Deakin Research Online

This is the published version:


Available from Deakin Research Online:

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30020975

Reproduced with the kind permissions of the copyright owner.

Copyright: 2005, Deakin University, Bowater School of Marketing
ARTS MARKETING: A NEW TOOL FOR DEVENTPMENT OF THE ARTS SECTOR IN THE MARKET CONTEXT IN VIETNAM

Author: Huong T. K. Le

May 2005

Key words: arts management, arts marketing, cultural policy, case study, Vietnam.

Biography:
Ms. Le, Thi Kieu Huong is currently studying for her PhD in Education with a concentration on arts management and arts management training from Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney, Australia. She earned a Graduate Diploma of Educational Studies at the University of Sydney in 2001, and a Bachelor of Music (Honours) in Musicology from the Hanoi National Conservatory of Music, Vietnam in 1996. She was a lecturer in the Department of Music Studies at the Hanoi National Conservatory of Music, Vietnam and has experience in music education, arts management, and education and training projects. Her research used to be presented in several international conferences such as the 17 IDP conference and ANZICIES conference in 2003 in Australia, Management Conference in London in 2004, and other internal forums. This paper is based on findings from her PhD thesis.

Abstract

Since the economic reform in Vietnam in 1986 provided more artistic and financial autonomy, the arts community has had more opportunity to develop. It has hence become necessary for arts leaders to obtain management and marketing skills to adapt to the new competitive environment. This necessity became vital when the Vietnamese government sought to tackle the problem of inadequate state funding for arts organisations through its policy of socialisation. This paper sets out to examine how performing arts organisations in Vietnam apply arts marketing strategies to adapt to the market context via empirical data from the cases studied: Vietnam National Symphony Orchestra and Hanoi Youth Theatre. Further, it identifies implications for the development of the sector. Findings indicate that Vietnamese performing arts organisations focus on the role of marketing for organisational development, although there are a lack of resources and a limited knowledge in this area. Thus, training in arts marketing and arts management is needed to maximise capacity of arts leaders in managing their organisations in the changing context.
Introduction

Since the economic reform in Vietnam in 1986 provided more artistic and financial autonomy, the arts community has had more opportunity to develop. It has hence become necessary for arts leaders to obtain management and marketing skills to adapt to the new competitive environment. This necessity became vital when the Vietnamese government sought to tackle the problem of inadequate state funding for arts organisations through its policy of socialisation. This paper sets out to examine how performing arts organisations in Vietnam apply arts marketing strategies to adapt to the market context via empirical data from the cases studied: Vietnam National Symphony Orchestra and Hanoi Youth Theatre. Further, it identifies implications for the development of the sector. Findings indicate that Vietnamese performing arts organisations focus on the role of marketing for organisational development, although there are a lack of resources and a limited knowledge in this area. Thus, training in arts marketing and arts management is needed to maximise capacity of arts leaders in managing their organisations in the changing context.

Background

There has been rapid change both locally and globally in the arts and entertainment industry (Deakin University, 1996), including changes in culture, economy and society that have significantly influenced the operations of arts organisations. Indeed, economic globalisation with privatisation and decentralisation (Burbules & Torres, 2000a; Jones, 1998) has yielded in a decline of government funding (Dewey, 2004; Fillis, 2004; O'Hagan, 1998; Radbourne & Fraser, 1996; Rentschler, 2002, 1999b; Soutar et al., 1997), and cultural policy (Rentschler, 2002). These changes create challenges for the sector.

Vietnam presents a striking case. The economic reform (doi moi – Vietnamese term for the economic reform) yields significant changes in the socio-economic and political condition of Vietnam, marking a watershed in the country’s development (e.g., Asian Development Bank, 2003; Auffret & World Bank, 2003; Dollar, 2001; Kelly, 2000; Le & Sloper, 1995; Research Institute for Asia and the Pacific (RIAP), 2003; Taylor, 2004; United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 2002; Warner, 2001). One of the more remarkable changes has been a profound shift in the country’s economic mechanism, which is now pursuing an open-door policy, and allowing involvement of the private sector in all areas of development, but preserving a socialist orientation (Kelly, 2000; Nguyen & Sloper, 1995; Van Arkadie & Mallon, 2003; Warner, 2001). As a result, Vietnam’s economy and living standard has improved sharply since the 1990s (Jansen, 1997; Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV), 2002).

Vietnamese performing arts has undergone a period of profound transition, in accordance with the changes in socio-economic development. Although the government still plays a critical role in funding the arts and cultural sector, this amount remains quite limited (Do, 1994; Hoang, 1993; Ministry of Culture and Information (MOCI), 2001). The financial stability has even become more pressing as the government has implemented the policy of socialisation, which encourages funding diversity and self-management (Lidstone & Doling, 2000; MOCI, 1999a; Vietnamese Government, 2000). Thus, the cultural sector has been making great endeavours in transforming themselves from being almost fully subsidised by the government into financially self-sustaining organisations. Furthermore, arts organisations have struggled to find markets in the more competitive environment where popular music, CDs, DVDs and films (Doling, 2003), often from abroad, now takes up larger amounts of cultural space. These changes underscore the necessity for arts leaders and arts
organisations to adopt modern marketing methods in order to adapt successfully to the new market (Le, 2004). Arts marketing becomes a new means for the sector to improve the matching of cultural achievements to audiences’ tastes, as well as increasing financial viability in the market economy.

Method

This paper is based on a qualitative and comparative arts management study between Vietnam and Australia. Case studies of arts organisations were selected by purposive sampling to understand organisational changes in the broader context of economic reform. Data from case studies were obtained from several sources: in-depth interviews, documentation, archival records, and direct observations. More than ten interviews with arts managers were conducted to examine different experiences and perspectives on managing arts organisations.

After data reduction, a process of coding, categorising, identifying themes, and developing concepts and propositions was undertaken, (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Minichiello et al., 1995), based upon research questions and theoretical frameworks in the ongoing process. In this paper, the analytical comparison is not presented. Only key findings are briefly presented from two case studies: Vietnam National Symphony Orchestra (VNSO) and Hanoi Youth Theatre (HYT), in order to investigate the condition of arts management and arts marketing in Vietnam, and how marketing tools are utilised in Vietnamese performing arts organisations in the new market context.

Arts Marketing: A New Tool for Adjusting to Change

The two selected case studies are professional arts organisations, located in Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam. The VNSO, founded in 1959, is the largest symphony orchestra in Vietnam, and ranked at national level. Due to social instability and economic difficulties following the end of the Vietnamese-American war, the development of VNSO did not take place until the middle of the 1990s. Even after that, the low level of funding available from the government for the VNSO meant that only a few performance opportunities per year sustained the orchestra’s viability. The HYT was founded in April 1978 to meet entertainment demands of youth and children after the reunification of Vietnam in 1975 (Hanoi Youth Theatre [HYT], 2002; Tran, 1998). Similar to the VNSO, the HYT was well known at a national level, and under the management of the MOCI. In contrast to the VNSO and the SSO, the HYT presents mainly popular arts. Both cases studied have become important entertainment providers for the cultural life of Hanoi people.

While the notion of arts marketing has developed among Western arts organisations since the 1980s (Mejon, Fransi, & Johansson, 2004), as remarked upon particularly in Marketing the Arts, (Mokwa, Dawson and Prieve 1980), the principles of arts marketing were not evident in the cultural sector in Vietnam until the late 1990s. In order to improve financial performance, Vietnamese arts leaders interviewed emphasised that arts marketing had started to be used as a significant tool for adjusting to the competitive environment. Some common strategies found in Vietnamese arts organisations include cheaper ticket prices for subscribers, for group bookings, advertisements, panels, a club of audiences, education programs and more popular and accessible programs to attract larger audiences. These findings are consistent with the literature (e.g., Byrnes, 2003; Colbert, 2003; Martin & Rich, 1998; Petkus Jr, 2004; Rentschler, 1999a).

For example, using marketing strategies to develop audiences has been an achievement of the VNSO (VNSO, 2001, 2002). The facts showed that drawing audiences for symphonic music was challenging in the Vietnamese market. Therefore, being able to sell tickets to audiences in recent years was a great achievement of the VNSO, which was simply impossible before the mid-1990s.
(e.g., Dao, 25 October 2002; Hoang, 19 October 2002; VNSO, 2001, 2002). The Deputy Director also touched on this issue:

In the 1980s and early 1990s, not many audiences came to our concerts. We even thought that the musicians occasionally perhaps outnumbered the audiences. Thus, in order to increase educated groups in association with symphonic music, the VNSO went to universities to offer free performances to students. (Hoang, 19 October 2002)

The 2001 and 2002 Annual Reports indicated that there has been a considerable increase in the number of performances by the VNSO through providing brochures to audiences in each concert, to foreign companies and embassies, and advertising. The Director of the VNSO proudly explained:

We are now rapidly growing. In the past (1980s), we put together only a few programs and performed from 10 to 15 concerts per year, and now [2001, 2002] this number has increased to about 25 programs performed in 50–60 concerts. (Dao, 25 October 2002)

It was also observed that the concert hall was 80% full, while it may have been only half-full or even less, five years ago. At least 50% of the tickets were sold for each concert, according to the Deputy Director, whereas tickets used to be given free to music students and staff over the past seven or eight years. The VNSO has disseminated symphonic music to many people through education programs and has established a stable club of 3,000 symphonic music lovers (Hoang, 19 October 2002; VNSO, 2002).

In comparison with the VNSO, the HYT seemed to be more active in marketing and innovative ideas. The Director of the theatre revealed that marketing strategies and business-oriented approaches were flexibly applied to improve financial performances of the theatre in recent years. According to the Director and documents studied, the theatre investigated and focused on favourite topics for young audiences, and quickly adjusted to meet changes in audiences’ taste (Truong, 2002). Also, the Director revealed, each troupe of artists can organise self-financing of performances; or the theatre can invest in good performances/creative ideas, giving incentives for good performances and allowing artists to participate in part-time or overseas shows (Bui, 6 November 2002). In this way, both theatre and artists can generate their incomes and artistic creations. Once again, the matter of flexibility to meet the audiences’ need and artistic creativity was highlighted in management of the theatre. The findings are also in substantial agreement with those of Byrnes (2003), and Martin and Rich (1998) that arts organisations always need to pragmatically adjust to changing environments, to assess themselves in order to develop audiences while still pursuing their mission and vision of the arts.

Also, the HYT is regarded for its management flexibility in adapting to the new market climate (Truong, 2002). The Director indicated “although the HYT is a state-owned company, it has become more privatised and a partly self-managed theatre,” (Bui, 6 November 2002). Therefore, while many Vietnamese theatres were struggling to develop audiences, the HYT’s shows were still performed regularly. The Director, Mr Bui, proudly said, “Sometimes we have even had daytime shows for children and nighttime shows for adults. Our theatre is ‘lit’ [means performs every day] throughout the year” (Bui, 6 November 2002; see also Tran, 1998). The number of performances from 1993 to 2002 ranged from 400 to 700 shows each year (Hoang, 2004; HYT, 2002; Tran, 1998). The above documents showed that performance of the HYT have been attracted from 123,000 people in 1993 to 750,000 people in 2000 (HYT, 2002). These all indicate the HYT’s achievements in the first stage of using arts marketing strategies to adapt to the new market economy.
Understandably, given that the size of audiences directly affects box office revenue and subsequently the financial stability of the organisations, attracting larger and more varied audiences from different age groups, classes and niche groups is the goal of any arts organisation (e.g., Australia Council, 1998; Byrnes, 2003; Close, Donovan, & Australia Council, 1998; Rentschler, 2002; Soutar et al., 1997).

Notwithstanding the above success, these findings indicate that the use of arts marketing in Vietnam mainly is limited to advertising and education programs. Although using sophisticated marketing tools has become common in Western arts organisations to investigate audiences’ needs and wants (e.g., Australia Council, 1998; Byrnes, 2003; Chong, 2002; Crealey, 2003; Dickman & Australia Council, 2000; Hodge, James, Lawson, & Australia Council, 1998; Mejon et al., 2004; Radbourne & Fraser, 1996; Rentschler, 1999b; Soutar et al., 1997), the finding offers evidence that the Vietnamese cases studied have not conducted market research to investigate audiences’ needs. It is notable that these marketing skills were learned just through experience (trial and error), and were unlikely to be exploited further without the receipt of systematic training and structured experience. This limitation can be explained in the quote of the VNSO’s Director:

Managing an arts organisation in the current market economy in Vietnam is more complex, as Vietnamese are not familiar with symphonic music, despite many different types of entertainment as well as diverse arts companies/groups. It is even more challenging as we do not have much funding for marketing. Furthermore, knowledge of fund-raising, marketing, sponsorship and audience development in arts organisations is quite new to us. (Dao, 25 October 2002)

This quote shows limited training of arts managers, as a result of the subsidised economy. The research clearly indicates that arts leaders had no systematic knowledge derived from formal arts management training, notwithstanding that such courses have been offered widely in the UK, Australia and United States. It can be seen that this could pose serious problems for attempts to become self-sustaining in the current changing arts environment, as well as become a challenge to the further development of the entertainment industry in the market economy.

Indeed, limited state funding and uncertain sponsorships could not allow Vietnamese performing arts organisations to fully apply Western marketing strategies such as online marketing or audience surveys. Evidently, neither the VNSO nor the HYT use internet for advertising and marketing while for example, the Sydney Symphony and the Melbourne Theatre Company as well as most performing arts organisations in Australia have their own websites for history, achievements, artistic activities, time, venues, ticket prices, online ticket booking, and also for donations, sponsorship and philanthropy, and the details of programs. These findings indicate that first, a provision of training in arts marketing is needed for Vietnamese arts managers and second, applications of Western marketing strategies need to be appropriate to the culture and the socio-economic conditions in Vietnam.

**Conclusion and Implications**

This paper set out to examine how performing arts companies in Vietnam apply arts marketing strategies in a changing context. Given the challenges in the performing arts sectors in the market environment, there is a sense that adaptation is necessary for survival (Byrnes, 2003; Rentschler, 2002; Allmendinger & Hackman, 1996). The cases studied adjusted to the changing context using arts marketing. Furthermore, Vietnamese performing arts organisations recognise the
essential role of marketing for improving financial viability. At the same time, arts leaders are acquiring new management skills.

However, those skills such as advertising, free tickets for students, education programs are mainly learned through practice, and only in recent years and on an *ad hoc* basis. Additionally, since Vietnam did not have formal arts administration training at the time this research was conducted, systematic knowledge and astute and advanced application of those modern arts management skills were little used. VNSO leaders also argued that their small capital endowment created obstacles for them in applying marketing strategies. These findings suggest that the increasing range of artistic activities in Vietnam require arts administrators to have diverse and flexible management skills to respond accordingly to the new market sphere. Vietnamese arts leaders should tactically and strategically identify relevant arts marketing skills to investigate their market and to meet demands of audiences’ satisfaction.

The need to establish institutional training programs for arts leaders in Vietnam is vital. Obviously, the skills of audience development and arts marketing should be emphasised in arts management curricula. Marketing, while a very important skill, should also be practicable for the Vietnamese arts organisations, and based on the prevailing socio-economic conditions and available resources. For instance, using the internet for arts marketing purposes might not be applicable in Vietnam, due to the high cost of maintenance and the relatively less developed computerisation in Vietnam.

Furthermore, the government should develop programs to facilitate and encourage arts organisations to become more self-financing, and maximise their survival skills. It can provide capacity-building in the form of management training for arts administrators to enhance their managerial skills. Besides local training from the government, a form of strategic collaboration between Australian and Vietnamese arts organisations, facilitated by both governments, would be highly relevant. It can also be provided through long-term courses for the new generations of arts managers. Professional assistance from Australia for example, would be helpful and useful, as Australia has long and valuable experience in this arena while Vietnam has not yet developed any indigenous training courses in arts and culture management.

This training should consider factors such as the need for students to gain practical skills, and for general management qualifications. It is recommended that a flexible mode of training be developed, rather than the traditional full-time degree mode of training, which is less well adapted to arts leaders’ busy role and the demands of their jobs. For example, training packages or tertiary courses in arts management or workshops in arts marketing from Australia, suitably adapted for the Vietnamese context, are recommended for upgrading modern management skills for arts leaders, in the context of their burdensome workload. As suggested, training packages with flexible modes of delivery could accommodate current arts managers in Vietnam, while degree courses may provide credentials and qualifications for the new generations of arts managers. In this way, too, arts leaders can also exchange hands-on management experience. However, due to differences between the Australian TAFE system and the Vietnamese VET structure (see more detail in Freeland & Grannall, 1996), further research is needed to evaluate the extent to which training packages in arts management can be developed and adapted to the Vietnamese training context, particularly since Vietnam has not developed such training packages. In the meantime, short training courses (but perhaps longer than the one-week program offered by the Ford Foundation) in arts management, arts marketing, leadership, and budgeting are needed to address a lack of skills in the arts field.

As arts management training courses in Australia or other countries were designed to serve in their specific context and meet the demands of that labour market they should not just be assimilated into Vietnamese institutions, but the curriculum needs to be tailored to local culture
appropriately. The Vietnamese context needs to be investigated in-depth, based on my findings of similarities and differences between the contexts of Vietnam and Australia, including differences in the education and training systems, to apply appropriately the skills base needed to suit the training context. Some examples of the adaptations that might be needed from Australian tertiary education in arts administration are:

- Fund-raising and donations may be less applicable in the contemporary Vietnamese context due to differences and limitations of economic conditions.
- Case studies should be Vietnamese rather than from other countries.
- Trustee/volunteer relations may not be applicable to the Vietnamese training context because this skill is not common in the arts sector.
- Computer skills and English are highly recommended for the Vietnamese context.

In this case, capacity-building in the field is significant, as Vietnam has few academic staff in this area. This study of how performing arts organisations in Vietnam apply arts marketing strategies to the market context, identified that sending students to Australian institutions for arts management training, educators may tackle the long-term lack of arts marketing needs in Vietnam. It is hoped that such strategic collaboration can facilitate Vietnamese arts organisations to make the most of their artistic creativity, in a dynamic and competitive environment.

References


