

**After Pandemic Cultural Institutions' Management in the Context of Culture-Development Relation – the Case of Bulgarian Folklore Ensemble**

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**Abstract**

*The paper discusses Bulgarian folklore dance ensemble as cultural institution in Covid-19 reality and its impact on development. Therefore, it considers the challenges imposed by the pandemic and the opportunities that came along it. The analysis has showed that to have better and more significant impact, the ensemble must alleviate its internal weaknesses and explore new directions of creative work, different audiences, digitalization, wide partnerships, etc. Despite the increased awareness of the role of culture for local development, much can still be done to improve and mainstream across policy areas. Hence, the paper presents several clear policy measures to reinvest in culture and deliver a richer, more vibrant, and more diverse cultural sector, both at national and institutional level in order to boost its contribution to local development.*

*Keywords: performing arts, folklore ensemble, culture-development relation, Covid-19*

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**Introduction**

The role of culture as driver and enabler for sustainable development is no longer debatable. Through the past decade, statistics data and activities have demonstrated that culture can be a powerful driver for development, with community-wide social, economic and environmental impact (UNESCO, 2012). Culture contributes to development, both as a sector of activity and transversally across other sectors as it includes a wide range of actors, from independent and freelance artists and creators, SMEs, to big international corporations and public cultural institutions. While the safeguarding and promotion of culture represents an end in itself, it also contributes to many of the Sustainable Development Goals — including those on sustainable cities, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, the environment, promoting gender equality, innovation and peaceful and inclusive societies (UNESCOa, 2019).

Cultural heritage, cultural and creative industries, sustainable cultural tourism, and cultural infrastructure can serve as strategic tools for revenue generation. Moreover, promoting the sector requires limited capital investment, involves low entry barriers and can have a direct impact on vulnerable populations, including women (UNESCO, 2012). Cultural institutions facilitate access to culture, present cultural legacy and traditions, engage people in activities, serve as venue for entertainment, etc. Their impact on social inclusion, mental health, economic growth is undeniable. Culture plays an important role in society and can be a factor in social cohesion when people with different backgrounds engage in a common artistic project or activity.

The Covid-19 pandemic put a halt on this process. The damage to the sector has been huge and catastrophic as cultural institutions have suffered significantly in the last months. The venue-based sectors were the hardest hit by social distancing measures. Museums, performing arts, live music, festivals, cinema, theatre, dance and opera performances, concerts, and art fairs have been cancelled, with different consequences for small private and public companies. Venues, concerts, festivals and public programmes were the first to be closed down by health orders, and have been the last to open again. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic particularly threatens the future of

artists, creators and cultural operators. The cancellation of live shows erased months of planned work for performing artists and technical workers, as the entire performing arts sector was frozen. Cultural education institutions and enterprises, and freelance artists, share an uncertain fate. The effects were felt immediately like loss of income, reduced wage earnings as per arrangement, insecure work visible in rising part-time, casual, short-term contract arrangements. In addition, arts and entertainment sector workers are experiencing significant ruptures in employment arrangements due to the pandemic. These include a lack of demand within their profession, decreased employability, interrupted careers pathways, and a loss of predictability and control over their work. The reduction in demand for the arts sector damages workers' long-term employability. Performing artists must practice their skills regularly to retain employability (Pennington and Eltham, 2021). Those who are lucky enough to be employed by public theatres, opera houses, concert halls, or art schools, can count on some state-designed solutions that cover all the staff. Many venues and organisations will not be in a position to re-boot.

Still, many artists and creators have remained active during the confinement period and organised themselves as they performed live from their balconies and windows, or streaming via digital messaging platforms. Prominent artists were contributing their products (songs, performances, etc.) online for free to help people overcome the hardships of the pandemic. They have continued to create and to offer their production generously to their public in order to lift the spirits. In these uncertain times culture and limited cultural activities remained the only thing that hold people strong. Similarly, citizens have been participating in various spontaneous cultural initiatives via social media. The economic and social reflections and influence of cultural activities were particularly important during the period of measures against coronavirus.

Social distancing measures imposed by the pandemic have also made more evident the importance of arts and culture for people's mental well-being. Cultural access, through its increasingly documented psychosomatic effects provides a new opportunity to capitalise on the role of arts and culture in the prevention and treatment of illness across the lifespan, contributing to solutions for health and welfare systems, such as through reductions in hospitalisation or medication rates (OECDb, 2020).

There will clearly be long-term damage to the sector from the pandemic and the generated recession. In the medium term, the sector is likely to experience a permanent drop in output. The abrupt drop in revenues puts not only their financial sustainability at risk, but results with repercussions for the value chain of their suppliers, from creative and non-creative sectors (OECDb, 2020). The negative effects and impacts pose the utmost necessity to protect the most vulnerable, including performing artists (European Union, 2020).

Now, cultural institutions have to find new ways for existence and functioning, they need to reboot. Museums, historic sites, galleries, theatres, concerts, and cultural activities in general have been suspended for a long time, putting their resilience and survival to the test. Managers must look for ways to deal with the uncertainty and ambiguity of the future. On the other hand, the pandemic presents an opportunity to rebuild a better culture and offer improved cultural goods and services. COVID-19 is providing many communities to reconsider their development models to be more inclusive and sustainable (OECDa, 2020) and culture can play an even greater role in these new local visions. For this potential to be realised, it is important to address several challenges, including the ability of institutions to survive the crisis and its impacts, and build on the opportunities that have emerged.

The paper examines one state-supported Bulgarian cultural institution, namely folklore ensemble "Kapanski ensemble"- Razgrad and its potential to handle with the present challenges and opportunities. We explore also its contribution to the development of the region in order to social participation, inclusion, prosperity and livelihood, knowledge and skills building. The fundamental issue that is discussed is how we can improve the ensemble's after Covid-19 contribution. The following section considers how cultural institution such as folklore ensemble in Bulgaria is

generally contributing for development.

### **1. Challenges for folklore ensembles in Bulgaria: the case of “Kapanski ensemble”**

Cultural contribution to sustainable development is evidenced in two major ways. On one hand, culture-sensitive approaches to development, when customized to the particularities of a place and community, have demonstrated they are most effective, and likely to yield sustainable, inclusive and equitable outcomes as poverty alleviation, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. Also, culture has the power to respond to gender issues, to health and environment concerns, to challenges in the areas of education and livelihoods (MDG, 2013). The specific and direct contribution that tangible and intangible heritage, cultural and creative industries and cultural infrastructures have can be found through urban revitalization, powerful economic subsectors that generate decent employment, stimulate local development, and foster entrepreneurship. Cultural institutions support local cultures' development, strengthen the dialogue within the communities, enable cooperation with other cultures in order to achieve social inclusion, understanding and mutual respect.

One of the specific cultural institutions in Bulgaria are the folklore ensembles. Folklore ensembles exist as state or municipal cultural organizations, also called cultural institutes (Zakon za zakrila i razvitie na kulturata, 1999). The professional folklore ensemble is a cultural organization, which through its activity seeks, preserves and promotes Bulgarian folklore through processing and stage adaptation of authentic material or its interpretation into a creative product in active form (Kardzhieva, 2017). In structural terms, the fundament of folk ensembles are dance group, instrumental group, vocal group. The creative and artistic activity is usually expressed in the repertoire of the ensemble, related to the preservation of folklore as part of the cultural heritage of Bulgaria, and its dissemination is manifested through the concert activity. The state and municipalities appear to be basic source for finance.

The paper explores folklore dance ensemble from the city of Razgrad, Bulgaria that represent specific folklore area in the country. "Kapanski Ensemble" is an artistic organization in the field of music and dance on a folk basis. It is a cultural institute with creative-performing, research, recording and educational activities, which contributes to the development of Bulgarian culture and raising the spirituality of its people. The ensemble is not an independent legal entity, but is a unit of the Municipality of Razgrad and carries out its activities under the leadership of the municipality and in direct cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, the Union of Bulgarian music and dance activists.

Created as an amateur ensemble in 1956, “Kapanski” became a professional ensemble in 1986 with the idea to search, creatively enrich and present the most characteristic of life, music, songs, dances and the ritual calendar of this specific ethnoregion and its people. Simultaneously with the emphasis on the color of the native land, the repertoire includes the multicolored palette of Bulgarian folklore from all ethnographic regions of the country. The Kapanski ensemble transforms on stage the beauty of authentic folklore samples, as well as gives them a modern reading. At the same time, the artistic history includes author's works of contemporary composers, musicians, choreographers, artists, poets. Today the ensemble is a standard for stage interpretation and popularization of the diversity of Bulgarian instrumental and song music, folk dance and costume, but also a specific individuality and artistic nature, characteristic of the Kapanski ethnoregion (Kapanski ansambal).

Currently, the main part of the ensemble's activities is focused on the preservation, development and promotion of the rich Bulgarian cultural heritage and its integration into our time. To make this happen, Kapanski Ensemble - Razgrad has a large and diverse inventory, consisting of costumes, musical instruments, stage sets, sound system and lighting. Kapanski ensemble has costumes from every folklore region of Bulgaria.

The vision of the Kapanski Ensemble - Razgrad is to cover the various needs and interests of

its audience through the comprehensive provision of services of socio-cultural, educational and sports-health nature. The mission is to arouse interest in Bulgarian folklore through authorial methods. It is fundamental understanding that the function of such institutions is to preserve and disseminate; educate and inspire the population; just to be present. Accordingly, the objectives of the ensemble are directed in three main directions - professional, educational, cultural and social direction. The tasks of this cultural institute are related to the realization of contemporary performing arts by means of folklore imagery, usually through concert activities in the country and abroad. Important feature of folklore ensemble is the authentic look of the Bulgarian folk dance. His artistic activity is based on the care for finding authentic material, for preserving samples in the genre, as well as for enriching with author's creativity.

The interest of the general public at different ages in free concerts and open-air events remains strong. Depending on the audience, a differentiated product is offered in terms of music, dance, tempo, etc. Older audiences prefer slower and lyrical dance, while in front of students and children the performed programme is tailored to the material studied at school, mostly dynamic and vital. Nonetheless, the problem of the development of the audience and in particular of the young audience remains current. The general trend is that the consciousness of the sector is difficult to "adjust" to the principles of market thinking, thus limiting the opportunities for the formation of a socially significant cultural product. Awareness of this important aspect in the behavior of the ensemble is key, because a more active interaction with the community, expands the standard set of activities and visibly opens the door to the needs of youth and children. In this sense, the Kapanski ensemble, through the rich spectrum of artistic possibilities, is one of the most powerful cultural agents on the territory of Razgrad Municipality and largely forms the appearance and content of the local cultural process. With an audience of 40,000 per year for the territory of the municipality and abroad, such indicators are not to be underestimated, incl. children's audience, which in recent years has tended to increase.

A significant share of the overall cultural product on the territory of the municipality is represented by the activity of the Kapanski ensemble and its participation in organizing and conducting in almost all cultural events and initiatives in Razgrad and the region. Those are local holidays, public events, festivals, reviews, competitions, the national holidays of Bulgaria, as well as those without analogue in the country and abroad, which cross the borders and through which the Municipality of Razgrad opens the door for "import-export" of cultural values and goods. Kapanski ensemble creates intellectual production through sound recording activity, registers its music and dance production on audio and video cassettes and CDs.

Last but not least, the ensemble pays special attention to performances related to the aesthetic education of children and youth in school and extracurricular institutions to work with them. Since 2008, part of the Kapanski ensemble is the Children's Dance Ensemble "Ludogorche", which is a representative of the World Organization for Festivals of Folklore, Traditions and Art at UNESCO.

As it is a municipal dance ensemble, Kapanski ensemble does not have its own material base. It is housed in the building of the Municipal Cultural Center, which is located in the center of Razgrad and has a large rehearsal hall, locker rooms, dressing rooms, bathrooms, administrative offices and several wardrobes. The building has a unique architecture and it houses one of the few revolving theater stages in the country. The hall has a capacity of 638 people.

Most of the employees belong to the aging part of the population of Bulgaria. Fewer and fewer young people are looking for development in the field of folk dance and music, and the older part of the population remains in this field. The employees in the ensemble fall into the second category of work according to national legislation.

There is a concomitant problem with the minimum insurance threshold for certain positions (e.g. for a ballet dancer), which is required but cannot be covered by the secured budget. Such a discrepancy is valid for all municipal ensembles and has been brought to the attention of the

Ministry of Culture and a decision on a state grant is expected.

The budget of the Municipality of Razgrad, which is the main source of funding for the ensemble, for year 2021 grants BGN 837,635 for the current 56 staffs of the Kapanski ensemble (Obshtina Razgrad, 2021). In previous years the funding amounted to BGN 685,500 for 2019 and BGN 780,000 for 2020. Another source of funding is fundraising from sponsorships and donations. Municipality of Razgrad additionally supports the ensemble by providing the material base free of charge, without requiring the payment of rent; apart from that, it covers current expenses entirely at its own expense. A certain amount is deducted only for the ensemble, which is not valid for other cultural institutions in the municipality - theater and music center, community centers, gallery, historical museum, library. For the local authorities it is obvious that respecting and supporting cultural expressions contributes to strengthening the social capital of a community and fosters trust in public institutions. Despite the care of Razgrad Municipality, its possibilities are not unlimited. It is imperative to find and implement new alternative forms of financing. Opportunities for financing the folk art in our country, apart from the state budget, can be sought in the direction of the Operational Programmes from the EU Structural Funds, as well as funds from foreign foundations.

The price of entrance tickets, given the local conditions, is lower than the national average. The management of the ensemble, as a secondary budget manager, does not have the necessary financial freedom. In order to increase the activity of the folk ensembles, both in the creative and in the concert activity, it is necessary to provide financial freedom in the form of a delegated budget and the ensembles to be managed by a director, who is the primary budget manager.

## **2. Folklore ensembles' post-Covid 19 impact on development**

Covid-19 pandemic provoked issues are related with cancelation of performances, valid for the whole sector. It was necessary for the state-funded institutions to cope with the same challenges – cancelled arrangements, closed venues, ruptured process for rehearsal, etc. Some of the cultural institutions funded by the public, still experienced most of those effects. Being famous for its rich repertoire and live concerts (more than 4000 for 65 years), it was a huge obstacle not only for the live performances of the Kapanski ensemble, but also for rehearsals and preparation. If the year before the pandemic was marked by 78 live performances, then in 2020 we witnessed only 20 and for 2021 the numbers are climbing slightly till 42, but with 20 cancelled spectacles because of social distance measures. The pandemic situation prevented and delayed in some extent resolving ageing ensemble's staff issue. Some labour law conflict issues were caused by the compliance with the social distance measures. Not only rehearsals schedules were changed, lunch breaks hours, start and end of the working hours, but also the rehearsals of men and women were held separately, alternating in the halls.

Many problems stayed unsolved, ideas remain unrealized and issues like subsidies by the state for the minimum threshold were delayed over time. Moreover, as there were none measures designed for the cultural sector by the government it raises the problem with financing even more. After intense and powerful unpredicted twists and changes because of Covid-19, in the cultural sector and performing arts in particular it is necessary to preserve the accomplishments and move forward with the same pace and strong will. There was wave of action to preserve rich and diverse cultural life, cultural heritage and its workers, artists' mobility, capacities and skills on European Union level. But as cultural policy is not an EU competence, EU level action in the cultural field in responding to the coronavirus crisis is just limited to the task of supporting Member States in their efforts to promote cultural heritage and diversity, as well as cultural professionals, artists and their work (European Union, 2020). Being municipal-funded cultural institution did not make significant difference for the folklore ensembles as those institutions were left to fend alone. Mostly, cultural sector typically have difficulties in being recognised as an important sector for national economy

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<sup>1</sup> Till October 2021

and development. Special measures were not suggested for the sector in Bulgaria by the government. Standard measures underestimate the arts and the efforts were mainly focused on tourism and hospitality sector.

Nonetheless, the benefits for the development process were not erased, just postponed in time. As we already mentioned a lot of benefits and contributions in general, we can find many culture-development relation's evidences particularly for the folklore ensemble. We assume that this institution is engaged in both material and spiritual contribution. The role of culture can be addressed both as a driver that contributes directly to bringing about economic and social benefits, and also as an enabler that contributes to the effectiveness of development interventions. As a participant in the cultural process and life of a certain community, the Kapanski ensemble promotes a wide range of monetary and non-monetary benefits that are elaborated subsequently.

Obviously, it sustains identity and rootedness. One of the fundamental elements in the mission is to search for authentic music, costumes, dances, etc. Along with these activities, the costumes used, choreography and rituals presented, songs and vocals as well are all examples of safeguarding practices actions. There is no difference and inequalities between men and women. It facilitates democratizing access to cultural activities and participation at least with its free performances. As providing connection between the young generation and older, facilitating the access to arts, the ensemble promotes social cohesion and ensures succession and intergenerational continuity. At the same time, the ensemble mediates as a social factor for the integration of various marginal groups and groups with special needs, children and youth.

Likewise, the ensemble has significant role in safeguarding the local memory and passing it to young generations, and to all members of society in general that is speaking itself for intragenerational and between generations continuity and sustainability. In connection with the process of development, it is in this direction that one of the most obvious benefits of the ensemble is manifested - the strongly represented activity in the process of forming, educating and raising an audience. Apart from preserving and popularizing of Bulgarian folklore traditions in the ensemble, professionals and students make folk dances find their place in amateur performances as well. Through these events a lasting interest in Bulgarian folklore and knowledge among the younger generation about the traditions and customs of the Bulgarian people is achieved.

The use of local resources, skills, and knowledge is evident since it is called Kapanski – very specific folklore area in the country. But its activity is not just limited to this as it is presenting author's modern artistic director's ideas which gives us the link with the innovation and creativity.

Besides the fact that it can make its one cultural production, entrepreneurship is found in the form of searching new forms of expression and new partnerships with the local authorities and business as well. Integration, social inclusiveness, as well as building sense of belonging (De Nora, 2000; Barba, 2003), are noticeable in all its performances as people gather and celebrate together with the music, songs and dances of the ensemble.

It facilitates the intercultural dialogue as it participates in different holidays and presents other cultures traditions as well. Acknowledging and promoting respect for cultural diversity within a human right based approach can prevent conflicts and protect the rights of marginalized groups, thus creating optimal conditions for achieving development goals. Culture, understood this way, makes development more sustainable.

Benefits can be completed with acknowledgement that the arts have impact for mental and physical health, and support learning, focus, and concept acquisition through education (Winner et al., 2013). The importance of local knowledge and community participation is necessary in order to achieve sustainable development – from health to education.

As an economic activity it provides certain incomes to the professionals in the organization. The incomes are not low as compared to the average level in the sector (dance ensembles) and cultural activities. The ensemble is on 4th place in national scale in terms of budget subsidies provided by municipalities or government. Capitalizing on the potential of the arts to promote social

cohesion and develop entrepreneurship requires support or/and investment in cultural activities and organizations. Culture-led development process should take into account the protection of cultural assets that are often fragile and constitute a unique and non-renewable capital.

All of the above mentioned permits us to conclude that this performing art institution correlates with the following Sustainable Development Goals: no poverty, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, peace justice and strong institutions, partnerships for the goals (UNESCOb, UNESCOc) and has significant impact on the local development.

Afterall, to cope with its mission as development driver and enabler after the pandemic, the ensemble should take some corrective measures, as well as totally new directions in order to improve its performance and social, economic and environmental contribution to development.

### **3. Opportunities for enhancing developmental impact**

There is necessity of different measures to be undertaken in order to enhance folklore ensemble's internal strength and boost its impact on the local development in terms of people potential, economy, etc. Accordingly, we will outline some suggestions in several directions for the organization to embrace the existing opportunities. Certainly, those recommendations are meant to increase the benefits and contribution to development as well. We will start with those that are directly related with the ensemble's activity and management.

First, it is essential to focus on diversification of the forms and means for preservation and popularization of the Kapanski region folklore heritage and culture in general, as well as the quality and diversity of the artistic product. If necessary, analysis has to be conducted to choose the best examples performed through the years. In order to be beneficial for the society, the management should invest in research and collecting work to deepen the current fund of the ensemble, but also focus how to protect and control it. This will enable the constant enrichment and development of the repertoire. The ensemble should explore new ideas for choreography, choir, orchestra, new authors, composers, artists (even guests), etc. for successful market realization. To offer new cultural content, new ideas should be transformed into new spectacles, which will increase the possible live performances and concerts. A performance can be created together with the philharmonic, as the music is based on folklore and the dancers perform a new style of ballet with characteristic steps from the Bulgarian folk dances. Another possibility lies in "mixing" the authenticity of the Kapanski sound through the prism of jazz, hip hop, beatbox and other styles, still the main motive remaining folklore, as this can bring the sought new and modern appearance. Nonetheless, such artistic collaborations will give the opportunity for exporting established and new performances outside the city and the region. The integration of the ensemble's diversified qualitative product into more intense concert activity will permit its more noticeable and recognizable inclusion in the national cultural process and more effective realization on the national cultural market.

New and modern programme will attract very young audience. To popularize the folklore, the ensemble needs to witness a significant increase in educational concerts; creating schools for music, song, formation of children's and high school folk choir in addition to the main of the ensemble. "Kapanski Ensemble" - Razgrad has ideas for opening classes in primary schools and high schools, which are related to choreography. In this way the folklore will be presented to the youngest. The graduates of these classes will have the opportunity to touch the Bulgarian culture and traditions from an early age. The opening of these classes will increase the interest of young people in Bulgarian folklore and through them will open new sources for the ensemble's staff. Its focus on the young generation allows the gradual rejuvenation of the staff and attraction of young members into it. It is directly related to the problem of providing sustainable number of people

willing to work in the area and simultaneously with the accent of increasing access to cultural activities.

That brings us to the second direction, namely artists and human resources at the ensemble. One of the main objectives of ensemble's manager is to secure permanent stable social status and well-being of artists, administration and supporting staff in the ensemble. To overcome the precariousness of the job and to improve the status, salaries and additional material incentives are expected to be raised. Next in line is implementing a system for attracting and appraisal, creating mechanism for motivating the artists, which includes rewards system for prominent and active players in cultural life; career development; special care and training for young talents. Substantial improvement of material base and technical support of the creative and administrative work in the ensemble is intended to support artists, such as good living conditions for the attracted young professional singers, musicians and dancers; construction of a complex mobile facility for outdoor events in all seasons; production of screens for dressing outdoor; providing modern sound and lighting systems. As next step, enhancing artists' mobility requires providing or purchasing a vehicle with cargo capacity of passengers, decor, props, etc., which will be reliable and guarantee for the comfort and safety of the team during the tour.

All of the fore-mentioned facilitates increasing the access and participation of as many people as possible. Tasks as expanding the audience, as well as educating and raising an audience were first mentioned for children and youth. Young adults and new spectators can also be expected as outcomes of changed music, songs and themes and time periods. Some of the efforts should be focused not only on active participation, but also should consider the engagement of those who have not necessarily formed an intention to participate. Thus, the target is to pursue cultural engagement that includes:

- ambient participants: those who have not made a deliberate decision to participate but have been engaged by walking past or into a cultural experience;
- receptive participants (audiences): attendees at a cultural activity;
- active participants (enablers): people involved in support roles outside a directly creative role. This includes roles such as organiser, facilitator, teacher, tutor, guide, board member and others that enable cultural activity;
- creative participants (creators): participants involved in the creative process, making something new, using creativity and involving self-expression (Cultural development network, 2021).

This direction requires not just refreshing the repertoire but entirely new long-term programme as result of consistent and effective cultural market research, including the adoption of proven European and world initiatives.

Certainly, all of these ideas and suggestions need to be considered in terms of adequate financing. Public funding for arts and culture may experience significant budget pressure in the medium term, which could impact on the subsidised parts of the sector (e.g. public museums, libraries, galleries, and performing arts). Higher number of live performances and concerts (paid) will unlock the capacity for generating more incomes from concerts and sponsors to alleviate municipal budget and ensemble's maintenance. Financial independence can be pursued with some cultural entrepreneurship activities in the form of private lessons for dances, instruments, singing, events animation, choreography online mentoring sessions and new classes. Simultaneously, it has to be accompanied by reducing the current costs of repairs and general cost optimization. To succeed in this task, managers have to break the frames of subsidy thinking and search for alternative sources. Those alternatives can stem from National fund Culture, Ministry of Culture, municipality of Razgrad, Balkan and European cultural networks and their programmes. Likewise, active interaction with business and non-governmental sector has to be realized, for instance assistance in preparing the economic analysis and the mechanism for alternative financing of the

ensemble. This support can be assessed as an investment in the artistic and managerial potential of ensemble.

Significant benefits of cultural institutions for the development are stemming from various partnerships. As stated by the management, the ensemble involves all stakeholders in the process from the public and civil sectors, relying on the development of folklore as a source of economic and social benefits. Kapanski ensemble's efforts should not be limited just to state, municipal cultural institutions or organizations in the sector. The interaction of the Kapanski ensemble with the non-governmental and private sector in the field of culture is still deprived of the necessary mutual motivation and does not reach the broad framework of the real partnership. It is obvious that the initiative must stem from the ensemble.

Starting with partnerships in the cultural sector, one can divide them into regional, national and international partnerships. All artistic formations in this particular region can be seen as centres and incubators for new artists. Searching for new opportunities for mutual eclectic performances with the theatre, philharmonic, brass band. Different initiative with few ensembles from neighbouring cities and regions to start "evening of the ensembles". Collaboration with regional museums for presenting a spectacle, tradition or restoration of a rite or custom associated with one of the holidays in the current month or season. Intense dialogue with all community centres (chitalishta), cultural and educational institutions is necessary in order to perceive the ensemble as a place for culture and innovations in it.

To promote cultural diversity, the ensemble can cooperate, present foreign expression forms and realize projects with existing twin cities in Russia, Turkey, Germany, France and seek new opportunities towards Greece, North Macedonia, Serbia. Developing new local strategies for cultural tourism that address and oppose the socially and environmentally unsustainable practices of the nearest large-scale or intensive tourism centres can be an important tool and asset for the ensemble as development driver.

Regarding the municipal authorities and business in the region, partnerships can be established to perform in their events, coordination and concordance of numerous cultural events in order to avoid aggregation or prevent lack of such in certain periods.

Partnerships beyond cultural sector should promote greater complementarities between culture and other policy sectors. The most evident for building is the one with education. Some of the ensemble's ideas were related exactly with schools as for the monthly free and adapted to the curriculum educational concerts. Strategic partnerships should not be limited only to schools. Some dimensions of knowledge exchange exist between cultural sector and universities as well. Such exchanges with higher education institutions concern not only education in creative skills and entrepreneurship skills, but also research. Those contacts can be used for the selection process and enriching the professional expertise in old folklore examples research activity. Also, it can find solution for the ageing issue within the ensemble.

The regional social policy can use the instrumental value of the cultural institution. Cultural programme has to consider society's lowest segment and offer financially affordable performances. It can be structured in ways that the ensemble performs in different social groups such as nursing homes. Social cohesion can be supported by further inclusion in the cultural calendar of the municipality of initiatives of different ethnic and social communities. It will make possible to address social issues such as intercultural dialogue or the integration and valorisation of minorities and migrants. The social impacts that are sought after by the ensemble include active ageing, combatting or preventing social isolation. Not only social services can benefit from greater linkages with cultural sector. Improved health and health prevention can be pursued through additional integration between culture production and participation with health and well-being. Health care services benefit from it in order to improve general well-being, prevent illness or delay its onset, favour the adoption of healthy habits (OECD, 2020). The lockdown has made evident the

importance of culture for people's well-being and mental health. Opportunities for prevention of illness and treatment of diseases for health systems can stem in partnership with local hospital and sanatorium.

Important cooperation must be sustained towards media in the process of intense concert activity and dissemination of news about the ensemble. Initially, identifying all media in municipality, region and on national scale is necessary. Significant point in ensemble's media policy is to include in print and electronic media on cultural policy issues debates, not only popularizing it. Regarding the last, it is necessary to create and apply certain advertising measures to present folklore products in a profitable way within Bulgarian and international cultural market.

Media measures can facilitate the path for future digitalization in the ensemble. The massive digitalisation in recent months in the cultural sectors is clearly not temporary and could create new forms of experience and business models with market potential. To address cultural needs, the ensemble have made their productions available as old performances are available in social media channels online for free. Post-Covid 19 experienced accelerated digitalisation brings new opportunities for local and regional development but also risks of exacerbating inequalities without accompanying measures. Such measures, for example, technological solutions for distance and distributed learning with digitally mediated access to cultural resources and experiences can drive future innovation (OECD, 2020). At the "Kapanski ensemble" regarding the rehearsals, opportunities are still limited, similar practices were tried during the first lockdown and did not give result. Probably, opportunities lie in direction to private lessons and events. However, some questions arise concerning digital use of culture and performing arts. As usually it is supported by the authorities (the free access), it should be very carefully considered for how long, what content should be paid, etc. After that, what behaviour will result from this period of digital cultural consumption for free. Will cultural institutions increase their outreach to new audiences and be operational with potentially reduced public funding? (European union, 2020). Nevertheless, the management is aware that investment in digital infrastructure can amplify advances in cultural sectors and requires further efforts to expand the nature of cultural experiences (mixed spectacle perhaps). First step logically is maintenance of innovative internet site. It should be followed by expanding the information space for culture in the preparation and distribution of advertisements for culture on electronic media. The next aim is to create data base which comprehensively comprise cultural institutions and constantly describes the created creative products. Something more, it will detect cultural products consumption, as well as analyse the information on media.

### **Conclusion**

Obviously, Covid-19 demonstrates once again the significance of cultural sector and performing arts in particular. The impoverishment and downsizing of the cultural and creative sectors would have a negative impact on cities and regions not only in terms of direct economic and social impact but also in terms of well-being, the vibrancy of cities and communities, and cultural diversity. On one hand, it amplifies the weaknesses, but on the other, offers new challenges, such as digitalization and expanding audiences. The cultural sector adjustment must ensure that the sector does not just survive the pandemic, but stands ready to flourish on the other side. Too often, culture is regarded not as an asset but rather a liability, a "last to invest, first to cut" budget line. Our suggestions are considered in the Covid-19 reality and can be used by other cultural institutions as well.

It must lay the groundwork for a sustainable, vibrant future for arts and culture built through sustained public investment. This includes large fiscal investments to help rebuild skills, jobs and incomes in the cultural sector, long-term funding for arts organisations and artists, wage subsidies, intervention and new legislation in cultural regulations. Nonetheless, to shape better policies it also imposes planning across many sectors of public life and integration with other public policies –

education, social services, physical and mental health care, sport.

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