

The role of strategy for the sustainability of cultural-educational units in the time of crisis

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Abstract: This paper examines and thoroughly analyzes the role of the strategy for the sustainability of cultural-educational units in the time of crisis. At a theoretical level, the schools of strategic thinking are analyzed and the stages of the strategic plan are developed. Then, the application of the theory to an existing museum, which has a cultural and at the same time educational role, is examined with an emphasis on the aims and objectives of its strategic plan, as well as the evaluation of its advantages and disadvantages.

The following paper deals with the concept of strategy and its main approaches, from the classical to the modern view and describes the basics elements. The role and necessity of strategic planning is analyzed through plans for the sustainability of cultural-educational units, especially in times of crisis. Concluding the theoretical part, the stages of development of the strategy of a cultural unit are described. Then the case of the Benaki Museum is studied. The development stages of the strategic plan are examined based on the museum's strategic plan for the years 2012-2015, its advantages and disadvantages, as well as the aims and objectives of the museum's strategy in the time of crisis.

Keywords: Strategic, Schools of strategic thinking, Strategic plan, Cultural and economic crisis, Sustainability, Benaki Museum.

I. STRATEGY: THEORETICAL APPROACHES

The concept of strategic

By the term "strategy", in its general sense, we describe "the determination of objectives, in general terms, and the planning of the movements to be made for the success of a purpose"¹. As a military terminology it was used to define the art of the commander to lead the troops [1]. Gradually, the concept found a field of application in business.

Accepting the definition given by Igor Ansoff, strategy is "a common line between the activities of the organization and its products or markets, which determine the basic nature of business activity before, now, and in the future" [2]. Therefore, the strategy, evaluating the present situation, examines the advantages, the opportunities, but also the weaknesses and the risks that come from the external environment in search of the sustainability of the organization [3].

The theoretical schools of strategic thinking

During the 1990s, various schools of strategic thinking were formed, from one-dimensional to more pluralistic and with processes sometimes predetermined and sometimes emergent, as Whittington described [3].

¹ The definition of the term "strategy" was used by the common modern Greek dictionary, available on the Website: http://www.greek-language.gr/greekLang/modern_greek/tools/lexica/triantafyllides/search.html?lq=%CF%83%CF%84%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE&dq=08-01-2014

Starting with the classical school, the oldest and most widespread, which plans the strategy in advance, hierarchically in detail, and rationally with the goal of profit. It has a long-term nature and by defining the main aims and objectives, it adopts an axis of action and distribution of resources [3]. Evolutionary is based on changes in the external environment of the organization and how far its choices go along with them. The systemic, with predetermined logic but pluralistic, follows relativistic standards, connected to the cultural context and local social forces, which is why it is of limited spatial application.

The four schools of strategic thinking

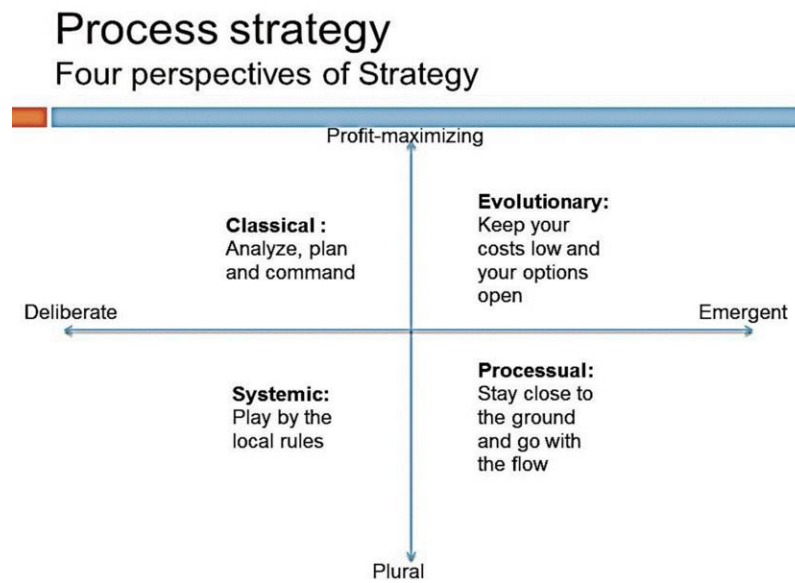


Figure 1. [4].

Finally, the procedural, shapes the strategy, through the influences-effects inside the organization. It does not maintain hierarchical structures since the agencies-groups interested in the sustainability of the organization form and are involved in the strategic plan. As dynamically formed, it must take into account innovation and creative learning in the context of its processes, as well as integrate the interactions of the organization's stakeholders and assimilate them into its plan.

Today, the most recent school, describes strategy as the effective and efficient management of an organization's productive resources and the creation of processes that facilitate the development of skills and abilities. In any case, this strategy presupposes continuous decision-making that possibly modifies the initial decisions but is always directed towards the intended results.

Education strategy (Instructional strategy) and Educational design (Instructional design)

The educational strategy (instructional strategy) and therefore the educational design (instructional design) are the axes on which an educational program will be structured.

By the term educational strategy, we mean the process of educational intervention in the development of skills. With the term educational design, we explain the way of planning educational change, which starts from the acceptance of certain theories of learning and leads to the determination of the educational material and assessment measures that will be used in the educational environment that will be created [5]. More specifically, the conduct of educational planning contains the determination of the current level of understanding (learner understanding state) of students, the determination of the final design of education and the creation of a new innovative concept using specific means in a field of relationships with the goal of change, the restoration and essentially the transition to the new-desired educational level.

At the same time, this course is supported by pedagogical learning theories which help so that the conclusions of all changes are observable and measurable through the scientific process. Ultimately, the educational strategy concerns the practical achievement of the instructional theories, while the educational design refers to the content, the way the design will act most effectively and the way the material will be presented.

The role of strategic planning for the development of cultural units in times of crisis

The political and socio-economic processes, in which the cultural organizations develop, lead them to form strategic plans. Their goal is the realization of their vision, based on the principles of general (public) interest and rational management for the production of cultural goods [6].

Since cultural management aims at success and not exclusively at profit, strategic planning is an administrative challenge [7] [8]. Strategic planning is the set of plans that manage the material-human resources of the organization for the realization of its mission and sustainability [6].

Benefits arise from the design of strategic plans such as: projection of the organization into the future, definition of consumer needs, specification of the organization's objectives, coherence of decisions-activities, development of communication and coordination of the organization, interconnection of values-resources and mission of the organization, establishment of control criteria efficiency-sustainability of the organization, so that it can effectively respond to external changes [3].

The viability of a cultural organization is threatened when it lacks a strategy. Then, its strategy must be more disciplined and flexible. This can be seen if one tries to answer the five fundamental questions posed by Byrnes [9] regarding the existence of a forward-looking plan: "Why? What; When; Where; Who;".

It goes without saying that careful thought, imagination and mainly time will be needed. According to Lord and Markert [10], the strategic plan yields several advantages:

- controls and improves performance
- provides the framework for decision-making
- creates the basis for taking initiatives
- discern ways of motivating staff
- identifies changes in the organization's external environment and the consequences

Therefore, the organization clearly and more precisely formulates its purposes and individual objectives, implements more far-reaching policies, takes care of the coherence of its activities, becomes more flexible to changes in its internal and external environment, strengthens its coherence between its mission and of its available resources with respect to its values and finally acquires the ability to control the effectiveness and sustainability of its strategy [3], in all stages of its development.

Crisis periods, especially in the cultural sector, appear structurally complex, because at the same time government reduce the expenses on culture and the flow of resources to the private sector [11]. The crisis is a risk and an opportunity that favors flexible tactics and not long-term strategies [12].

Stages of strategy development

Several scholars take a stand about the process of strategy design in a cultural organization. In order to summarize the common places and the possible deviations of the placements, we will follow the following arrangement [3]:

Formulation of the objectives:

- Assessment of the present situation
- Choosing a strategy
- Performance control

In any case, strategy development focuses on the demands and needs of the target audience without ignoring the competition. The mission and goals are revised whenever necessary [10]. Moreover, it is necessary to approach it with practicality and without vagueness [9].

Formulation of objectives

Objectives are realistic, distinct and specific and describe how the organization will fulfill its mission in a specific time [13]. They are directly related to the mission of the organization and their clear definition gives it the advantage of safe management, activation of its staff and satisfaction of stakeholders [10].

A clear mission defines the organization's reason for existence and is the first and perhaps the most difficult step, which takes time [9].

Τα στοιχεία της ανάλυσης SWOT δεν είναι απόλυτα, αλληλεπιδρούν άμεσα και διαφορετικά σε κάθε οργανισμό

Assessment of the present situation

Investigating the dynamics of an organization is a process internationally called "SWOT analysis", which describes its strengths and weaknesses (Strengths, Weaknesses), i.e. factors of the external environment that affect it, as well as the opportunities and threats that exist (Opportunities, Threats), as these are defined by the internal factors [14].

The most important thing is to be open and honest with the situation of the organization at a given moment since as usual a strength can turn out to be a weakness while an opportunity can eventually be a threat [9]. SWOT analysis elements are not absolute, they interact directly and differently in every organization.

Choosing a strategy

The next step is to formulate the strategic direction of the organization and define the framework of action in order to achieve the formulated mission and individual objectives, taking into account the elements of the SWOT analysis. Objectives are realistic, distinct and specific and describe how the organization will fulfill its mission in a specific time [13].

They are directly related to the organization's mission and their clear definition gives it the advantage of safe management, activation of its staff and satisfaction of stakeholders [10].

Performance control

Last but very important stage is the control of performance and effectiveness. It is an effective continuous process, which with reliable practical criteria investigates the results, so that the organization is sustainable and improving, the public is satisfied and its productive resources are evolving [3].

If we adapt what is mentioned in Wheelen & Hunger [14] for companies, control can cause structural adjustments in the implementation of strategy to their benefit.

II. CASE STUDY: BENAKI MUSEUM (PERIOD 2012 – 2015)

The Benaki Museum, today, is one of the largest Museums in our country and is the oldest organization operating in Greece as a Private Law Foundation. With the extensive sections of its exhibits, which cover more than one cultural actors, but also its more general function which serves several social needs, it offers a perhaps unique example of a complex structure within the wider network of museum institutions in Greece.

The Benaki Museum is housed in one of the few neoclassical buildings that still resist the aesthetic alteration of post-war Athens. The increase in objects, staff, visitors and activities during the last two decades forced the Benaki Museum to redefine its physiognomy based on the requirements of modern reality, but also to ensure the conditions for a more comfortable future operation. So, it was deemed necessary to decongest the hardware and services with new annexes.

In addition to its historical collections, the museum expanded into contemporary art. Its activities include workshops, guided tours, lectures and events.

The structure of the strategic plan

The strategic plan of the Museum for the period 2012-2015 after telephone communication with the Office of the Finance and Operations Director of the Benaki Museum was recorded as follows: it is adjusted - harmonized with the state funding program.

Its structure has the following form:

- Introduction with a brief description of its mission, strategic goals and values.
- Summary presentation of special areas of interest: increasing its audience in real and digital environments, collections, research, education, exhibitions, strengthening its national and international profile, building renovation, digital convergence, strengthening staff capabilities, increasing revenue, improvement of its children's section.

- Extensive reference to the financial context: The state grant budget for the following years, the balanced budget with the state grant and own resources as revenue, as well as all projected expenses for the period 2012-2015.

The mission, values and key strategic objectives

The museum's mission is to enrich people's lives and inspire creativity through promoting knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of its subject matter. All who work towards this goal believe in the following core values: generosity in offering service, imagination in creativity, consistency and seriousness in the way of working.

The individual strategic objectives are defined as:

- To offer its audience the quality of its experience and the best possible access to the collections, in a real and digital environment.
- To be recognized and respected as one of the most important museums in Greece.
- To help by promoting the creative economy of the country.
- To operate with financial and organizational self-sufficiency and efficiency.

The pros and cons

The museum faithfully follows the theoretical lines of a strategic plan, with a detailed record of its goals and the ways of their implementation.

Both the policy of continuous control of its capabilities through annual cyclical planning and efficiency indicators, as well as the detailed delimitation of its financial frameworks, are strong advantages in order for its goals to be achievable. However, looking at the individual figures, the signs of the financial crisis are visible. The budget is on a downward trend, which will probably affect the efficiency of the objectives in the long term, especially since the increase in its own revenues does not automatically guarantee cash balance. So, his expansionist intent is not entirely consistent with the economic data. In addition, no form of danger is highlighted enough and this raises questions about how it perceives the current crisis (telephone communication with the Office of the Financial and Operational Director of the Benaki Museum).

The function of Programming at the Benaki Museum

In the midst of the economic crisis and after the recent reductions of the state grant by 60%, as well as the minimization of the grants, they have caused a suffocating atmosphere in the operation of the Benaki Museum, resulting in the cancellation of planned events. After all, the numbers are typical, when for 2011 the grant was only 700,000 euros, while in 2010 it was 2.3 million. And we must consider that the museum has 200 people and operates six branches. In addition to the state grant and sponsorships, its smooth operation is supplemented by income from real estate, sales and tickets, but given the economic crisis, everything decreased, it was forced to make cuts in the salaries of its staff and layoffs.

The Director of the Museum, Mr. Angelos Delivorias, foreseeing the great risk, undertook a great campaign to expand his audience and find resources with sponsorship programs, in order to face the difficult financial situation and cover most of the expenses.

The new Support Program of the Benaki Museum includes:

- 15 categories of Members with an annual subscription
- Three categories of Corporate Members with an annual subscription
- Revised the institution of Sponsorships
- Possibility of online Donations
- Donation receptions at the entrances of the Museum annexes
- Possibility of voluntary participation [15]

A significant boost to the museum could be provided by the utilization of a large real estate that came into its possession through inheritance from donors. In our opinion, the Benaki Museum with its huge property is able, with proper planning and rational operation, to easily overcome any problems presented today. Provided that the announcements on behalf of the managers of the Museum for its expansion to new buildings and for the opening of new annexes in the midst of the serious

crisis, are choices and moves that will be studied with realism and wisdom (telephone communication with the Office of the Financial and Operational Director of the Benaki Museum).

III. CONCLUSION

We examined the formation of the strategy of cultural-educational organizations, analyzing the concept of strategy and its importance in today's special economic conditions and identifying the stages of development of the strategic plan. The existence of a clear mission, the clearly formulated individual strategic objectives, the thorough and mature evaluation of the current state of the cultural-educational organization through the examination of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks required by the -SWOT- analysis, the appropriate choice of strategy and ultimately performance control are catalytic elements that can ensure sustainability in a cultural-educational organization.

As a culmination of this analysis, we investigated the case of the Benaki museum, we came to a positive conclusion, since the development stages of its strategic plan ultimately work to the benefit of its mission and goals. We identified the advantages and disadvantages of its design and evaluated them, after a thorough study of the development stages of its strategic plan, its financial data and its performance indicators.

The main conclusion, in relation to the current economic reality, is that the strategy should not exceed the possibilities offered by the funding, but should be flexible enough to realize the mission and objectives of each organization with the current economic data of the society of information and knowledge.

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