

Szilárd Salló

Hemp Festival in Sandominic (Csíkszentdomokos)

1. Best practice selection criteria

I met Irén Majorchik, whose name has been closely related to a unique event, the Hemp Festival of Sandominic (Csíkszentdomokos) for a few years, at the forum for cultural professionals in Harghita County in November 2017. I had no opportunity to talk to her about the hemp festival at that time, but invited her to conduct the folk crafts show to be organized by the Tradition Preservation Resource Centre of Harghita County in May 2018. On that occasion, together with old ladies from Sandominic, she presented the various operations and tools of hemp processing to almost fifty students. The students were able to try each operation, whereby the activity proved really popular. After the workshop I had a chance to talk to the main organizer of the event Irén Majorchik and recorded what she said in the form of an interview.

The reason why I chose to present the Hemp Festival of Sandominic as an example of best practice because the event can be considered unique and has a community building force. It mobilises old ladies who are given a chance as active participants of the event to familiarise the youth with an activity that survives only as a memory these days. In their youth days, hemp processing was still an organic part of life. As part of the home industry, hemp was processed and served as material for home textiles and clothes. Their presentation of hemp processing was authentic because they had not learned this craft as something new but had acquired – “grown into” – it as children. The passing on of expertise has a major role at this festival: the event organized annually is a kind of bridge between the old and the young generations. Beyond being together, the activity transfers knowledge to young people which they will probably be able to use within the framework of developing village tourism as adults.

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

The first hemp festival was held in autumn 2006. The event was initiated and launched by Irén Majorchik, who had been an active participant of several community events earlier, too. When she organized the first festival, the senior officials of the local authority proved to be very supportive. The mayor and the cultural director assured her of their support: they mobilised the local community encouraging them to join the activity. Prior to the event, the tradition preservation group “Kaláka” was established. The group comprising 25-30 people revived the major operations of hemp processing, from hemp sowing to hemp harvesting.

Already at the time of the first festival, a cultural programme, too, was organized where young people entertained participants with folk songs and music.

3. Stakeholders and beneficiaries of the best practice

Prior to the autumn hemp festival, Irén Majorchik taught the members of the tradition preservation group a play that they performed at the festival, while the local folk dance group Cserevirág as well as folk dance groups from Frumoasa (Csíkszépvíz), Barzava (Csíkborzsova) and Armaseni (Csíkmenaság) performed Szekler folk dances. As regards institutions, the Mayor’s Office, the House of Culture, the Pensioners’ Club and Guzsalyas Ház joined the organization of the event. The event targeted the whole village community: the festival was attended by the relatives and friends of the hemp manufacturers, the actors and the dancers primarily, with all generations of the village from children to old-age people represented.

4. Objectives and activities of the best practice

In 2017, the 6th hemp festival was held, which brought something new in the event series as it was organized at a new venue. Having invested three years of efforts, Irén Majorchik set up on a scenic plot she owned and using her own resources, “Guzsalyas Ház”. This is a complex of several buildings including an authentically furnished heritage house, workshop space, a small weaving workshop, a kitchen and a store. The earlier festivals had been held at other parts of the village; the new, spacious and well-organized environment not only guarantees further success for the event but creates opportunity for implementing other tradition preservation programmes as well.

5. Area(s) affected by the best practice

Irén Majorchik noted that the activities of their group had drawn the attention of many in recent years. A growing number of people have been buying hemp from them to as to process it and there also seems to be demand for new hemp processing shows for adults and children in the yard of Guzsalyas Ház. In this environment, outside the framework of formal education, children meet a different way of learning and learn by entertainment during the tradition preservation workshops.

6. Territorial scope of the best practice

The success of hemp festivals is apparent not only at the local but also at the county and national levels. In recent years, the tradition preservation group led by Irén Majorchik has been invited to several events; they have, among others, held a hemp processing show in the main square of Miercurea Ciuc (Csíkszereda) during Miercurea Ciuc Days, and some members of the group have also visited Sibiu (Nagyszeben), where their performance also included a gastronomy show. In addition they have had performances in nearby villages featuring the folk play written by Irén Majorchik.

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

The first hemp festival was financed from own resources, by community funding. Seeing the success of the event, the mayor urged Irén Majorchik to establish an association, and the expenses of the next three festivals were covered via successful applications submitted to the county authority.

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

While Irén Majorchik is satisfied with what she has implemented so far, she believes her efforts must continue as she has new plans around Guzsalyas Ház. She hopes to add new buildings in the years to come to the complex she has established. While keeping the nature of the portal, she plans to have a Szekler gate erected to the entrance. In addition she wishes to add a room whereby proper hygienic conditions can be guaranteed. Her greatest dream is to buy a barn.

If she succeeds in doing so, the range of activities can be further enlarged: indoor activities could be held for larger groups, too, while the barn could be

a proper venue for music and dance entertainment (like the “csördögölő” traditional folk dance).

9. Sustainability of the best practice

The main organizer of the hemp festivals constantly encourages members of the community to help her work and participate in the tradition preservation events but she often faces the situation that locals are difficult to involve in community work due to personal engagement. This is aggravated by the lack of financial resources. Both the administrative tasks related to the tradition preservation association of Sandominic and the raising of funds are carried out by Irén Majorchik. In future she wishes to cooperate with the youth organization as she expects young people to have the potential to continue the activity she started. She believes passing on knowledge is important not only in the form of workshops: in the near future she wishes to publish a book with the title *From Hemp Seed to Canvas*. The book is aimed to help those interested familiarise more thoroughly with the various operations of hemp processing.

10. Adaptability of the best practice

The organizer of the festival considers it important that the knowledge she has should be passed on to young people who will continue conducting workshops in the yard of Guzsalyas Ház the way she does.

Quoting her own words: “They have now begun to understand both in the minds and with their hearts what roots mean. Roots must be nourished. I can see support now; I wish I was able to persuade young people to help and learn operations that they will be able to show children later on.”