



Weekly Briefing

**Slovakia social briefing:
May – the Month of Culture
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May – the Month of Culture

May – full of traditions

May – the Month of Love. This traditional perception is also connected to celebration of the spring, sun, blossom and kisses under the cherry trees. In Slovakia, May somehow represents also the month of culture. And not only because of celebrations and festivals that are traditionally organized.

May in Slovakia is associated with a number of spring Christian and pagan traditions. The second most important Celtic holiday is linked to the first day of May. On this day, Beltane is celebrated. During the night, people spread out several bonfires. All the animals from the village are swept through the bonfire to be protected from evil forces and to ensure their good fertility. Everything then turns into a village merry-making, during which especially young people sing and dance around the fires. The night of April 30th to May 1st is also associated with the power of dark beings. During this night, all the witches and strings from the surroundings would meet in dark places to reach a strategy to destroy as many places in the village as possible. They were usually focused on the field of freshly planted plants. That is why all the housewives always meet in one place, and they gradually walk through the village, making a big slash to scare the strings.

On the first of May, Slovakia lives with the tradition of “putting the maypole“, which is known even from ancient times. It represents the symbol of energy, new life and good growth. The maypole is usually put up by a young man for the girl he loves. The custom is still very popular, and it is spread all over Slovakia. Each city and each village have its own maypole. The maypole is made of high and straight tree, most likely of birch or pine with its bark peeled off. The top of the tree is decorated with colourful ribbons. It should protect people from evil forces, storms and unfortunate events; therefore, it is built in the middle of the village or close to a major building such as church, town hall or school. Putting the maypole is accompanied by celebrations and festivals, singing and dancing.

May balls and fairs are organized throughout the country. They usually represent the beginning of the festival season, which is alive throughout the summer. The traditional event of this season is the Bratislava May Ball. In addition to the music program, this city multi-genre festival offers theatrical performances, a number of refreshment stalls, a bicycle contest, and the well-known Café Europe, this year with the discussed topics: Double Food Quality - Myth

or Fact; Do MEPs really not do anything? and How next Bratislava? The open-air festival, which opens the season of Bratislava cultural and social events for the widest public, is organized by the civic association in cooperation with the Capital City of Bratislava and the Bratislava Self-governing Region, the European Commission Representation in Slovakia, the European Parliament, advertising and media partners.

May – a good month for cultural and creative policy making

May 2019 seems to be not only the month of festivities, but also a month of re-defining a policy to promote cultural and creative industries. The debate on cultural and creative industries in Slovakia can be dated back to 2011. Since then, many documents have been adopted, among others the Creative Industries Development Strategy in 2014 and its Action plan in 2015. The adoption of these strategic documents meant a promising conviction that the creative industry was finally getting the deserved attention. The Action plan was meant to be a transition from the theoretical framework of delimitation and mapping the creative industries in Slovakia to concrete proposals for measures for its development. The adoption of the Action plan was preceded by several studies of cultural and creative industries in Slovakia. These formed the theoretical basis for formation objectives and activities under the Action plan. The Action plan is based on four key actions priorities, namely the effective management development system, quality human resources, increasing the absorption capacity of the market and supporting funding instruments. CCI's got the support under the Integrated Regional Operational Program (priority axis 3) with its main goal *“Stimulating the promotion of sustainable employment and job creation in the cultural and creative industries by creating a favourable environment for the development of creative talent innovation.”* However, the situation with the cultural and creative industries has developed somewhat differently.

Support from the Integrated Regional Operational Program Priority Axis 3 was intended for the creation of regional creative centres. But just as decentralized support for entrepreneurs, centralized support has not yet been really used. The call for support is still not out, but despite the discussions with the regions, the terms of the call do not seem to be satisfactory either. Apparently, the main culprit of this situation is the absolutely absent discussion of the Ministry of Culture with key institutions, academia, creatives and the public itself.

Not a single element of the action plan implemented, lack of statistics, lack of mapping and the decline of CCI awareness – these are the main reason for the process of re-designing the policies to support the cultural and creative industries which is currently in progress. Culture

has never been a priority political topic in Slovakia. This also reflects the fact that the creative industry has not been very successful so far, where, unfortunately, we are lagging behind the majority of European Union countries. Government support has stopped somewhere by failed strategic documents, EU money is not drawn, self-governments are not ready to use them and nobody really knows what to do. Perhaps it will be best to forget the whole process and start almost completely again. And what do creative people say? Well, most creatives are looking for support in new alternative ways, such as crowdfunding, some have their own projects, some are sceptical, and some have resigned. Maybe temporarily.

A new chance for CCI in Slovakia is offered by the participation of the Ministry of Culture in the CREADIS project 3 (within Interreg Europe). *“CREADIS3 addresses the issue of innovation driving territorial development through non-technological forms of innovation. Its main objective is to align territorial public policy agendas to support the development of more efficient CCI policies in territories aiming to generate innovation and economic development in European regions.” (EU, CREADIS, Interreg Europe info.)*

Participation in the project may improve the territorial public policies and tailor them according the needs of creative sectors, integrate the creative industries in the local innovation ecosystems, increase cross-collaboration between creative industries and other sectors of economy and last but not least increase synergies between culture and economic development policy instruments. If it is so, we will be able to evaluate at the end of the project in 2021.

One of the main problems of inability to apply targeted support is the missing mapping of the creative industry's development in Slovakia, that is, the lack of a statistical database. This problem should be solved by setting up a creative industry statistical account according to the EU methodology, which should be in operation in short time. However, we no longer know how to catch up with data for the last 10-15 years, so it will be necessary to focus on the future.

The potential for the development of culture and creative industries in Slovakia is nevertheless great. The share of CCIs in GDP is higher in Slovakia compared to other EU countries. In addition to economic value, we must not forget other important aspects, especially cultural, social and moral (social inclusion, inclusion of women in work process, or employment of young people). Culture is an important aspect of the national identity of Slovaks. In recent years, we have been experiencing a kind of rebirth of interest in folk culture with the connection to creative activity. Another interesting fact is that the young generation of creative class is the bearer of this change. These creative people work as free artists or small entrepreneurs and restore old traditional crafts and art by incorporating modern elements into them. They create a

new, unique and modern culture that we often see on the May fairs. And it is surely not only about the hipster trend, but about finding and re-identifying with the cultural values and cultural heritage of Slovakia.

Little creative activities transform May squares of towns and villages across Slovakia, bringing a fragrant inspiration to spring homes and shining through the sunny days after a long winter. As spring cities change, the attitude and perception of culture in society is changing. Culture and creativity are now closer to people, also thanks to economic development. Culture becomes more bohemian; people show their creativity. May makes it even more visible. Let's hope that policies to promote cultural and creative industries in Slovakia will also be able to reflect these changes in society in the future. Only then the economic potential of the creative industry can be fully unleashed.