

**THE EVALUATION OF QUALITY OF THE
CULTURAL PRODUCT SUPPLIED OF THE
MUNICIPAL CULTURAL AND PUBLIC
BENEFIT ENTERPRISE OF KARDITSA -GREECE
(D.I.K.E.K.): A SYSTEMIC APPROACH AND
RESEARCH**

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Abstract

The contemporary cultural environment makes urgent the strengthening and the adjustment of production structures and supply of art and culture. It is certainly depending on the individual involvement, the evolution of the economic and social conditions, the requirements and the expectations for which the effective exercise of the cultural policy of each Member presents an outstanding priority consideration. It seeks that the produced cultural products have high quality and competitive nature, able to attract the interest of the public. In this context we should unavoidably takes into consideration the activities of the cultural enterprises, they are required to preserve their

viability, to renew the productive operational practices and to meet the high cultural requirements of the area in which they are active.

A typical case study of one of the most important cultural organization of Karditsa Municipality is the Municipal Cultural and Public Benefit Enterprise of Karditsa (DI.KE.K.). This organization attempts to outline the cultural environment, to identify the factors that are responsible for the organizations' production weaknesses and last but not least we are going to propose a formation of a dynamic production network that is expected to ensure a high level of value and produced cultural products which can meet the cultural needs of the public in the local and the regional level.

Keywords : Cultural Enterprises, Cultural Product, Product Quality, Cultural Audience, Local and Regional Cultural Development.

1. Introduction

The complete understanding and effective implementation of every country's cultural policy lays the foundations for the creation of a series of significant cultural centers with products and upgraded cultural contributions which consequently provide an added cultural and comparative value on a national and international level, and which are able to stimulate various productive actions with a positive social and financial effect on the narrower and wider area in which they act (Paschalidis, 2002a:225-229; Konsola, 2006:24).

In greek reality it is however observed that the existing layout of cultural structures, of the bodies exercising cultural policy, of the means available, as well as the need for action and survival within a demanding and competitive cultural environment, make necessary a generalized structural and functional restructuring of the existing cultural institutions, assisted by a cooperative perception of all the creative and managerial factors and bodies for the better promotion of all cultural aspects in all geographical dimensions (Chambouri-loannidou, 2002a:18-21; Chambouri-loannidou, 2003:27-29). Given that today the democratization of culture and art dominate, both of which represent the increased individual and group participation in the production and consumption process, what is mainly aimed at, is to attract public interest, to claim its limited time, its energy and support and to transmit the resulting cultural notions to wider social groups, since it is mandatory that we detach from a limited ,sophisticated elitist approach towards the provision and relish of cultural goods,without social

distinctions concerning their accessibility and consumption (Bryant, 1988; Klamer, 1996; Streeten, 2006; Kakkou, 2009).

Besides, particularly problematic has recently appeared to be the situation on a local level, with the direct consequence of downgrading not only the importance but also the quality of the produced cultural goods. Although several Local Government Organizations, as significant partners on the cultural stage, have created important cultural centers, their majority displays a managerial gap, so that the produced and offered cultural product is qualitatively downgraded and appears unable to attract the audience's interest (Klamer, 1996; Chambouri-Ioannidou, 2002a:22). The situation undoubtedly becomes even worse due to the weakness of the local cultural action to suggest alternative competitive forms of cultural activity, or it's making a decision which in most cases lacks a complete and long term consideration. Without being an exception to the rule, in a similar condition has recently been one of the once leading enterprises of cultural and social profile, the Municipal Benefit Enterprise of Karditsa (DI .K.E.K).[1]

This enterprise constitutes the major cultural and social body of the Municipality of Karditsa, whose aim is to promote actions of cultural development and activities of social policies, as aspects of the cultural being. However the highly competitive conditions of the cultural environment in which it acts, the absence of satisfying and regular financial support by the state and local bodies of jurisdiction, as well as its close dependence upon the given municipal authority which makes various decisions by the preference of the occasional principal, compose an organizational and productive background with bureaucratic features, unable to set achievable goals, suffering from the lack of dynamic strategic decisions and plans for action, action failure and deviations from the consumer audience's expectations, resulting in DI.K.E.K displaying a deficit in quality cultural product and significant cultural contribution.

Given the problems above, the aim of this paper is –through a theoretical and research approach, to estimate the value of the resulting and provided cultural product of this cultural unit, an evaluation made by the cultural “CONSUMERS” themselves, living on the narrower and wider area of Karditsa, so that a stable added value for DI.K.EK's provided cultural product is secured.

Through these efforts it is expected that DI.K.EK's profile will be more completely promoted, creating a sense of unity and focused direction towards cultural action, which will allow it to overcome the current organizational and productive difficulties and be led to a continuous flow and production of high quality |cultural works. Thus the assurance towards an effective and ongoing process of solving the arising social problems and

towards satisfying the local cultural needs becomes plausible, the strong discrepancies which create an atmosphere of tension and disappointment decrease, dialogue and trust on the part of the public-with the consequent participation in the cultural events are reinforced (Klamer,1996; Paschalidis, 2002a:47-52; Chambouri-loannidou, 2002b:80; Ekonomou, 2003:92-93).

2. Methodological Approach

2.1 Production Planning and Implementation

Like every cultural organization, when formulating its **production circuit** (see Figure 1) (Montana ET AL, 1993: 84-85; Kakkou, 2009), DI.K.E.K, has to carry out on regular time periods a **production planning**, which contributes effectively in drawing up plans concerning the finally produced cultural product. The main parts of this planning include **what will be produced** (KIND OF THE PRODUCED GOODS, WANTED RESULT OF THEIR PRODUCTION, AIMING –CATEGORIZATION OF THE AUDIENCE), and **how it will be produced**(PRODUCTION MEANS AND USED RESOURCES). Later, the transformation of this planning into reality takes place on the basis of the **production process**, which consists of 3 individual phases :

- **Input Phase.** During this first phase, a series of immaterial and material elements enter the production process. In the particular case as **immaterial elements** are regarded the cultural experience, the cultural background (CULTURE), the audience's response to DI.K.EK's cultural contribution up to now, and the degree of awareness of the consumer audience for its participation as the final evaluator (Makri, 2003:58-61), whereas the **material elements** refer to the primary and secondary raw material necessary for the creation of the cultural goods. Possible inadequate input of such elements caused serious problems in the development of production. Nevertheless, through the research done on [2]DI.K.E.K's consumer audience, a significant deficit was found out, concerning the utilization of some immaterial elements, the utilization of the significant cultural background (CULTURE) of the area and the awareness for the participation of the consumer audience in the final formulation of the cultural product

Concerning the first dimension, through the question "to what extent does di.k.e.k make use of the local cultural heritage in its provided cultural goods , the consumer audience presented a degree of utilization which spans from 'A LITTLE' and 'RELATIVELY' (**MEAN**=3,60 **AND Std Deviation**=1,379). A significant percentage of the people asked (**cumulative percent**: 77,1%) was located in the span from 'NOT AT ALL' to

‘RELATIVELY’. As far as the second dimension is concerned, with regard to THE SUPPLY On The Part Of Di.K.E.K Of Opportunities To The Audience For Assessing The Former’s Cultural And Social Product, And The ‘Means For This Assessment’, the great majority of the audience (76,3%) gave a negative response and only 23,7% responded positively (From This Percentage, 64,5% Was Through Leaflets, 25,8% Through The Internet And 9,7% Through Phone Calls), which verifies the organization’s inability to use important input for the formulation of the final cultural product.

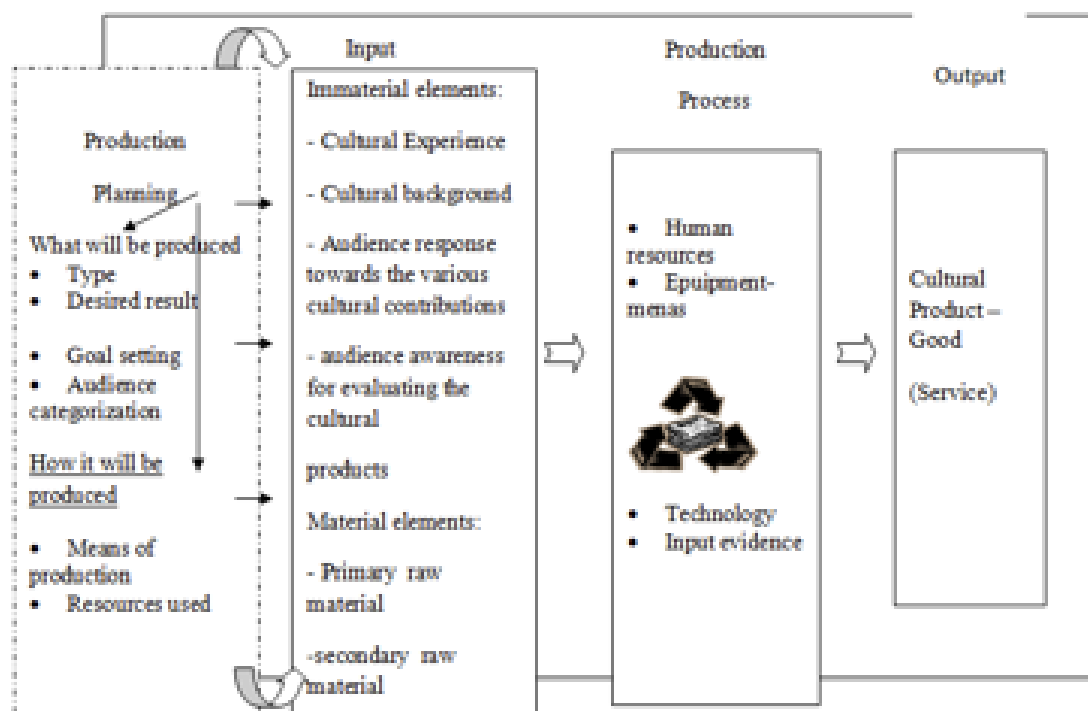


Figure 1: Production Circuit based on the Production Planning and Process Planning followed by DI.K.E.K

- **Production Processing phase.** During this phase, the input factors enter the place of production, where the available human resources, the equipment, the means and the technology interrelate in a **production process** aiming at producing the final product.
- **Output Phase.** In this final stage, the ready cultural product is available for use by the consumer public.

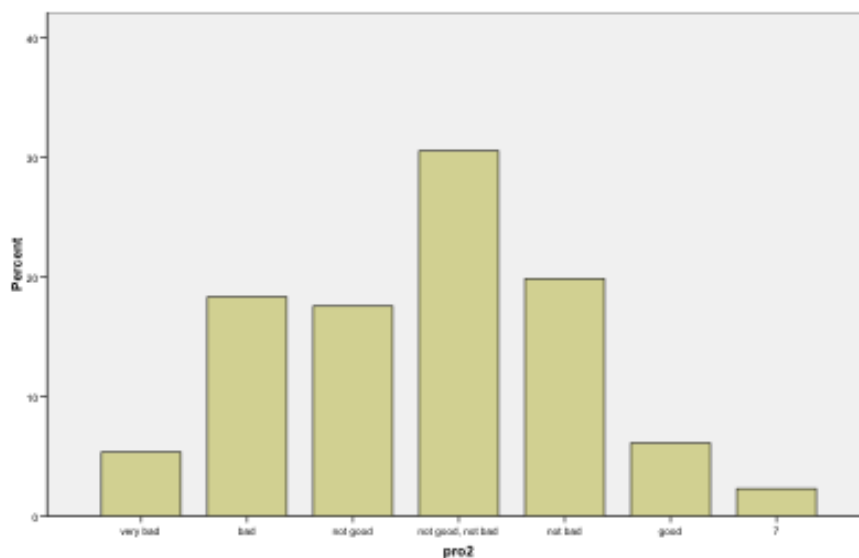
With regard to the finally produced cultural product what is aimed at is the specification of the main factors which shape its **quality** on the one hand and determine its cultural **value** on the other. Mostly responsible for shaping the quality of the cultural product are the factors of the organization's inner and outer environment. Beyond a particular personal opinion expressed repeatedly about the problems observed during the research both in the inner and outer environment of DI.K.E.K and which have serious repercussions on the quality of its produced cultural and social product, the findings coming from the analysis of the relevant question clearly present a similar public opinion. Thus, when the people asked were invited to spot ,through a wide factor listing 'the most important problems in providing products of high cultural and social value', they presented as main reasons the insufficient state and municipal funding (62,6%), the close politically oriented dependence on the state and local government (59,5%), the administration's weaknesses (56,5%), the absence of strategy and goals on the part of the administration(55%) and the administration's knowledge deficit (43,5%).

2.2 Production Outcome

The main factors which determine the cultural value of the produced product were defined as follows :

- Total assessment of the provided cultural and social work. With the aim of gauging the total sense that the audience gets from DI.K.E.K's provided work, a specific Question was asked, in which the consumer audience presented through its answer a level of assessment spanning from 'not good' and 'neither good nor bad' (WITH MEAN =3,69 AND STANDARD DEVIATION=1,398), with the greater percentage (30,5%) considering the provided work 'NEITHER GOOD NOR BAD'. The audience's total attitude is presented in the following bar chart (BAR CHART 1).
- Individual evaluative characterizations. It was considered essential that the level of the audience's approval or disapproval of the characterizations of DI.K.EK's provided cultural work be researched, so that it can be realized how the public's reduced interest for DI.K.E.K;s cultural actions is explained. So, in the relevant question the choices 'INTERESTING', 'CREATIVE' and "TRIVIAL" presented a "NEUTRAL" attitude, since the mean was about 4 (4,05 - 3,88 - 3,75 CORRESPONDINGLY), while the choices "SUBVERSIVE", "INNOVATIVE" and "POINTLESS" were about 3 (2,76 - 2,85 - 3,14 correspondingly), presenting an attitude of "RATHER DISAGREE", thus confirming and explaining the existing situation.

Assessment of the cultural and social contribution of di.k.e.k's individual units and actions. In order to be found out which of its action have had a deep impact on the public's conscience as the most and least important for the cultural and social development of the area, the audience was asked through a question to evaluate a series of actions and designated as "IMPORTANT" by order of merit the Municipal Library (MEAN = 4,92 AND STD DEVIATION=1,723), Municipal Cinemas (MEAN= 4,89 STD DEVIATION =1,471), and cultural events (mean= 4,82 and Std deviation=1,872). The lowest average of assessment was given to the Municipal Radio Stations (mean=3,23 and Std deviation=1,906), Parking Places (MEAN= 3,34 AND STD DEVIATION=2,006),and the Youth Information Centre (MEAN=3,63 AND STD DEVIATION =2,096), the contribution of which ranged from "INSIGNIFICANT" and "NEITHER INSIGNIFICANT" nor "SIGNIFICANT".



Bar chart 1: Visual Presentation of the audience's assessment of the work provided by DI.K.E.K.

2.3 Contribution to Production

- ITS CULTURAL CONTRIBUTION AS A WHOLE. Given the contribution of the cultural organizations to the reinforcement of social bonds, to urban revival, to upgrading the cultural level and to the formulation of a recognizable identity of their area, as well as

to the area's touristic and financial development (Paschalidis, 2002a:232-235; Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007; Lord, 2008: 6-7), it was considered necessary to research the extent to which the audience estimates that DI.K.E.K., during its long existence, offers similar services to an area in great need of such competitive advantages, so that it can confront the special emphasis given by the State on the financial and business development of important neighboring urban centers, like Larissa and Volos, at least as it is noted down by the local printed media. Therefore, when the participants were asked to pinpoint the degree of their approval or disapproval of the various categories of contribution to the town and its region, their estimations were designated by the response "NEUTRALLY" with a slightly bigger preference given to "STRESSING CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE" (mean = 3,95 and Std deviation=1,762), as well as to the touristic development of the town and the surrounding area (mean= 3,92 and Std=1,897).

- **ASSESSMENT OF DI.K.E.K.'S FUTURE CONTRIBUTION.** This particular point was considered indispensable, since the possible estimation that DI.K.E.K., under its current organizational status, can offer in the future products of high cultural and social value, from the one hand contributes to management complacency, and from the other, encourages it to continue its work properly and to make plans for future action. The opposite estimation—which of course matches our personal, often stated opinion—, would lead DI.K.E.K. to skepticism, self-criticism, initiative taking ,aiming at the necessary corrective movements. On the basis of the question relevant to the issue of DI.K.E.K's future direction of its cultural and social work , the audience advocated in favor of the second estimation, displaying a reserved attitude (MEAM= 3,24 AND STD DEVIATION =1,533), oriented towards "RATHER DISAGREE". Moreover, the fact that a percentage near 80% spanned from "TOTALLY DISAGREE" to "NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE" is noteworthy.

1. 3. **Review –Conclusions**

The high demands of the audience of Karditsa and the wider area concerning the provided products of important cultural value face the insufficient state and municipal funding and Cultural Units' close political dependence upon the State and the Local Government, as in the case of DI.K.E.K. Nevertheless, quite significant percentages of the people asked, additionally designated as major ineffective factors, DI.K.E.K's. weaknesses and knowledge gap, along with the lack of strategy and goal setting for the utilization of the area's significant cultural background, for awareness raising aiming at the consumer audience's participation in the final formulation of the cultural product.

The research also revealed the administration's systematic refusal to accept critical feedback and assessment messages towards the prospect of making use of the significant

input for the formulation of the finally produced cultural product. Therefore the feeling of fatigue caused by the provision of unimaginative actions and the audience's distrust in the administration's announcements about any supposed improvement prospects, built a conscious unwillingness towards the participation of cultural audience in the cooperative formation of an innovative and desired cultural product produced by DI.K.E.K

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[1]The town of Karditsa, with a population of about 45.000 citizens, is the capital of the Prefecture of Karditsa, which is a sheer agricultural Prefecture with public sector employed people, located in the center of Greece, and belongs to the District of Thessaly.

[2]The size and range of the problems concerning the research of DI.K.E.K.'s production outcome create a situation for which –in terms of research- there is no empirical approach to the whole issue through hypothesis testing being generally characterized by the inflexible features of a positivist approach (Siomkos ET AL, 2005: 22). In cases of such features, for the detailed research and effective approach to the whole problematic situation the direct specification of the various problems is suggested, as they are observed through the researcher's in situ observation and general reports, accompanied by the support of the data with the use of international biography, interviews and questionnaires from all parties involved in this cultural institution

Therefore, the methodological approach to the subject of this paper is carried out on the basis of an EXPLORATORY STUDY and aims at the development of knowledge in terms of an analytical and integrative process of the organizational and productive structuring of organizations like DI.K.E.K, which have some special features (Kosiol, 1962; Sdrolias, 1991).

The research was carried out with the use of a questionnaire. The questions were mainly scaled questions (THE 7 GRADE LIKERT SCALE WAS USED), while some of them were dichotomic and some others were multiple choice questions. The distribution, completion, and collection of the questionnaires took place from 14 to 22 March 2009. 180 questionnaires were distributed in different times and places in the Karditsa city with the method of personal interview (INTERCEPT INTERVIEW) and they were filled in by 142 persons, from whom 9 questionnaires were incomplete. Therefore, the final sample of the fully completed questionnaires was 131.

The process of data processing was carried out with the help of the statistic package SPSS16 (Siomkos ET AL, 2005;Howitt ET AL, 2006), and particularly with the method of DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS, where its main tools were primarily used, namely Mean, Std. Deviation, Frequencies-Percent, after it was first realized that the reliability coefficient Cronbach's of the scales that were used to measure the multifaceted notion of cultural product is 0,879, higher than 0,700, which is the normal questionnaire limit (Bishop ET AL., 2007; Hair ET AL., 2010). For a better presentation of the results of the process, the processing and the drawing of relevant conclusions a bar chart was also used.