

CULTURAL DATA PRODUCTION IN TODAY'S ROMANIA. TWO GENERATIONS

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Rezumat: În prima parte a articolului de față prezentăm modelul producerii datelor culturale în Franța, țară cu care România are multe afinități și asemănări. În a doua parte, ne oprim asupra producerii datelor culturale în România postcomunistă. Identificăm principalele cercetări care au furnizat date culturale, ne oprim asupra metodologiei și scopurilor, reconstituim dinamica producerii datelor culturale și constatăm existența a două generații diferite de cercetare.

Cuvinte cheie: producerea datelor culturale, cercetări cantitative, cercetări calitative, consum cultural, politici culturale

Abstract: In the first part of this article the model of cultural data production in France is presented, a country which has many correspondences and similarities with Romania. In the second part, we discuss the production of cultural data in post-communist Romania. We identify the main researches that provided cultural data, we expose the methodology and goals, and reconstruct the dynamics of cultural data production; as a result, we have identified two different generations of research.

Key words: cultural data production, quantitative research, qualitative research, cultural consumption, cultural policies

1. Introduction. The French model: administration, “professionals in culture” and academics

Cultural data production in Romania has a rather poor history; only for the last ten years have researchers developed alternatives to official statistics, focusing on institutions, i.e. those of the National Institute of Statistics. Since most researches in the field of cultural data production in recent years is based on the French model, before presenting the dynamics of producing such data in Romania, we intend to make a brief presentation of the French background. To achieve this, we will use a survey undertaken by Matthieu Bera and Yvon Lamy [2003]. The latter can serve as a first point of comparison, on one hand, and, on the other hand, it gives us an idea of the possible directions of development in local production of cultural data.

According to the two authors, there are three types of players involved in conducting such surveys: administration, that produces public statistics, “professionals in culture” and academics.

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In France, public statistics are mainly conducted by INSEE² and the Ministry of Culture, and represent the main source of data in question. National Institute of Statistics vision is twofold: an economist one, when practices are treated as expenditure incurred by “cultural products” and an anthropological one, when it focuses on leisure or social life. In general, the economist point of view prevails and cultural practices are studied within the household expenditures. In the '60s, the Ministry of Culture takes over some of INSEE tasks, i.e. those strictly related to cultural practices. It mainly deals with the production of data from surveys carried out by various cultural institutions that have interviewed their own public; it conducts national surveys on specialized areas, types of public and places of cultural consumption; it commissions surveys through “procurement notice”, thus trying to initiate a partnership with universities specialized in cultural issues. Over time, these surveys are increasingly used as a means of assessing the state’s cultural policies.

The professionals in culture who come from the commercial sector (cultural industries, publishing houses, media, cinema, record companies) or public cultural institutions (libraries, museums, cultural heritage centers, etc.) have different motivations for understanding the public and develop specific forms to study it. Those from the commercial sector are the professionals in dissemination of cultural goods and they are interested in “market” issues, so they adopt the language of marketing: “frequency”, “impact”, “general public”, “consumption”, “and customers”. The survey – introduced in France by Jean Stoetzel, according to the model of George Gallup – is their favorite data production instrument. The questionnaire with closed questions is the most commonly used production method. The media is by far the most prolific producer of such surveys. Professionals in public cultural services become interested in cultural practices much later. Some affirm that there is some public resistance to such measurements, while others are skeptical regarding the intention to measure culture and reduce it to such concepts as “practices” and “consumption”. However, the number of surveys begins to grow. Concerning the museums, in order to initiate such surveys, even a law was adopted, Tasca law, in 2002, according to which the name “National Museum” is only awarded to those museums that show a practical interest in visitors³.

² Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques.

³ The Museum of Jewish Art and History is an exception. Since its establishment in 1998, the Museum relied on the deep knowledge of the visitors. The managers had in view: to know the visitors from the socio-demographic point of view (age, gender, social origin, geographical origin, etc.); to identify the relationships they establish with the museum due to their religious, cultural, civic identity, their knowledge and degree of sociability; to assess the practical and physical relationships with the institution, the use of mediation means, their itinerary inside, as well as the scenography (temporary or not), the functionality evaluation; to know the effects exhibitions produce at the representations level and to stimulate the relationship of visitors with the exhibitions and the museum. Surveys on temporary exhibitions and permanent ones are made, and data are communicated to managers and to those responsible with public relations.

Except for some important Parisian museums (Louvre, Orsay, Cité des Sciences, Grand Galerie de l'évolution), the interest for elaborate study of their own public is quite low.

Academics, the third category of players, come from many fields – sociology, economics, ethnology, history, etc. – and their motivations for studying the cultural practices are different. However, contrary to current representations, they do not have a monopoly in approaching these practices. Their main interest is “academic”, in other words, to attend meetings, communication sessions, training courses, writing books and articles. Their work does not depend essentially on the deep knowledge of the public, as in the case of professionals in culture.

However, there is not a clear separation between the academic, administrative and commercial environment. There are many partnerships and even a migration of professionals from one sector to another. Autonomous researches, like fundamental studies, alternate with those based on contract, with practical aims. According to the two authors, we can place on an imaginary axis, on the left, the disciplines and academics concerned mainly with academic matters and, in particular, heuristic, grouped in a “speculative pole” and, on the right, people with a special interest for practical applications in a “practical and theoretical pole.” Naturally, not all fields of study have the same adhesion to the problems of economic and political players. Historic surveys are less “useful” for the latter, while sociological researches respond better to the needs of studying the commercial or administrative sector. Sociology is between the two poles, so it is difficult to establish a well-determined place on the imaginary axis proposed. It depends rather on the orientation that every sociologist gives it. At the same time, changes that occurred in recent decades, reconsidering the university's role in contemporary society and the pressures of important social changes move the academic environment closer to the “practical and theoretical” pole.

First of all, the current number of students in universities has increased considerably. Universities must meet both the students' expectations and the demands coming from the job market, from private or institutional area. Professional training must develop simultaneously quite different skills, such as the relationship with the media, communication abilities, public relations, management, law, etc. New jobs in cultural sector require knowledge of legal, economic, sociological and historical aspects. So it happens that many of the traditional disciplines are reconsidered and revised and new disciplines become increasingly important, as with communication. Among the traditional disciplines that have opened in a spectacular way to cultural issues we mention law studies and, especially, the economic studies. Economy of culture has developed in France in the 70s and 80s especially, primarily due to the institutional demands for assessment and justification of cultural policies.

Then, it found an important development in the cultural marketing, studying the behavior of consumers of culture while using more and more sophisticated instruments and performing a mediation role between supply and demand, between cultural goods and the public. With regard to public cultural services, there's an interest

in economic and practical issues, such as the optimal level of entrance fees to museums.

2. Cultural data production in Romania. Two generations

After the fall of the dictatorship in Romania, political and economic issues have captured so much interest of common people and political power that cultural issues have been long put aside. The most discussed topic during this period was that of Romania's transition from centralized economy and dictatorial leadership to a market economy and a democratic society and also the new society problems: poverty, unemployment, migration, corruption. It was difficult to place culture in this equation and this takes the form of a rather civic and political culture, so a long period passed until we have data concerning Romanians' cultural habits and cultural consumption. With the disappearance of political censorship and restoration of freedom of expression in 1989, the issue of culture appears resolved or at least unproblematic.

Data producing, mainly of the quantitative type, after the fall of communism was quickly restored, especially by the National Commission for Statistics⁴ and the Research Institute for Quality of Life (ICCV), an institution established by government decision in January 1990 within the Romanian Academy. Then, little by little, the emergence of polling institutes for public opinion (local branches of international institutions), some academic institutions or NGOs, diversified data production and the next step was to break the monopoly of quantitative researches and the qualitative methodologies have begun to gain recognition. We will not make an analysis of social data producing in post-communist Romania here, but we will reveal how the interest in producing cultural data gradually appeared and we will make a synthesis of those on cultural consumption.

Since 1990, the Research Institute for Quality of Life (ICCV) has been launching a comprehensive multiannual research program – Quality of Life Survey, coordinated by Ioan Mărginean. Among the many issues studied, there are some questions that seek to find out how often people read books and newspapers, go to the cinema, theater and concert, opera, and TV. Unfortunately, beyond the frequency, which is useful in determining the dynamics of cultural consumption for long periods of time, we do not find out anything about the profile of the consumer of culture from the published reports.

In 1994, the newly founded Foundation for an Open Society initiated the “Barometer of Public Opinion – BOP” which will last until 2007. Over the years there have been approached many subjects, from voting intentions and trust in institutions and politicians to corruption, migration, religion, sexual life or accession to the EU, but it has never been focused on cultural consumption. Starting from 1998, when the

⁴ In 1998, it became the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, and since 2001 - National Institute of Statistics

sample size was increased, and the number of items increased, in some barometers there was introduced a question to find out how often people read newspapers, listen to radio, watch TV, read books and discuss political issues. Data presentation booklets do not offer a profile of the reader of books, for example; instead, the questionnaire form and collected database is made public and free (the www.soros.ro), so we can have secondary analysis whenever we like.

In 1999, within Soros Open Network (SON), Romania, along with the Open Society Foundation (OSF), the CONCEPT Foundation is established, aiming at “integrating cultural values into the open society” and that practically continues, under a new form, the cultural projects developed by OSF. In 2000, CONCEPT Foundation carried out the study “Cultural market in Romania”, designed in three dimensions: 1. cultural products from Romania in 2000 and institutional players that participate directly in their production and management, 2. financing cultural products and stakeholders; 3. cultural consumption of the population. The study is not based on a survey at national level, but on the production of data from the Ministry of Culture, libraries, the Institute for Cultural Memory and publications of the National Commission for Statistics, and a series of qualitative data collected during interviews. Data were collected and processed by Gallup Organization Romania. The third direction we are interested in includes the dynamics of cultural consumption between 1993 and 2000 (collecting data from the BOP of FSD, and life quality assessment of ICCV) and the profile of theater, concerts, opera or classical music consumer in 2000 (BOP secondary analysis of FSD, in November, 2000). It is far from the requirements of a classic research of cultural consumption, but it is the first clear sign of growing interest for the production of cultural data.

In 2004, British Council Romania initiates the research “Young in Romania”, conducted by The Gallup Organization. The issues that are being approached are tolerance, volunteering, and the study of foreign languages or accession to EU, but also some interesting things from the cultural consumption perspective: cultural activities during free time, musical preferences, information sources for leisure activities and interest in the cultural products of other nations. The sample is representative for the young people, ages 15-35, from Romanian cities: Bucharest, Brasov, Cluj, Constanta, Iasi, Sibiu and Timisoara.

Year 2005 is significant for the cultural data production in Romania: the Center for Research on Culture (CSCDC)⁵ is established under the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, and one of the main projects is the Barometer of Cultural Consumption, which published data for 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009. The first issue of the Barometer set the following objectives: 1. to measure the development of cultural infrastructure for the distribution of cultural goods 2. and the degree of participation to cultural activities 3. to measure the cultural needs of the population

⁵ In 2009 it is reorganized and it changed its name to Center for Research and Consultancy on Culture (CCCDC).

according to the types of cultural, creative and entertainment industries. The objectives are enriched from one edition to another, but the logic remains the same: the research follows the cultural goods cycle, from the “production” to distribution institutions (bookstores, theaters, exhibitions, cultural centers, libraries, etc.) and consumption, to which the public perception of cultural institutions is added. In this logic, the subjects that are being approached are: the distribution infrastructure of cultural goods and services (accessibility, geographical spread, regional differences), private cultural infrastructure, the relationship between social stratification, cultural stratification and cultural capital, consumer cultural behavior on each sector (theater, film, heritage, written culture), types of cultural consumers and their profiles, cultural tourism, free time and leisure, etc. For all issues of Cultural Barometer there was a nationally representative sample for the population over 15 years old. Having in view that the Public Opinion Barometers of FSD were based on nationally representative sample for the population over 18 years old, we must pay great attention when comparing and interpreting data.

To analyze cultural consumption, CCCDC makes a distinction between public and private consumption. Public consumption falls into three categories: consumption of “elitist cultural” (opera/ operetta, theater, museums/ exhibitions), consumption of “mass culture” (entertainment shows/ music festivals/ local events, going to cinema) and non-cultural activities, leisure activities (shopping in supermarkets and malls, body care activities, attending sporting competitions, going to discos/ clubs, travel, going in parks or green areas). Private cultural consumption is measured by watching TV and purchasing behavior of cultural goods (books, movies, music).

In 2006, Iasi Municipality is funding a project entitled “Study on cultural consumption of Iasi population”, carried out by the European Centre for Resources and Consultancy (CERC) in Iasi. It is a qualitative research, based on inquires, and also a quantitative one, based on a survey on a representative sample of Iasi population of 15 years and over 15. The specific objective is to identify the cultural offer, on one hand, and on the other hand the cultural consumption (theater, cinema, concert, opera / operetta, music, literature, heritage, media, etc.).

In 2009, the Cultural Center of Arad County, in collaboration with the Intercultural Institute Timișoara initiated and carried out a sociological research project on the analysis of cultural consumption in Arad. Its goals are to assess the social impact of the cultural strategy for 2003-2007 in Arad County and to identify current trends in cultural consumption. The objectives are: 1. to identify the cultural consumption structure in Arad County, 2. to determine people's expectations on cultural consumption and 3. to enable consumers evaluate the cultural offer available. It was an exclusively quantitative research and was based on two representative samples, one for the Arad city and the other for the rest of the county, population for 16 years and over 16.

Also, in 2009, the Romanian Institute for Assessment and Strategy (IRES) conducted a rather atypical survey for Romania – Proust's famous questionnaire was

applied to a nationally representative sample. Although it does not apply directly to cultural consumption, we can find out Romanians' preferences regarding prose, poets, artists, literary heroes and heroines. In 2010, the same IRES carried out a national survey on adults concerning the "People activities and cultural practices of Romanians in 2010". We find out from here that Romanians bought books, went to shows, to the cinema, listened to music, and the equipment they have for private culture consumption.

In 2011, the Romanian Institute for Assessment and Strategy (IRES) carried out another research report on "Reading habits of Romanians". It is the first time this topic is the main objective of a national survey. From the technical data, we learn that the sample is representative for persons aged 18 years and over, and that interviews were conducted by telephone. Having in view that all researches mentioned before were based on face to face interviews, it is difficult to compare the data obtained. In fact, the sample is representative for the population of/over 18 years that has a telephone, which means that some of the poor rural population is excluded, so, having in view the entire adult population from Romania, we can have an over-representation of those who read and especially of those who buy books. In any case, if data are managed with care, within the representation limits, the conclusions are interesting. The research approaches such issues as: frequency of reading books, reading speed, genres, favorite titles and authors, reading motivations, attitudes and behaviors related to books, purchasing books, personal library, etc.

We note that until 2000 the production of cultural data is secondary and exclusively quantitative. Concept Foundation study is the first research that focuses entirely on a present cultural issue and remains relatively singular until 2005 when the Barometers of cultural consumption began to appear. After 2005, the number of researches is growing and an interesting fact is that some local administrations are beginning to commission studies on local or regional cultural consumption. Basically, a new generation of researches in the field of culture begins.

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