

EVALUATION OF AN EVENT TO PROMOTE EDUCATION AND VALUES OF SOCIAL INCLUSION IN RURAL AREAS THROUGH THE DIRECT OBSERVATION METHOD

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Abstract: *This article presents the results of marketing research generated by the method of direct observation in order to evaluate an event organized in a rural area. Research has led to some conclusions on how, in rural areas can be promoted ideas such as the importance of parental involvement in early childhood care and education, the importance of education for a child's development, overcoming prejudices, tolerance, social responsibility and civic responsibility.*

Key words: *direct observation marketing research, education, social inclusion, rural environment, event.*

1. Introduction

Rural development represents an important issue in European Union, being one of the pillars of the Common Agricultural Policy. One of the priorities of rural development programs is the promotion of social inclusion (European Commission, 2018). Social inclusion is based on “mutual respect and solidarity, on equal opportunities and decent living” for all members of the community but despite all the programs developed since now in the European Union, 1 of every 3 people is socially excluded (European Youth Portal, 2018).

Specialists consider that social exclusion means „to connect the experiences of individuals and social groups to broader social and economic processes” (Shucksmith, 2004) and “reduces people’s capacity to participate in society” (Kennan, Lloyd, Qayyum & Thompson, 2011).

For period 2014-2020 European Union has allocated around €4,3 billion through European Social Fund in Human Capital Operational Programme and among priority were social exclusion, education and skills with a special attention to youth, Roma and rural areas (European Commission, 2018).

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2. The Context of the Research

Within a campaign of information and awareness about the importance of education, and to promote values of social inclusion, personal development and social economy that are achieved through the project "I learn, I play, I am happy at school", which is financed by the European Social Fund, Operational Human Capital Program, an attractive event was organized for the local community, a contest of traditional dishes specific to ethnic groups that live in the commune concerned. The schedule for the event provided a practical place for renowned chefs to cook traditional dishes together with children and young people of various ethnicities, ages and educational levels. These dishes were specific to the different ethnicities living together in the area. The schedule also included an artistic activity presented by children from that commune.

The goal of the previously described activity was to provide subtle and attractive information about the importance of parenting for early childhood care and education, of child development education, of overcoming prejudices, of social, religious or ethnic tolerance, of social involvement, of civic responsibility; also the need to change behaviors that determine attitudes such as the discrimination and stigmatization faced by vulnerable groups.

The event was organized on 26 October 2018 by the Braşov Equal Opportunities and Non-discrimination Association, the Voila Commune and the Voila Gymnasium School.

To assess the event, to determine the extent to which its purpose was achieved, direct marketing research was conducted.

Starting from the main research questions, the following research objectives were set: measurement of the degree of participation and the local community at the event, analysis of the behavior of participants in the event from the perspective of social tolerance and accountability, determination of the degree of interest generated by the sub-activities of the event, determination of the extent to which the event created the premise of interethnic collaboration, the finding of the extent to which the advertising made for the project was adequate and in accordance with the requirements of the sponsor.

3. Methodology of Research

The research method used was direct marketing observation, consisting in systematically recording the behavioral patterns of the participants in the event, the objects used and the actions performed, without the observer communicating in one way or another with those who displayed the behaviors concerned.

Through observation, the researcher recorded behaviors or events according to the research objectives during the actual event.

The observation method used was direct (behavior was measure when it actually occurred), personal (the researcher was responsible for observing the participants reaction to the event), visible, was done in a natural and normal environment for the behaviors researched to be seen (this kind of observation accurately reflects the behavior, the phenomenon or the investigated situation) and structured (observation

standards were established in advance).

Observing the personal behavior of the participants involved a recording and systematic interpretation of their response to the event and the various stages of it. The reaction observed could've been verbal or nonverbal. Observation of nonverbal communication was an important aspect in marketing research, it being a known fact that a large part of the meaning of a message is transmitted in a nonverbal way.

Observation was an alternative research method, used concurrently and as a complement to other methods of obtaining primary data such as survey and individual interviews.

The results were recorded by the researcher through an observation sheet and use of specific equipment. It underpinned the writing of a detailed report of the research.

In order not to violate the principles of ethics nor injure the rights of the individual, the aspects of the personal and intimate data of the participants were not the subject of observation and the personal data of the participants was not exposed, in compliance with the principle of confidentiality.

4. Research Results

Objective no. 1. *Measuring the degree of participation of the local community at the event*

The event was attended by 244 people registered on attendance lists, of which 104 were children. But according to the observations made on the spot, the actual number of people participating in the event exceeded 270, part of the participants refusing to sign up on the attendance lists for various reasons, including the fact that they didn't know to write. The presence at the event exceeded the expectations of the organizer and has far exceeded the agreed goal of the project, i.e. a minimum of 150 participants. At least the 244 people registered on the attendance lists participated in all the activities of the event.

Ethnic diversity at this event was noted, through the participation of ethnic Romanians, Romas and Hungarians.

Objective no. 2. *Analyzing the behavior of the participants at the event in terms of tolerance and social responsibility*

Children of various ethnicities interacted very well. Both Romanian and Roma children went up on stage. They all recited and sang with ease and attitudes of joy and relaxation, in spite of obvious emotions.

According to the observations made, the students interacted appropriately with the teachers who had accompanied and guided them during the event. There had been no notable incident, no child has been warned or reprimanded, in a visible manner, by any teacher because of inappropriate behavior.

The children had listened to the messages given by local leaders and project experts and the students directly involved in the artistic program performed with much enthusiasm and focus. Children who did not participate directly in the artistic program, although at first watched with interest, showed signs of fatigue towards the end.

Students participated with great interest as each dish was prepared and as explanations were given by chefs on cultural elements specific to each type of preparation. Some students asked questions about the chefs cooking methods. They also ate the dishes cooked along with some parents and teachers.

Objective no. 3. *Determining the degree of interest generated by the sub-activities within the event*

No notable differences were found between attentions given by participants to the different activities of the event. They listened with interest to the messages given by local leaders and project experts and appreciated the artistic program performed by the children of the Voila School. Some of the young people and adults present volunteered with supervision, serving, and care of children. At the end, everyone present was happy to taste from the dishes cooked at the event.

In general, participants expressed their satisfaction with the event and the organization of it. One of the locals felt the need to intervene spontaneously to thank and congratulate the organization of this event saying "Never was Cultural Center of Cincşor so full." It was applauded by the other participants.

An interestingly example was a parent who was known as a feisty and aggressive person. He was extremely quiet throughout the event. Even when, towards the end, some of the participants showed signs of impatience to begin the tasting, he remained quiet and listened attentively to the artistic program for the children. One teacher saw him and praised his conduct stating that he was banned from approaching the school because of repeated misbehavior occurred. During the children's dance ensemble when Cincşor danced with other children of different ethnic groups in Comuna Voila more participants reportedly said "This is true integration."

The participants at the event used nice words and expressions in praising the initiative of implementing this project and, in particular, this activity.

One of the participants, resident of a neighboring village asked several question regarding the possibility of implementing similar projects in his village.

Objective no. 4. *Determining the extent to which the event created interethnic collaborations*

The overall attitude of the participants at the event was relaxed and conducive to the exchange of ideas and concessions.

Although the event organizers wanted to create a framework that would encourage cooperation between families of different ethnicities, no such interaction was observed between families. The participating families or couples were reserved in discussions or interactions with other different ethnic participants. This reserved behavior was not observed among the children.

Placed in a situation of involvement in rearranging of a room when it was necessary to place tables for students from which to serve the cooked dishes, youth and adults present volunteered in the task. It was the first time in the event when a spirit of

collaboration was obviously observed that went beyond cultural barriers, ethnic or otherwise. After rearranging the rooms, a large number of young people and adults volunteered in serving the children.

Objective no. 5. *Finding the extent to which the advertising made for the project was adequate and in accordance with the requirements of the sponsor*

Promotional materials and information on the project and financing had been displayed in the hall, on stage and in proximity to the place of the event. They were visible and consistent with funder requirements.

5. Research Limits

Although the value of this research method is recognized, with results being particularly valuable since recorded data are not distorted, are real and accurate and errors that may arise due to memory or the willingness of respondents to form a certain image, the research has some limitations. First of all, due to the limits of the research method used, mental processes such as attitudes, motivations, expectations and opinions of people could not be observed. An explanation of that behavior could not be obtained. The expected actions or future intentions of the subjects could not be captured and behavior observation was short-term. In fact, observation was an alternative research method used in conjunction with other methods of obtaining data such as: survey and individual interviews.

6. Conclusions

According to on-site observations, the event can be considered a success. For the Voila community it was an unprecedented and attractive activity. Although interethnic collaboration was not very obvious, it can be considered a first step for establishing connections between local people of different ethnicities in Voila. The attendance at the event was beyond the expectations of the organizer and far exceeded the established goal of the project.

By participating in this event for parents and children, even parents not that involved in their children's education, listened to the messages given by experts on the importance of parental care and early education for a child and, in general, the importance of education for development of children. Put in a situation to interact in creating an optimal framework for the performance of the artistic activities of the children and for serving meals, parents of various ethnic groups have managed to overcome prejudices, to show evidence of social, religious or ethnic tolerance and to exhibit civic responsibility by active involvement in arranging and rearranging the hall and serving the children at the tables.

Events of this type are very attractive for the rural population and can successfully contribute to the achievement of social responsibility objectives. This model of an event could be taken up and implemented by rural public administrations. Also, at the central level, a number of ministries could initiate specific actions to facilitate the implementation of such events.

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