

## **The State Museum of Contemporary Art of Thessaloniki – Greece: New Museum and Old Collection**

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### **Abstract**

*The State Museum of Contemporary art of Thessaloniki is situated in Thessaloniki and was founded in 1997 with the passing of a law published in the Newspaper of the Greek Government on 24/12/1997 (No 2557). That year, Thessaloniki, a coastal city in Northern Greece was the cultural capital of Europe and the foundation of a State Museum was intended to mark the flag bearer for contemporary cultural management. The same law resulted in the founding of a similar museum in Athens, the National Museum of Contemporary Art. It was the first time that Greece had created state museums covering modern and contemporary art, both Greek and European.*

**Key Words:** Thessaloniki, State Museum, Costakis Collection, Les Lazaristes, Contemporary Art

### **Introduction**

The State Museum of Contemporary Art of Thessaloniki has been housed up to the present in the Moni Lazariston (Monastery of Lazaristes) complex, a former Catholic monastery of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1861) which was restored when Thessaloniki was the cultural capital of Europe (1997), although the initial plan of the State was for it to be housed in an old industrial factory complex dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (known as YFANET). The Moni Lazariston (Les Lazaristes) is located on the west side of the city, in a rather socially and economically rundown area, something which has had a detrimental effect on the evolution and development of the Museum as a cultural center, at least as far as numbers of visitors are concerned. The exhibition area of the Museum is approximately 3300 m<sup>2</sup>. In the newer buildings that surround the Moni Lazariston, the State Theater of Northern Greece, the State Orchestra of Thessaloniki and other cultural services of the prefecture of Thessaloniki, which share a small outdoor amphitheatre of 500 seats, are housed.

From a legal point of view the State Museum of Contemporary art is a private law institution which means that it functions according to the rules of the private economic sector, it serves the public interest and it is accountable to the Ministry of Culture of Greece, which also provides financial support for the museum. The first articles of the museum's charter define the artistic periods which the collections of the Museum should be concerned with. These are the periods of modernism and contemporary art: the history of art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until today (<http://www.Greekstatemuseum.com/kmst/index.html>).

### **Mission statement**

The article 2 of the founding bill describes the purposes of the museum which, in general, are the following:

- a) The preservation and promotion of the work of Greek and foreign artists.
- b) The promotion of aesthetic awareness and the cultural education of the public.
- c) The development of scientific research.
- d) The creation of the appropriate circumstances for a museological approach to art.

With the aforementioned purposes the Museum should also:

- a) Assemble collections of contemporary art of all the categories of interest to modern scientific research and artistic criticism.
- b) Protect and conserve its collections
- c) File, order and research evidence about each one of its collections

- d) Keep its collections on constant public display in line with modern museological perceptions
- e) Research, study and publish books and writings about its contemporary collections
- f) Organize temporary exhibitions
- g) Conduct educational programs
- h) Collect archival material
- i) Enrich the library
- j) Conserve the works of art
- k) Organize exhibitions
- l) Obtain new works through purchases or donations
- m) Search for sponsors for the economic support of the museum

### **Organization (Administrative structure)**

The management of the Museum is described in the founding law of 1997. The main instruments of administration of the State Museum of Contemporary art are the Chairman, the Board and the Director, all of whom are appointed by a decision of the Minister of Culture. The Board consists of 9 members, "intellectuals, artists and scientists" (article 4), who serve for 3 years. The Director of the Museum is also appointed by the Minister of Culture for four years. For its proper function the Museum has the following departments: a) The department of Collections and Archives b) the department of Exhibitions and educational programs c) the department of conservation d) The department of Public Relations e) The department of Security and Maintenance f) the department of financial management and g) the press department (Regulation, 2008).

### **The collections**

At the time of the founding of the State Museum of Contemporary Art, the Costakis Collection, which included famous artworks of Russian Avant-Garde, formed the core of the museum's collection. The agreement for the purchase of the Costakis Collection was signed on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2000 for a price of about 35 million American dollars. The collection comprises 1275 works of art, oils, sketches, porcelain and constructions. Immediately after the purchase, the Costakis family donated to the Museum the personal archives of Georgios Costakis, which consisting of letters, sketches, old newspapers, gravures, posters, photos, rare books and other valuable objects. The Museum also houses a donation consisting of a small collection of almost 300 works by contemporary Greek artists. (<http://www.greekstatemuseum.com/kmst/index.html>).

The collector Georgios Costakis (1913-1990) was born in Moscow to a Greek father and a Russian mother. His father was a merchant resident in the Russian capital. He had no special education and he had been working as a driver for the Greek embassy. He had a natural tendency to collect without any thought of wanting to exploit the objects he bought (Roberts, 1994). After that, and despite the difficulties he encountered with the Stalinist regime, he bought works from the neglected and extremely poor avant-garde artists, either from them personally, or from their relatives. Within a decade he had collected hundreds of works, which he kept in his apartment in Moscow (Roberts, 1994). In 1977 Costakis made a deal with the soviet regime and decides to leave a large part of his collection to the Tretyakov Gallery of Moscow, in return for which and he, with the rest of his collection, was allowed to leave for the West, initially to Germany and then to the USA. In 1981 the Guggenheim Museum of New York held the first big exhibition of the whole Costakis Collection, organizing the first and most important documentation of its works (Rudenstine, 1981). The collection includes the works of artists such as: Vasili Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin, El Lissitzky, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Liubov Popova, Olga Rozanova, Solomon Nikritin, Ksenia Ender, Ivan Kudriashev, Antonina Sofronova, Ivan Kliun, Mikhail Larionov, Kliment Redko, Nadezhda Udaltsova, Pavel Filonov, Ivan Kudriashev, Mikhail Matiushin, Ilia Chashnik, Gustav Klutskis and many others.

The unique collection owned now by the State Museum of Contemporary Art is the works of art of the Russian avant-garde of the Costakis collection, which were supposed to be managed in a way that would justify the cost of their purchase. It was the first time in the history that the State spent so much money for cultural goods, which, although collected by a Greek national are not part of Greece's cultural history, if seen in narrow national *margins*. This deed is recorded as the most important in the history of Greek institutions. In the end, the Museum had no other collection except for the works of Greek modern art, which were relatively few, since their number did not exceed three hundred.

The goal of the first management policy of the Museum was to exhibit the collection to the public, along with the publication of catalogues written in the English language. The space of Moni Lazariston is not big enough to host an exhibition of the whole collection. The first exhibition was organized the same year the collection was acquired (2000) and at the end of 2004 the Museum initiated more intense communication activities with other institutions in Europe, organizing a major exhibition of the bulk of the Costakis collection. The exhibition took place at Martin Gropius-Bau in Berlin (Papanikolaou, 2004). The Costakis Collection which was bought by the State Museum of Contemporary Art of Thessaloniki consists of the greatest number of works of the Russian avant-garde in any one collection internationally, exceeding even the ones in the Tretyakov Gallery, as documented by the curators of the Museum (Papanikolaou, 2001).

### **Personnel**

The personnel of the State Museum of Contemporary art are divided into three categories: the scientific, the administrative and that of security (Regulation, 2008). They are appointed, according to their specialties, in the various departments of the Museum, but without being expertise in their sector and in arts management generally. On the whole, the personnel serving today are about thirty people, excluding external collaborators (legal counsel, exhibition trustees etc. There are not many volunteers because the institution of the friends of the State Museum of Contemporary Art is not very active. The only help coming from volunteers is that provided by the students of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, who offer their services through the educational program "Practical Exercise of the Students". The competence of the director is described in the charter. That person supervises all the services of the State Museum and executes all the decisions of the Board. The director formulates the visual artistic policy of the Museum, programs the artistic events, suggests the additions to the collections and draws up the financial budget of the Museum. The body responsible for the museum comprises the Chairman and the Board.

### **Funding and financial situation**

The State Museum is financed by the Ministry of Culture on an annual basis. This financial support is included in the state budget. In 2009 this support amounted to about 1,5 million Euros, including salaries, cost of the exhibitions, insurance and security. Other financial sources of income for the museum come from sponsorships (which are relatively few at present), the income from the tickets (general ticket price is 3 euros, while for pupils and students entrance is free) and the sales of series of magazines and catalogues of the exhibitions.

### **Exhibitions and visitor numbers**

According to the exhibition's annual reports of the State Museum of Contemporary Art the last three years (2008-2010), the visitor numbers, in relation to the significance of the exhibitions hosted the Museum, are very low. The artistic program was enriched by conferences, mostly, of the Costakis Collection as well as several educational programmes were applied. The exhibitions were of Greek and international interest and some of them were the result of international co-operations. During the last three years, in the State Museum of Contemporary Art, over ten exhibitions took place, many of which are of international character: The visitor numbers of these exhibitions are also mentioned below, according the annual reports of the Museum. More precisely "Lost *Vanguard* Found: Synthesis of Architecture and Art in Russia (1915-1935)" (2008-duration five months, 1.721 visitors), "Rodchenko & Popova: Defining Constructivism" (2009-duration three months, "Intersections" (2009-duration two months, 691 visitors 1.934 visitors), "Athena Tacha" from Public to the Private" (2010-duration 3 months, 2.249 visitors), "The Beautiful is just the first degree of the Terrible" (2009/2010-duration 3 months, 1.926 visitors), "Isole mai Trovate -Islands never found" (2010, durations four months, 2.327 visitors), "SADOK SUDEI - A trap For Judges" (2010-duration three months, 2.013 visitors,) and "The Cosmos of the Russian Avant-Garde" (2010/2011).

### **SWOT analysis**

#### **The internal audit** (Hill and O' Sallivan & O' Sallivan, 2003)

Starting from the internal situation of the museum, we could say that the weaknesses outweigh strengths. First of all, regarding the museum's funding situation, there is safe and secure government grant, including salaries, conservation of the artworks and security of the museum. The income of the museum comes, exclusively, from ticket and catalogue sales.

Additionally, there are no extra grants, which would undertake its promotion and advertisement. Secondly, the range of the exhibition halls are about 3.300 m<sup>2</sup>; many events take place in there, as for example lectures and extra exhibitions, but there are not any special-designed digital room for the lectures or other events. In terms of staffing, there are around 30 people working in the museum; the particular personnel is not as experienced as it should be, especially in management field, which is very important for the promotion of a contemporary museum. More specifically, the inadequate advertisement leads to the reduction of visitor numbers. Moreover, there is lack of volunteers, who would be very useful for undertaking additional work. As for the "physical resources" (Hill et al., 2003) and the museum's facilities, there is a good library-service but no operation of a gift shop and cafe, and as a result, the income is reduced and the visitors are dissatisfied. Additionally, there has been no official visitor survey, which indicates the type of the audience visiting the museum. According to Hill, O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan (2003: 290), one of the "two specific dimensions" of marketing objectives is the "customers" (audiences, visitors or participants). Furthermore, the museum has arranged for the blind people, and for this reason provides a special program for them. However, the access to the museum for the disabled is impossible; there are no special facilities in and out of the museum for them.

### **The external audit (environmental analysis) (Ibid: 281)**

Continuing to the external factors, although the area, where the State Museum is located, used to be underdeveloped, recently it has upgraded significantly (new roads, sidewalks, luxury hotel) and as a consequence, the museum's reputation is getting more and more increased. Another great opportunity for it to become more attractive to visitors is the existence of a theatre and Orchestra, which constitute part of the "Moni Lazariston" complex. The only disadvantage is that the public transport access to the museum is difficult, but the fact that it is located outside the city centre, means that there is more parking-space available and thus, no other competitors, which tend to threaten the visiting to the museum. This, indeed, happens; there are no other art organizations that could constitute a threat for the reputation of the museum.

### **Objectives**

The main Museum's objective, which should be carried out during the next three years, emphasizing in the educational and learning sector, is to increase its visitor numbers and also to "develop and retain new audiences" (Hill, O' Sullivan and O' Sullivan, 2003), especially when its exhibitions are of international appeal. In addition to this, the This target may be achieved under some specific conditions: a) the public should be involved in the activities of the museum and the society should hold an active role, b) the museum should collaborate with other educational institutions, in order to offer unique learning experiences, c) the museum should implement an interactive policy, especially for school children, d) it should organize qualitative exhibitions, which will be accompanied with understandable texts and interpretative comments, e) the museum should apply a communicational policy based on the rules of marketing, aiming at its target audience, f) it should develop its fundraising through donations, creation of gift shop and cafe, g) the creation of an association "Friends of the Museum" is a necessity, as well as the pursuit of volunteering and lastly, the exhibitions of the museum should be accompanied with various events (lectures, conferences and cultural happenings), so as to increase the duration of the museum visit. Additionally, as Graham Black states "museums must learn to engage visitors more effectively and to encourage them to return regularly through the range of services they provide", because "much of what appeals about museums stems from their individuality" (Black, 2005: 268,270).

### **"Lifelong Learning" and educational programmes**

It is commonly known that Lifelong Learning has become a necessity in the European Union and is connected with all the educational activities. According to the Memorandum of Lifelong Learning of the European Commission (2000), Lifelong Learning should not be considered as only one aspect of education and training, but it should become the guiding practice for learning.

In this context, the education provided by the museums is regarded as a form of Lifelong Learning, as the museums are considered as organizations where non-formal training takes place, alongside the main systems of education and training (European Commission, 2000). However "It is the concept of lifelong learning which has become part of the political agenda across the western world, linked to the competitive advantage accruing from a trained workforce able to respond to issues of globalization" (Black, 2005:125).

Furthermore, according to the international practice, the concept of learning is connected to the function of museums, since education consists one of the basic aims of every museum, as stated in the International Council of Museums (ICOM) definition of museum "A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment (ICOM, 2007). As Graham Black argues, "every experience in a museum, archive or library had the potential to be a learning opportunity - an opportunity to acquire, reflect on and apply new experiences. This approach is usually described in terms of a learning cycle" (Black, 2005:132). In terms of the Educational Field, the State Museum of Contemporary Art, on the whole, organizes educational programs for school groups of all ages. School group visits are also conducted. There is also a special accessibility programme for people with visual impairments titled "Touching Art". The Museum organizes workshops for school children and for adults, as well as preparation visits for teachers. Additionally, it offers guided tours to social groups (<http://www.greekstatemuseum.com/kmst/education/index.html>). However, all this educational activity was not enough to raise the numbers of visitors to the museum. For this reason, the main museum's concern will be the emphasis in "education and learning", as "museums are considered by many to be principally educational institutions, as well as, or rather than, collecting institutions" (Sandell and Janes, 2007:108).

As Jeffery - Clay (In Sandell and Janes, 2007:109) points out: museums are ideal constructivist learning environments. They allow visitors to move and explore freely, working at their own pace. They encourage group interaction and sharing. They allow personal experience with real objects. They provide a place for visitors to examine and expand their own understanding. As museum professionals it is our job to build and enhance these environments to pull the visitors into the experience, allowing them to explore in ways that pique their curiosity and encourage them to investigate and make comparisons to their own lives and experiences. Programs and exhibits must be carefully crafted and tested to *assure* that they *enhance visitor* knowledge and/ or feelings without encouraging misconceptions. This is the appropriate concept for the State Museum of Contemporary Art in order to enhance the visitor attraction and interest.

### **Key Issues and Strategy**

As mentioned above, education has become a core function of every museum and is included in their strategic planning. However, the increase of visitor numbers is a key issue and should be part of the museum's strategic planning and marketing. Some of the key issues and targeted actions that the museum's administration should undertake are the following (Black, 2005:87-89): First of all, there has not been done any visitor and market survey, which is a very essential lack of the museum; a possible solution for this is to include communication with other institutions, organizations and associations, special guided tours, lectures and activities for all the family. In general, the museum should open up to the public and the community. An additional issue is the lack of volunteering; Secondly, analysis of the "existing product" and weather it meets the needs of the target audience.

The main issue here is to promote, in this case, the significance of the Russian Avant-Garde artworks and attract the interest of sponsors, who "will enhance its reputation and offer good value for money" (Hill, O' Sullivan and O' Sullivan), 2003: 296). This will be achieved, if the museum emphasizes more on "PR and advertising" (Ibid: 292), as well as, on its promotion and publicity through the electronic and written press or by situating posters and banners in streets or by sending leaflets and exhibition program to the close area. Furthermore, a special care should be given to the internal marketing of the museum; this could be solved by getting all the staff members to be familiar with the museum's mission and be able to "meet visitor needs and wants". More specifically, the introduction of marketing in museums is an essential priority as it "can be attributed to four factors"; the first factor is "the growth of Museums", the second one "the question of financing", the third one "the competitive environment" and lastly "the need to know the visitors better" (Sandell & Janes, 2007: 298-301). The museum will focus, mostly, on the last factor in the appearance of marketing in museums, as to indicate that it possesses a strong, positive identity, in order to "attract targeted audiences" (Black, 2005: 81). Finally, visitor services need to be taken under consideration as well; the museum experience is an important issue, as "the primary role of visitor services is to encourage and support access to museums by all visitors and the potential visitors". The facilities offered by the museum, such as detailed marketing, parking, internal signage, opening hours, gift shop, cafe, audio-visual media, access to people with impairments, make the museum an attractive as well as safe destination (Black, 2005).

**Implementation** (Sandell & Janes, 2007)

The above strategies will be "brought into action" (Ibid: 154) in a three year period as following; the first year of implementation (2011) is including: a) cooperation with other institutions and inception of educational programs b) the staff-member training and general improvements to the internal marketing of the museum, c) improvement of the facilities and d) the creation of memberships. In the second year (2012), there will be conducted a visitor and market survey, as well as display of the new product and the start of museum's promotion aiming to visitors' and sponsors' attraction. In the last year of implementation (2013), the whole program and strategies will be evaluated.

**Conclusion**

The State Museum of Contemporary Art was originally founded in order to house the precious Costakis Collection. The choice of the city of Thessaloniki, instead of the Greek capital Athens, was a political decision, the result of an audacious cultural policy of the Greek Ministry of Culture. During its operation, the Museum should evaluate the quality of its services, regenerate and monitor the visitors' reactions. The evaluation should take place in three stages: before the opening of the exhibition (front-end evaluation), during the exhibition (formative evaluation) and after the exhibition closes (summative evaluation) (Dean, 1994). The State should monitor the function of the Museum and also evaluate its operations annually. In that way, it will be less possible for the museum to deviate from its mission, especially regarding its relation to the community.

From the above analysis, one can deduct that the State took a great risk by locating the museum in the culturally and economically downgraded western part of the city and that is confirmed by the most recent discussion about relocating the museum in the center of Thessaloniki. Effectively, the Greek Minister of Culture Kostas Tzavaras officially announced the merge of the two major organizations of the city regarding contemporary art, the State Museum of Contemporary Art (Les Lazaristes) and the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, which is a private institution. Ultimate goal of this merge is to house both museums in the central part of the city, so that they will become more accessible to the public (Nanou, 2013).

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