

Katalin Csatlós né Komáromi

Exhibition of Old Photographs on the History of Small Settlements in the Sárospatak District

1. Best practice selection criteria

Photographic documentation presenting the history of settlements can primarily be found in the form of old photographs cherished by families, in the archives of long-standing organizations and companies or probably in the collections of local libraries. The systematic collection and arrangement of these as well as their presentation to the general public may be important parts of cultural education activities, especially with respect to small settlements. The implementation of such an exhibition, from the idea to realization, brings information to surface and evokes knowledge in relation to the communities of the settlements concerned that may be decisive for the further operation of the communities living there today. In the course of collecting photographs you may find correlations, traditions to process and values from the past centuries that may form the basis for a future settlement and community development strategy. The process of collecting also reveals the histories of the individual families; the charismatic persons as well as the church, economic, cultural and self-educating communities of the villages emerge one by one, which may give a great impetus to community life.

It was among others the above aspects that the House of Culture of Sárospatak was motivated by when providing help to settlements in the district for the implementation of the programme series. The exhibitions were implemented with a uniform image but adjusted to the characteristics of the individual villages and were a great success at all sites. Six of the villages around the town used the opportunity of getting methodological assistance from the Sárospatak institution for organizing the exhibition and doing the related background work. The local authorities and colleagues working in cultural education reported about the success and further beneficial effects of the exhibition without exception.

2. Organization(s) / person(s) the best practice can be related to

House of Culture and Library of Sárospatak, the local authorities and the cultural education staff of the villages of Zalkod, Olaszliszka, Herceggút, Makkoshotyka, Kenézlő and Erdőhorváti.

Organizers of the programme: Katalin Csatlósné Komáromi, Director of the House of Culture and Library of Sárospatak; István Bordás, Director of Sárospatak Gallery, Éva Leskóné Szemán exhibition organizer; Sándor Megyeri, Director of the House of Culture of Olaszliszka; Antal Joósz, Director of the House of Culture of Herceggút; Gézáné Molnár, Director of the House of Culture of Zalkod.

3. Stakeholders and beneficiaries of the best practice

The programme primarily targeted the populations of the settlements; the local communities. The thematic topics presented at the exhibitions – church life, the operation of economic units, cultural events, the history of educational institutions, festivities related to agricultural products, sports events – concerned almost all age groups. The audience that showed up in high numbers at the exhibition openings at all sites confirmed that locals were curious of how the photographs they had lent for the exhibition were used and presented, and remembering together and evoking stories from the past were unique experience for those present. In several cases the storytelling and conversations after the official openings of the exhibition gave new inspiration to the senior officials of the settlements. The exhibitions that could usually be visited for one month at all sites attracted a large number of visitors; there were cases when the same person visited the exhibition several times. Proof for the latter includes comments in the guest book. It can clearly be established that the beneficiaries of the exhibitions were not only the persons who contributed by their donations to the realization of the exhibition but in the long run the whole community of the respective settlements benefited from them.

4. Objectives and activities of the best practice

The primary objective of the exhibition was to present the history of the settlements based on photographic documentation found locally. The past traditions and the communities thus revealed form the basis of a new planning process. The programme aims to reinforce local identity, enhance the feeling of community bonding and select role models who, with their

activities, have contributed to the development of the respective settlements efficiently. In the course of the collection work several family stories surfaced that may be important in the life of the village and have an impact still felt today. The thematically presented photographs highlighted many architectural monuments or even elements significant from the point of view of architectural heritage. The photographs presenting the lives of families gave an impression of living standards in earlier times; numerous conclusions could be made as regards financial status and lifestyle. The cultural education staff responsible for collecting the photographs and their assistants acquired material sufficient to fill a village calendar book. By recording the stories heard in writing or documenting them in any other ways, new products were added to local history.

When advertising the photo exhibitions, organizers faced several questions. People were usually willing to lend the photographs cherished at home but wanted to have guarantee about their safety and return. The organizers made records of the photographs collected by entering the names and addresses, and guaranteed they would be kept intact. In practice they worked with the original photographs, while in several places their digitalisation also took place for a future database or other further use. The photographs delivered until the specified deadline were arranged thematically on boards. The arranged photographs were fixed to black photo cardboard using double sided adhesive tape, with photo captions or a title given per board. The thus prepared exhibition installation was placed on the wall or on screens with glass cover. The photographs not used were arranged into an album, which could be inspected by those interested in the exhibition space. The exhibitions were usually opened by the mayor, while members of the local nursery or primary school or a civil organization specialized in culture played a role as other contributors. The invitations were made after previous consultations with the participants by the institution in Sárospatak, while the local authorities sent them out to the addressees.

In the course of the best practice, villages that lacked the necessary material conditions (screens, glass panels, cardboards, etc.) were provided them by the House of Culture and Library.

5. Area(s) affected by the best practice

The implemented programme realized the activity of exhibition primarily, while it also significantly contributed to practicing non-formal learning. The photographs exhibited conveyed church historical, local historical as well as

culture historical knowledge towards the population. At all sites, the audience was able to identify emotionally with the atmosphere strengthening the sense of belonging; the anecdotes of a personal tone sometimes brought those present to tears. Different generations “were on the same length” when evoking the personality of an influential local teacher, pastor or landlord. By remembering together a new, strong connection was formed between those present, with various positive effects involved.

6. Territorial scope of the best practice

The small settlements taking part in the programme were the villages Zalkod, Olaszliszka, Herceggút, Makkoshotyka, Kenézlő, Erdőhorváti.

7. The conditions (human, financial, technical) required for the best practice

A basic requirement is photographs to be collected, the number of which ranged between 120-400 from settlement to settlement. All the sites had suitable space where the exhibition could be implemented. For some of the sites of the programme series the House of Culture and Library of Sárospatak provided screens and the glass panels for covering the boards. In every case, the cardboards and glue were obtained and the labelling as well as the making of the invitations were performed by the district seat institution.

The personnel conditions of the programme were jointly met by the staff of the Sárospatak and the small settlement institutions. In every case the organizers cooperated with the senior officials of the local authorities, the mayors and school directors.

The expenses of the series were financed by the House of Culture and Library from tender resources which covered the costs of the technical materials, printing and travel. Local authorities provided for the catering after the exhibition openings according to their means.

8. Results and short-, mid- and long-term impact of the best practice

With reference to the small settlements, the event became one of the most successful events of the calendar year concerned. As a consequence of the product created in cooperation with the population, in addition to receiving a high number of visitors, local patriotism was reinforced. The photo exhibition highlighted the strengths and opportunities at the small settlements that

could be a new starting point in organizing community life. The cultural strategy of Sároszatak small region has been worked out in which the knowledge revealed through the photo exhibition has been benefited from. Encouraged by the success of the exhibition, some of the settlements have since then organized further photo exhibitions on other topics.

9. Sustainability of the best practice

At the respective sites the exhibition was available to visit for one month usually, but the topic and the simplicity of the tools required for the organization proved that the programme can be repeated on any occasion. Beyond the documents, the population's activity related to the organization of the exhibition is a value and guarantees the sustainability of the practice.

10. Adaptability of the best practice

The programme series proved that the best practice was easy to adapt and keeping the unique characteristic features of the respective settlements in mind it was implementable irrespective of population size. From several settlements where the core idea was implemented the mastermind institution has received the information that it has been further developed.