

Ethnographic Approach for Street Performers as Cultural Entrepreneurs

Authors : Marta Polec

Abstract : The paper outlines the problem of street performances in Poland in context of humanistic management studies. The Author perceives activity of street performers of various art and entertainment actions as a phenomenon of informal organizing, self-management and cultural entrepreneurship in urban sphere. What has to be highlighted, performative street art is not currently being an interest of scientific research as often as visual street art. That is why the Author indicates the need of including new approaches of humanistic and social disciplines, especially different management paradigms, in examining various aspects of the activity of street performers. The paper shows the results of ethnographic study based on anthropological interviews, participant observation non-participant observation, shadowing, field notes, audiovisual documentation and text analysis. The fieldwork was performed since 2014 in the old towns and major areas of several the most popular touristic Polish cities, mainly in Gdansk, Cracow, Lublin, Warsaw, and Wroclaw. The research group included street artists of various kinds of performative arts. The investigation was prepared within the 'Ethnography of the informal organization of street artists in Poland' project, as a part of Diamond Grant programme (the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland). The first conclusion of the study is that street shows form a way of artistic self-realization and unusual promotion of creative activity in public space. As street performance helps to make some extra money and even earning a living in general, it seems to constitute a new profession. Street performers as a specific environment usually know each other and in many ways cooperate informally to carry on their shows successfully. Secondly, this activity brings plenty benefits for the local communities. Street shows attract inhabitants and tourists quite often by appealing to intangible cultural heritage and memorializing it. They also pose a space for discussing current social issues. Moreover, they disseminate relatively inexpensive public access to culture, but also state an example of social courage of choosing unconventional occupation. Finally, currently being used terms of street performers/street artists/buskers in different languages, as instance as in Polish, are still fluent and undefined. As a consequence, it brings implications for existing common knowledge about street performers, for example in establishing and implementing public policies. It impedes solving many ethical and social dilemmas concerning the question of performances in public sphere, which in some cases seem to be related to, as: children's work, beggars' practices or question of harmony of public space. The main aim of this study was to expose street performances as yet undefined profession, including different possibilities of interacting with the audience, based on providing impressions, experiences and memories. Although the issue seems to be current and common, in indicated context there is a lack of equal and unified approach of managing urban sphere, which in practice differs both in informal rules and official policies concerning street performances not only in cities in Poland, but also generally in Europe.

Keywords : informal, organizing, street performance, urban sphere

Conference Title : ICCM 2018 : International Conference on Cultural Management

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : August 27-28, 2018