7.10 The management of conflicts in cultural management and policies

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This chapter tries to clearly and easily explain how the conflict, which is present in the social relationships between people or institutions, has also a leading role in some processes of cultural management. To not get lost among the many theories, lines, strategies, and authors, this text is focused on the aspects which most directly affect cultural management and policies, leaving aside conflict situations in other scopes, such as the family’s, the school’s, the geostrategy’s or the war’s scope.

The chapter also provides some proposals about how dealing with the resolution of conflicts, always from the scope of cultural management.

Finally, an example of an actual case applying most of the proposals included in the text is provided.

This document was written based on the command of contents and on the acting in the mediation of a process of the cultural sector, always from the experience in cultural policies and management.

1. What a conflict is and which role its play in the relationships between agents or people

Conflict and its origin

Most current authors agree in considering the conflict as a possible situation inherent in the socialisation of the human being, individually or in group. First, it is not seen as a terrible or irremediable condition. In a society in which we share coexistence standards, from general rules to daily civic habits, conflict emerges when this established order is interrupted. We consider it as a non-acceptable state when, because of its persistence over time, its breadth in the space or the expression of its virulence, it causes us a difficulty and an annoyance which wear us out and prevent us from coexisting or progressing. We then focus our efforts on a double intention: to anticipate the conflict and to know how to resolve it. And we do not mention “to prevent” the conflict as a society without conflict is a state of lack of relationships. As we will see below, the cultural sector is among those generating more links of affection, feelings, involvement, relationship, action, etc., so a greater frequency of conflicts is possible.

The term conflict is used in very different and extreme senses and dimensions, from the troubled child in class or at home to the war as an armed conflict. Although a same conceptual line could be shared, we should know how to identify each situation, its meaning, and the action required as response.

This document is not aimed at drawing a conclusion about the theory of conflicts but adapting some usual concepts to cultural policies and management. First, different orientations are found among the definitions of “conflict”. Not
all of them are equally adaptable to cultural management

Julien Freund, in his book “The sociology of conflict”, defined conflict as “a confrontation between two people or groups of the same species who demonstrate a hostile intent to each other, usually about a law and who, to maintain, restore or affirm that right, try to break the resistance of the other, possibly through the use of violence, which may even lead to the physical destruction of the other”. Freund focused most of his research on the war’s conflict.

Lewis Coser also emphasized this “aim to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals”.

Without leaning to such side based on destroying the other, Ralf Dahrendorf and Marc Howard Ross put conflict in an opposition, competition or rivalry of two elements aiming at the same resources. This idea is closer to the reality of cultural management when two people or organisations compete for a subvention, an agreement, a project, a public, honour, etc. To injure the other is not the objective in cultural management, but the own benefit. For example, the objective of an artist is that their work is shown in the room of the cultural centre, but not necessarily that another artist shows their work later. In other words, there is room for everyone, but each one looks for their own place, thus competing for space, time, and economic resources.

Another aspect is worth to be highlighted: in policies, and therefore in projects materialising them, there is always a general purpose or objective aims to strengthen a dimension of culture. Thus, other agents developing the same cultural goal should not consider each other as rivals, but possible relief workers. For example, if two projects aim to encourage the pleasure in reading, they are no rivals: the more projects encourage reading, the better for the last goal, the raison d’être of projects. This vision, maybe today a little bit naive, would avoid many conflicts: in the cultural sector, as in other social sectors, agents’ objective should be the complicity of cooperation and not the rivalry confrontation.

**General characteristics of conflict applied to cultural management**

**According to Luis Oro Tapia, the general characteristics of conflict are as follows:**

- Conflict could be caused by the existence of opposing goals among actors (heterogeneity of valuations) and/or convergent interests among them (homogeneity of valuations: same estimation of a scarce good whose possession is controversial).
- Conflict could take place in means to achieve a goal (actors agree in the objective but differ in the means to achieve it).
- Disputes is inherent, inseparable from the human group. Conflict could therefore be caused in any type of social relationship, in which anything could lead to disagreement.
- Conflict is characterised by a certain reasonable vagueness, that is, objects and reasons why actors come into conflict are virtually infinite.
- Only from the experience and by applying these characteristics to cultural management and policies, we could increase and detail such characteristics.
- Conflict is the result of changes and the emergence of novelties or new situations. In a not very regulated sector, as the cultural sector, conflict could often be caused by its dynamism and innovation.
- The most usual conflicts in the cultural sector, widely discussed in the next chapter, are related to the rivalry for resources (subventions, spaces, opportunities, etc.) as well as for prestige or publics.
- There is usually a third agent, the public administration, which awards such resources. So, a curious
situation could take place: two agents compete and come into conflict between them without even knowing or related to each other. Their relationship is always through the third agent.

- The advantage is that this third agent plays the role of mediator in the conflict, directly or by a hired specialist. (Read the example in the last section of this text). This role is not valid when one of the agents under conflict is the public administration itself.
- In the cultural sector, some conflicts are often caused by personal rivalries (two artists, two presidents of associations, two institutional politicians, etc.) and are hidden by supposed conceptual, structural, ideological or political arguments.

Could conflict be creative?

From a more optimistic or positive view, conflict could be considered as a creative factor for changing or renovating. So, things improve as they change, and change could imply a conflict situation. Also, the existence of a conflict could be a sign of movement, of energy, and in short, of life. An outburst (personal, social, institutional, etc.) is sometimes required to unleash a reactive movement leading to improvement. This progress corresponds to a creative situation which would imply new ways of focusing a situation, new agents or agents’ new roles, new states leading to better situations, new ideas, new relationships, etc. Conflict could be therefore a creative act. Welcome!

As a result, it is deduced that the total elimination of the conflict should not be the objective, which, on the other hand, is impossible, but a reduction of the exhausting and paralysing conflict. The objective should be to have all the elements required to understand, interpret, and resolve the conflict.

2. Why conflicts could be more present in cultural management?

As mentioned above, conflict is a situation which should be normal or usual in the relationships between institutions and/or people. It is worth questioning whether conflict is more usual or present in cultural management. Some argued that management itself is the daily conflict management, usually of low intensity. Some useful responses to better understand and to manage these situations are included below.

The novelty of the profession

First, it should be clarified that cultural management and policies are within a very ambiguous, diffuse and flexible field. As it is practically a new profession (no more than 30 years in the Spanish scope), its space and limits are not defined yet, thus implying a possible brush with other sectors. Its members are continuously being defining and identifying. On the one hand, some professionals managing cultural processes are not identified as cultural managers (e.g., librarians or museums technicians) and, on the other hand, people from other sectors are simply identified as cultural managers (e.g., artists or members of an association). In sum, what is necessary is to consolidate the space of the profession, its sectors of action, functions, activities, places, publics, etc. Time is useful for this definition and configuration.

Numerous agents intervene in cultural policies: concurrence of competencies

- Cultural policies are a space in which all type of agents intervene with almost the same functions. It is called the concurrence of competencies. So, a public institution (and at all levels, from the municipal to the state level), a private firm (from a small sole proprietor to a large multinational company) or non-profit
agents (from the small association in a neighbourhood from a large international foundation) could act. Such agents have different motivations, interests, capacities, possibilities, etc. All of them coexist in a cultural ecosystem, sometimes cooperating and sometimes competing, and here is where conflict situations are caused. Such situations are fewer in other sectors of society and economy as there are fewer agents involved and their functions are more regulated.

The cultural sector is not very regulated

- There is a third factor as a result of the two previous aspects: there are not any regulation elements. Cultural management and policies are a sector with little legislation and not so many professional bodies. There are no determinants to access to the profession’s development (anyone could call themselves “cultural manager” and work in this scope) or professional associations (nothing and no one protects the correct profession’s development). Uncertainty paves the way for the appearance of conflict situations.

“Particular” characteristics of agents

- It is not a conflict sector without any reason. The huge difference of interests among agents could imply a larger number of conflict situations. Artists’ creative nature, wilfulness of associations, public’s demands, firms’ economic needs, the formality of public institutions or politicians’ interests, just mentioning the main agents, could create tensions due to the difficulty of coexistence.

Many different activities Major innovation factor.

- Cultural sector is very dynamic, innovative and critical, thus generating many actions, messages, presences, and impacts: all of them are immediate, changing, very different and unforeseeable. This mixture of elements creates additional tensions.
- Not many resources to distribute.
- In addition, the resources of the sector are very limited, both at a public (usually the Cinderella of budgets) and private level. However, costs related to cultural activities are generally high due to the many people involved, the difficulty to mechanise processes, and some cachet from the exclusive nature of some agents. Also, the market is regulated in a very disproportionate way: many artists live badly with their job whereas a minority are paid exorbitant amounts. The dependence of the public administration is high in this unequal equation (high costs, low budgets), and there is also a major lack of definition related to the attribution of resources (subventions, assignments, grants, spaces, etc.). Such attribution is not formally regulated, the discretionary nature in the allocation is high, etc., and everyone thinks that they deserve them more than other people.

Conclusion:

Is cultural management mainly a profession to manage conflicts? Because it may seem that managing a theatre (or other cultural facilities or programmes) is managing the conflict caused by opposing and, sometimes, confronted interests: politicians, professional artists and amateurs, social movement of the environment, publics, cultural managers themselves, etc. As seen above, the response is affirmative even recognising that the conflict is inherent in human and institutional relationships, which are very dynamic, demanding, and yet diffuse in cultural policies and management.
3. Some conflict situations in cultural policies and management

This section only describes some of the most frequent conflict, disagreement or, directly, confrontation situations in the cultural sector.

Explanatory note: the sector of cultural management is an exciting space to work. Authors are not aimed at giving the impression of being a difficult sector, but it should be recognised that its richness is its dynamism and innovation, thus leading to situations in which how to resolve them should be known.

**Competition among public institutions**

The public sector should have its scopes and functions better delimited in the intervention. But in a field, such as culture, which is not yet defined and very attractive as for political visibility, each public institution tends to defend a self-assigned area. In most cases, the relationships among public agents are relationships of cooperation (as it should be), but in some cases, they compete for a same field of action, thus generating unnecessary duplicities. Some examples are the policy of subventions, a cultural centre, a festival, etc. What is curious is that this does not happen just in organisations of different political tendencies, but also in organisation with the same political tendencies. Over time and with the institutional maturity, these organisations should better define the range of action of each, as well as the scopes of cooperation. In this case, possible conflict is solved by the institutional agreement at a political level. A certain civic pressure (entities, artists, users, etc.) could be useful to force such agreement.

**“Unfair” competition between the public administration and other agents**

In some cases, local associations and cultural firms developing cultural activities complain when a public agent launches a proposal which is similar to another already existing, but it is usually free, so that it is difficult for the former to maintain their activity and their public. The argument usually used by the public agent is based on the ensuring of a public provision, in the full sense of the term, of the service. Part of the resolution of this conflict, very bad experienced by social agents, probably lies in the cooperation among agents, in knowing to support the person who already develops an action in a good way, and in knowing to entrust an association or firm of the social microeconomics with the public service provision, very usual in the cultural field. A minimum quality, public access, ideological neutrality, etc. should be in exchange demanded.

**Disputes among associations**

Although disagreements among private agents are typical of the market and accepted as such, a greater coexistence is expected among associations as, at last, their aim is the common good of society. The reality is that the fiercest conflicts are among entities: the competition is fierce, and the confrontation could affect the personal scope. Associations could ignore and confront each other, be divided, their members could leave them, go to “the others”, and all of them will be aimed at being recognised by the public administration as valid spokespeople in the sector. In such a situation, which is very usual, the associative maturity and its members’ maturity should be resorted, as well as to know how to pursue the common goal, to leave aside personal confrontations, and to cooperate in those aspects sharing. When the result of the conflict affects citizenship, the public referent agent could be a mediator (town council, department, ministry, etc.). [Read the example provided at the end of this chapter].
Disputes among creative agents

Relationships among artists or creators are not always easy due to personal egos, lack of resources, the need to compete, assignments or other reasons. On the one hand, it is the corporate feeling to defend group interests, but on the other hand, it is the instinct to promote the own work. If there is a conflict, it is difficult to intervene, and the intervention should only take place when conflict transcends the personal life and affects citizenship. As in the previous case, an intervention of third parties as mediators could be useful to resolve the situation.

Relationships among professionals (of a same or various organisations)

These relationships are the usual conflict among people, cultural management professionals in this case, of a same structure. Conflict could be caused in all agents (public, private or associative), at all levels (directors, technicians, assistants, etc.), and in all structure sizes (from the smallest to the largest). It could be internal between people or departments of the same organisation or among various institutions. It could be caused by the competition for resources or results, by the impact of performances and their renown, or again by strictly personal reasons affecting the group work. Probably, conflict situations are not more frequent and intense than in organisations of any other sector, although the characteristics of the cultural sector, already mentioned above, indicate that they could be a little bit more noticeable.

How to intervene to manage/to resolve conflicts: mediation contributions

There is not a magic and automatic formula or a unique tendency to intervene in conflict situations, but most authors agree in some of the following aspects recommended to play the role of mediators in a conflict. If this role is not established, such aspects are also valid for the parties under conflict, although it could be more difficult to carry out them because they are very involved in the process. Some aspects are as follows:

The starting point

1. People can manage their conflicts, as well as to find out and to understand the conditions for their transformation. For this purpose, they establish a direct relationship or look for an agent-mediator.

The characteristics of the mediator (either a person or an institution)

2. According to Nelson Molina, the person or institution should be empathetic, confident, conscious of their own culture, sensitive with other people, creative, patient, careful and protective.

Mediation’s role

3. The mediator is not a judge who decides who is right; nor an adviser or therapist. Their role and objective are to help the parties to reach a satisfactory agreement in which all of them feel that their reason is part of the final consensus.
4. They should avoid bad solutions of relevant commitment which only postpone the situation or cause another different conflict.
5. For this purpose, they should know how to regulate and control the dialogue process between the...
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- They should not discuss the content of the discussion if the parties manage it better, although it is possible that they should make proposals related to such content. They should deeply know the subject under discussion, apart from being good mediators.
- They should know how to inform the agents involved about the objective of the agreement and not about a victory of one of them.
- They should be impartial or neutral and win agents’ confidence. Although they could have greater sympathy or affinity with a sector, they should remember that their objective is the agreement, not the victory of one or another, although they are righter.
- Confidentiality is a mediator’s condition.
- They should know how to work informal moments, such as the talks before or after a meeting, breaks, etc.
- Provisionally, and particularly in cases with more than two agents involved, they should consider minority opinions or positions which could be the losers of a dispute among two “large” parties.
- They should try that the parties look at the future and are not stuck to the past, to what happened which also was differently understood by each.

The development of the mediation process

- Each agent or person involved should be appropriately presented, even mediators themselves (who is the person and what is their role), as well as the objectives to guarantee they are shared.
- It is advisable to establish the time so that a process is not everlasting, although there will be flexibility, if necessary.
- The actual origin of the conflict should be identified, as it is not always what the parties say.
- The conflict’s trajectory should be exposed, as well as the current state of things, the role of each agent, the trigger for the conflict, etc. In such way, they show each agent that they know the case and can therefore contribute to its resolution. Discordant valuations will be avoided, and coincident or positive aspects will be always highlighted.
- They should achieve that each party recognises the positive aspects of the other, as well as their own weaknesses. Part of the solution will be probably to join the best aspects of each agent involved.
- For this purpose, the difference should not be eliminated, but reconcile it, coexist with it, and show it in a positive way.
- They could resort and stimulate the sense of personal or institutional responsibility to third parties, to society, to the cultural sector, and to the future.
- They could provide information and example of successful cases in other places, thus giving the parties confidence in the process and in mediators.
- They could count on other trustworthy people who are recognised by the parties to play a supportive role for the process and results.
- They could find in each agent or institution under dispute those people more subject to dialogue.
- They should know how to highlight and present the others the advances or agreements which could be produced to enliven and give confidence to the process.
- An agreement should not be promptly closed. Time, patience, and perseverance are useful to harmonise the discussion with agreement.
- Different meeting formats could be combined according to needs: individual, small or large group, etc.
- A summary should be made and presented in some moments of the process to ensure that everyone is following the pace.
• 27. They should be careful with the language, its meaning, and its content, which could have different meanings for agents. The language and terminology used should not make anyone uncomfortable.
• 28. Also, the non-verbal expression or language should be watched as erroneous or inappropriate messages should not be involuntarily transmitted.
• 29. They should be particularly sensitive with those people who could have more difficulties for participating in the process (because of age, training, culture, origin, experience or other reasons).
• 30. They should know how to deal with uncalled-for profiles and interventions: abusive language, intimidations, threats, attacks, blackmails, etc.
• 31. At a terminological level, the term “conflict” or “party” is suggested to be avoided in written documents and verbal interventions, as well as terms such as “situation” and “agents”.

Agreements

• 32. Agreements should be promoted or suggested by joining previous positionings of the parties. They should be well argued.
• 33. These agreements should be clear for the parties.
• 34. They should achieve that these agreements are binding, in writing if necessary.
• 35. They should seek supports (institutional, territorial, sectoral, etc.) to facilitate and to press for the application of agreements.
• 36. Agreements and their results should be later monitored.

4. A detailed case, the work carried out, and its resolution

This case is useful to identify a conflict situation and how, from knowledge and the professional practice of cultural management and policies, was the intervention and the resolution.

Introduction

The case is located in a metropolitan town of 20,000 inhabitants, which are divided into several population centres and neighbourhoods.

In one of them (we call it “the neighbourhood”), with 5,000 inhabitants, a conflict was caused by the desire of two entities to organise the annual festival.

Background

The annual festival emerged as an initiative of the Neighbourhood Resident’s Association (hereinafter “NRA”), which developed it for more than 20 years. Over time it became a festival which was property of the NRA, mostly met by the municipal contribution. Its style was very popular and conventional, so it became less attractive for young people. Also, the allocation of economic resources was a little bit dubious. Two groups were created: one clearly identified with the type of festival, recognising the NRA’s authorship, and another that wanted another type of festival and believed in a more plural organisation within the neighbourhood.

At a particular moment, some years ago, the Town Council decided to intervene. Faced with the pressure of a set of
local associations (young people and other opposed to the NRA), the Town Council decided to give a recent Neighbourhood Festival Commission (hereinafter the “NFC) the subvention for the festival. In fact, the organisation of the festival of the traditional NRA was replaced by the new NFC. The latter organised the festival for two years by contributing renewed elements but losing the most popular aspect. Over time, the new NFC was not a Festival Committee, but another entity. The NFC, not resigning itself to lose the power to organising the festival and, in turn, the power in the neighbourhood, collected 400 signatures against the festival model in force and sent them to the Town Council. They mentioned the loss of popular nature, the low participation in some events, the lack of plurality in its organisation, etc.

**The starting point of the conflict situation**

At the initial stage of the conflict, the Town Council faced two neighbourhood entities (NRA and NFC) which wanted to organise the festival alone, without counting on the other association. The Town Council itself was not neutral as it encouraged or supported the change in management, although it was a previous municipal team, thus constituting a third agent in the issue. After unsuccessfully trying to mediate in the situation, a professional of the cultural management and policies, hereinafter “DRC” by the initials, was required as this person had previously carried out a consultancy work on cultural associations by municipal assignment, thus knowing the local associative movement. A mediation work between both associations was assigned to this third person with the aim of reaching an agreement based on the joint organisation of the neighbourhood festival. But the sense, the carrying out, and the experience of the festival on the part of neighbours was above all, beyond reaching an agreement at any price. For this reason, the Town Council resorted to an external consultant specialised in cultural management and policies (this person knew well the meaning of the party for a community), rather than to a professional mediator who did not know the cultural sector to be treated.

**The assignment**

The Town Council, which was the institution watching over the social and cultural richness of the community, was aimed at ensuring that, in no event, the neighbourhood festival and the municipal support turned into a confrontation reason. For this reason, to obtain satisfactory responses for all spokespeople involved, the Town Council decided to start a mediation process managed by a technician specialised in this scope and who, in turn, was external, so that a more profession view, which is exempt from previous judgements or complicities, was provided.

The assignment’s goal was to reach a cooperation agreement between the main entities involved in the organisation of the neighbourhood festival, in which everyone could participate and feel accepted and represented. For this reason, the process was initiated with some basic premises which ruled this mediation process as well as the new organisation.

First, incomplete agreement models not fully focused on the issue were rejected, such as dividing the neighbourhood festival into two days, one day for each entity, dividing the activities of the festival according to their typology, each entity organising the festival in alternate years, etc.

In turn, the Town Council established some basic criteria to rule the organisation of the neighbourhood festival, and all agents involved were informed about them. The festival should therefore:

- take as much advantage as possible of municipal resources.
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- be sensitive and committed to plurality and diversity (generation, culture, gender, different entities and/or groups, institutions, and services).
- respect the rules in force of the Neighbourhood Festival Commission (NFC) or those intended to be created and established as the own entity’s legal framework).
- facilitate and promote the participation and involvement among neighbours as members and collaborators.
- Try to cordial common coexistence and collaboration among entities, citizens, institutions, and services.

First steps

At first, the consultant/mediator met with the Town Council, which was in turn part of the cause and the agent affected by the situation, as well as applicant of the intervention. The objective was to know their position in the issue, their interests, their capacity to contribute to the resolution of the conflict, but also to make them understand that they should have to yield (as the other agents) for the common good, etc., which all needed.

A situation pursuing the comfort emerged in this meeting: if an agreement was not reached, the entity most supported by citizens would be that organising the festival, above their value. Its desire to make an effort to focus more on the issue was not also very clear.

Interviews with agents

Then, DRC conducted a total of 7 interviews with the social entities of the neighbourhood involved in some way in the organisation of the festival, including NRA and NFC. The others were a sports club, two groups of traditional and popular culture, the merger of traders, and 3 parents’ associations (Spanish initials: AMPAs). Each interview, with two or three people from the Management Board, lasted two hours approximately and aimed at knowing the positioning of each entity in relation to the situation.

Some observations applied to the resolution of conflict were as follows:

- Terms “conflict”, and “side” or “party” were avoided in all written documents and in interviews, and “situation” or “agents involved” were used instead.
- The consultant, DRC, presented themselves as someone neutral and foreign to the village and the Town Council, but this person knew the local associative dynamics because of the study previously carried out, as well as the general associative reality and the sense of the festival as they were professionally focused on the management of culture.
- The consultant always informed about the desire of all agents to reach an agreement in which everyone was comfortable, with no winners or losers.
- The consultant presented their autonomy against the Town Council by defining their successful level in the agreement among associations, not in the acceptance of a supposed municipal position which, on the other hand, was very diffuse.
- After the first interviews, the consultant/mediator, DRC, verified that each entity really had different interests and capacities to provide, but all of them were partially right in the initiated process and had a certain possibility to enrich the festival of the village, the last reason of the work. Both the citizenship and the festival would win if the best of each association was included in the organisation. Basically, the NRA could contribute the capacity of popular mobilisation, and the NFC could contribute the capacity of...
A first work was the recognition of the importance that the festival was pleasant for everybody, especially for neighbours, and this aspect was more important than who organised it. This aspect was relatively easy to achieve.

Then, a work based on achieving that each agent recognised the strengths of the others and, in turn, their own weaknesses, was carried out. The need to join forces was considered at the end...for the benefit of the neighbourhood, not just as a mere agreement among associations.

The common meeting

Until then, the agents involved met only the consultant, but not the other agents (although in a small village everyone is known, and they are even relatives). At this point, agents met in a room, and the rapprochement and agreement processes started. First, there were 6 member entities. Then, another one could be included. Each entity was represented by 2-4 people, so there were 20-25 people in the room of the cultural centre of the neighbourhood, all sat down in circle and DRC, the consultant-mediator, addressing the meeting. It was better than the Town Council did not participate in this first meeting (in fact, it did not participate in any other meeting).

DRC, the consultant, started the meeting by:

- Suggesting that each participant introduced themselves.
- Introducing themselves, their professional origin, as well as explaining their role in the process.
- Describing the assignment of the Town Council and the steps previously taken, partially known by all of them as they took part in them through the previous individual interviews in the entity (most people participating in this meeting were the same as in the interviews).
- Summarising the antecedents, but anyone was positively or negatively recognised.
- Describing the current situation as much objective as possible.
- Defining two aspects on which all agents should be agree:
  - The festival was above all a citizenship’s heritage, so the best festival should be organised by thinking on citizenship.
  - In such a process, personal aspirations and relationships should be secondary. Even if somebody consider themselves as an obstacle for the agreement, they should not participate in the process to not stop the work of the others.
- Aiming at recognising the best characteristics of each agent involved.
- At the end, the round of interventions to reaffirm, to explain or to contradict began.

First observations:

- There was a clash of cultures, generations, visions of the festival, and organisational models to a great extent.

The Neighbourhood’s Festival shows the existing changes in our society. In summary, the two opposing models are currently identified based on the following parameters which are included below not as absolute models, but as main models:
A first conclusion of this contrast of models is that both have positive aspects which could be useful to enrich an annual festival, as well as improvable aspects. If both models are complemented, they could be useful to improve the annual festival’s model and organisation.

- On the other hand, there was a personal confrontation, although it was always latent, between the presidents of each association (NRA and NFC).
- It was perceived that the Town Council could not and did not want to play the role of arbitrator when it was also the cause of the situation (for this purpose, a consultant specialised in cultural policies and management was hired to mediate the conflict).
- Also, a solution should be quickly found as the organisation of the festival (however it was organised) should already have begun.

Proposals: consultant’s intervention

The consultant provided some interventions to resolve the situation:

- Given the confrontation between presidents (people with a strong character), they gave other leading people from the two associations (NRA and NFC) and, in turn, the entities presented at the dialogue table the floor. The result was to reduce the clash of people to listen to other less aggressive opinions. Meanwhile, the two most involved presidents did not intervene.
- They looked for and found people of the neighbourhood sufficiently known by all agents which could be a common connection or link, although they are not members of any association.
- To avoid that an entity was not the loser or was absorbed by the other, the creation of a new Coordination of the Neighbourhood Festival, with a new name, was suggested as more people from the neighbourhood could be included, if it was the associations’ desire.
- To avoid personal confrontations, it was suggested that the NRA and NFC was not represented by the current presidents, but by other more flexible people from the entity who were open to dialogue (this aspect was not accepted).
- It was also suggested that the most opposing presidents were not the presidents of the new Coordination, at least for the first years.
- To avoid a simple distribution of activities among entities, specific work committees were suggested to be created (programme, hiring, funds, communication, logistics, etc.) so that different members of several entities collaborating each other could be included. Also, some citizens not belonging to any entity could be useful to avoid the possible distrust among associations.
Regarding the type of festival and, therefore, the programme’s content, the most popular and traditional activities of the NRA (orchestra dancing, child games, bars, etc.) were combined with the youngest and innovative activities of the NFC (youth concerts, circles or groups, new proposals, etc.).

The result: the agreement

After an intense work schedule (4-5 meetings in less than two months), an agreement was finally reached and signed by all entities participating in the process, as well as by the Town Council. Under this agreement, the entities and the Town Council were adhered to some premises related to the annual festival, and a few operation agreements were approved to organise it for the ensuing year and subsequent years.

To sum up, the main agreements were as follows:

1. A new entity is created, the Coordination of the Neighbourhood Festival, with 3 establishments: a management board, work committees, and a general assembly.
2. The management board is made up of all entities participating in the mediation process by providing each one 2 people.
3. According to the entities mentioned above, 3 neighbours of the village, not related to entities, of recognised standing and experience, who know well the festival, are included in the management board.
4. The new positions or responsibilities of this management board will be chosen among their members, by the set of the components of the entity, constituted as assembly.
5. Preferably in the first year, the chairmanship will not fall on any of the previous entities (NRA and NFC).
6. The dialogue and consensus will be promoted as means to make decisions related to the board.
7. Within a maximum period of a month, the management board will call all non-profit entities located in the neighbourhood to invite them to participate in the annual festival of this year.
8. The management board will consider the model of groups or circles.
9. Coinciding with the performance of the festival, the management board will promote the attraction of members and specify the requirements to be a member (social fee, commitment or another aspect).

The keys of success

The success of the agreement was mainly the assessment of the strengths of each one and to make them available for the understanding, the festival, its organisation, and therefore, for the neighbours of the village. It is true that a deep intervention was required to stress the best aspects of each party, the need for reaching an agreement, the capacity of working together, and the maturity of each one to talk to all of them.

Following the criteria of the professional mediation, the language was used in a very careful way, the good understanding with all groups was pursued, the best aspects of all of them were stressed, proposals in which all felt comfortable were pursued, a consensus was reached without winners or losers, an impossible agreement was not forced, etc.

It was considered that the resolution of the situation was based on working in 3 scopes:

- The model of the neighbourhood festival: the desirable type of festival.
The annual festival’s organisation: how reaching an agreement to organise it.
Personal differences: how manage them to not break the understanding.

There were also different desires to participate in the annual festival:

- Entities interested in organising the whole festival.
- Entities interested in contributing an own activity and being equally involved in the general organisation of the festival.
- Entities interested in providing an activity in the festival without participating in the general organisation.

It was important that each association, group or person had clear their involvement degree in the annual festival.

The agreements or disagreements of the least involved entities were hardly worked as they were present at the process.

The intervention of the 3 people invited to participate in the process was also crucial (there were 4 at the beginning, but one of them left the process) to establish criteria, to provide knowledge, to resort to harmony, etc.

Finally, everybody understood that the new agreements forced to look to the future, and not being conditioned by what happened in the past.

**Valuations and recommendations**

After reaching a framework agreement, some valuations and recommendations are included below as they could be useful for a better application:

- At first, and to strengthen the fulfilment of agreements, the Town Council should have an active role in the process. This presence should be focused on the dialogue, the mediation, the application of agreements, etc. A technical role (programming, communication or infrastructures) is not advisable. The Town Council should have a very important role in the transparency of the public funds assigned to the festival and in turn of all its funds, although they are not municipal.
- The three people who individually participate in the board of the new Coordination play an important role in the creation of a positive work atmosphere. They should feel the support of entities and Town Council. New people are required to be considered in case of retirements or needs for change.
- The general structure of the Town Council (mayoralty, city councillor, etc.) should understand that the Neighbourhood’s Festival is a village’s heritage and they should not intervene with decisions which could create divisions and controversy in the Coordination or citizenship.
- To insist in that current presidents are not part of the body, which will be made up of members of their entities. This is a good aspect for the new Coordination but also for the entities which should know how to find new encouragements among their members and to favour the internal change.
- It would be adequate to increase the associative basis of the new Coordination of the Neighbourhood’s Festival by including people, groups, and entities which want to join the organisational work. Committees, in this regard, are a participation space which the Town Council, according to the tendencies of current cultural policies, should favour.
- It is worth making a particular effort with entities and groups which are not now present but are part of the
neighbourhood’s life: Traders Union, parents’ associations, associations of other cultures, etc.

- It is worth stimulating the discussion on the type of Neighbourhood’s Festival wanted for the neighbourhood, thus involving more spokespeople.

**A final reflection**

The difficulty of some entities to find people, others the presidency, to be part of the new Coordination shows an extreme associative fragility. These entities excessively depend on people who are in turn drivers (almost the only ones) of their association, but who, at the same time, could stop their internal regeneration and renewal.

Addendum: a year later, the festival was held satisfactorily, the new Coordination of the Neighbourhood’s Festival is still working as well as already preparing the new festival. The objective seems to be fulfilled!

**References**


7.10. The management of conflicts in cultural management and policies
