

Košice – European Capital of Culture 2013

Place Marketing Workshop

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“As a result of certain place marketing strategies of European Capital of Culture, Košice as a city on the periphery of the country, periphery of the continent and the periphery of the innovative world, we would like to move it to the place from which you wouldn't escape, and maybe, maybe in the future, someone would even like to relocate there.” Mišo Hudák, Jelly Belly, at the TedX Košice

Brief Background

The city marketing of my city of birth has been always present. Usually, concerning on the historical sites that resemble old times of Austro-Hungarian fame and medieval importance as a crossroads on important roads. With the communist times, the bourgeoisie of Košice has been displaced to the countryside and a huge fer factory has broad a large portion of the working class inhabitants to the city, whose children have grown up and now create the majority of the population.

After Slovakia joined the EU, Košice gained an opportunity to become a candidate of European Capital of Culture. In this contest, a group of creative people in the NGO Bona fide, concentrated around some visual artist who studied and thought at the faculty of arts in the local Technical University, started to work on progressive project. Even before, they have settled a unique cultural site in an old Cultural House (traditional communist institution in every community).

Culture-based Marketing

As a capital of culture, the city has to bring some innovative projects that increase city's level of visibility as well as cultural production and environment. Several reconstructions are about to play Berlin-like transformation. Using old army residences, tobacco factory and almost fallen swimming pool for cultural sites aims to support mainly the alternative culture, however, there are still some new classical art festivals attracting visitors from the area to come and enjoy the art.

After the project has become successful the quarrels from the relation city-independent culture-engaged actors became very serious and led towards dismissal of the headmaster of the project (who, by the way, has always been seen as an interrupting element as herself coming from the capital and not being connected with the city).

Actors

As I mentioned before, the initiative started from the civic movement, however, it is not possible not to cooperate with the municipality to win the title. The city itself was motivated by the income of money offered by the award for the ECC. There has been a certain power struggle and the politicians took over the decisive point from the independent actors and chose their candidate to become a new director. He is more serious and like the classical culture much more than the “pseudo postmodern”.

Aims of the marketing

As this project has still many different actors who can apply for a grant for their own implementation, it is hard to cover it in this short summary. However, I have noticed several features of the city promotion during the campaign for the contest.

Košice is a city with a broad multicultural tradition and promoting the always lasting understanding (of course, nothing like that really exists), it has a lot of multiculturally oriented programs. Even though, it is questionable, how this way of promoting social inclusion is acceptable (because it mostly just underlines the differences on purpose), we can see some move on change when talking about minorities – they become more visible and a part of the discourse in the city (Festival Mazel tov, Soup festival...)

Generally, city marketing is concerned on the promotion of the project as a capital of culture. There is also one notion of the aim of making Košice people being proud of their city. Very successful in this way is the Spots project – however, doesn't have much to do with the marketing (it places connections points of suburban inhabitants to the former transformation electricity buildings). With this high expectations from the project, the real impact on the local-patriotism is much more the shame for the finance-tunneling so well known in every Central European city operating with the EU money. Therefore, it is much more the disgust with corruption and high-brow culture that is a result of the contemporary preparations and current realizations of the project, that citizens perceive.

To conclude

Promoting the culture as a center of the city's attracting point has to be very sensitive with the local moods. In a much more industrial than intellectual city (however it is heart-breaking for me to admit), it is not easy to educate the audience bringing the Berliner-style parties and contemporary art. It should be much more sensitive also for the specificities of the region, the infrastructure and the possibilities of the surrounding. As it is much easier to get to the mountains and Budapest than to Berlin, if promoting the city, regional specificities could be more successful.