following key skills: cultural awareness and expression, civic and entrepreneurial competences, digital skills related to usage of modern approaches for codification of the

intangible cultural heritage and its digital preservation and transmission via lateral media tools such as social media platforms. Achieving the required learning outcomes requires 150 hours of study. In the proposed blended learning format this means approximately 40 hours of face-to-face instruction supported by 110 hours of self-directed e-learning. In addition to the core skills that the new curriculum addresses, a mentoring programme was developed. It aims at helping the new community volunteers to identify and develop the personal and inter-personal skills needed in a hands-on learning environment. The majority of the senior volunteers in question have not any prior training in pedagogy or in application of pedagogic approaches and they need to develop the necessary skill-sets in the mentoring in order for the required standards to be achieved.

• Step-by step country specific guides to the accreditation of prior learning

The seniors' tacit competences recognition, while is valorizing the knowledge and skills of the older members of a community, could positively influence their motivation in a closer intergenerational dialogue, focused on the common goal to maintain and renew the intangible local cultural heritage. The guides provide locally specific practical guidance and training supports for adult educators managing and implementing the validation process. The recognition of credits (ECVET) for juniors and seniors can facilitate the access to further learning and qualifications, and for the young generations this could be also an important opportunity for their employability in the cultural industry.

• On-line Observatory and E-learning Portal

The observatory is running on a web server tailored for the purpose. It is based on the Managers Framework. This Managers Framework is a scalable, object-based programming framework including features such as language versioning, object relations and ownership models, all with a flexible connection interface. The multiplicity of purposes for the development of the observatory and portal is related to the provision of: a) best practice examples of local festivals and events from the regions where partners are located to inspire festival and event managers to raise their standards to the next level by developing and improving their current offering; b) instant access to a library of education resources developed by partners during the development phase of the project; c) learning spaces for those taking the training courses on-line; d) support and guidance for those seeking to have their prior learning accredited; e) support and expert help for the people working to digitize (codify) their tacit knowledge and transmit the developed digital presentations via lateral media tools; f) range of on-line environments and forums where those involved in running and managing local festivals and events have access to a one-stop-shop where festival and event managers can find information, exchange experiences, seek support and plan collaborative transnational ventures.

The core technologies behind the Framework are Open-Source and include PHP, MySQL Database, Apache Web service and RED5 Media Server. The object-based and modular nature of the framework and the services built on it allow flexible combinations of the available modules as well as cost-efficient creation of new ones, should the need for special purpose-built extensions arise as will be the case with the knowledge management and codification tools. The portal is optimized for mobile access and it would function equally well on laptop, tablet or smartphone. The proposed technology infrastructure is developed to accessibility compliance standards. The e-learning portal

is web 2.0 compliant and includes all the standard and expected social media features that are now an essential part of on-line learning offers.

5 Conclusions

Through a bottom-up and participatory approach, valorizing the cultural heritage background of rural communities via the usage of digital technologies and lateral media tools, and promoting the transnational exchange among the learners, the project contributes to increasing the demand and take-up of adult learners, generally not engaged in lifelong learning. Thus, an outreach strategy of the educational provision is implemented which can improve the community-wellbeing exploiting their talents, tacit knowledge and competences.

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