

A Cultural policy should be created following the bottom–up approach

Andrea Zlatař Violić, Professor at the Department of Comparative Literature, Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb; a career in journalism behind her, and a political career in front of her, given that she is a member of Hrvatska narodna stranka (Croatian People's Party) and the Kukuriku coalition, and their possible candidate for the Minister of Culture. Speaking of her public engagements, it should be mentioned that from 2001 to 2005 she was a member of the Zagreb City Council, in charge of the area culture. Her latest book, "Rječnik tijela" ("Dictionary of the body") was shortlisted for the newly awarded "Jutarnji List" award for journalism.

Firstly, on cultural policy. It seems that after the two strategic documents from the late nineties and the years following year zero ("Strategija kulturnog razvitka"/"The Strategy of Cultural Development," drafted by Vjeran Katunarić and Biserka Cvjetičanin, and "Bilježnice" /"The Notebooks" by Vjeran Zuppa), the culture and its routes are hardly seen. Everything remains just a vague party indication. Not to mention the stench of the way HDZ kept the accounting books for culture sector. So what is the reason for the lack of vision in this area?

I think that Croatia lacks strategic documents in various sectors, not in culture only. The HDZ–way of ruling the country is based on a combination of some ad hoc solutions, the constant circumventing of systemic change, and long-term visions. Instead of the professional analysis we are offered arbitrary numbers that politicians quote as they please, and the main way of "managing" the country is the through the state budget. If you want to learn about the priorities of our governments since 2003, you would have to analyze the state budgets, understand their logic of funding. The same applies for culture, except that in this case the reasons for the lack of cultural policy are clearly visible: the reason is the existing policy of maintaining the status quo and supporting the relationships with already established clients. To make the matters worse, while the political elites have been utterly disinterested for culture, a very strong research scene have been developed during the last ten years – besides the works by the authors you have mentioned, in the meantime some studies have appeared of the European cultural policies (by **Sanjin Dragojević**, **Nina Obuljen**), of the transition context (by **Nada Švob Dokić**), of the cultural industries (by Jaka Primorac) or the cultural tourism (by **Daniela Angelina Jelinčić**), of the models of theater, of the laws (**Darko Lukić** and **Vitomir Lončar**), and last but not least, by the youngest authors dealing with emerging urban cultures, such as **Dea Vidović** is. We have therefore already got two generations of the new cultural policy experts, whose expertise is poorly utilized.

The reasons for the strike

Regarding this, how do you see your nomination for the future minister of culture in the new government?

The "nomination" is the result of a survey conducted among cultural operators, and has to do with my activity within HNS; and my work in city government in the first half of 2000s has also been remembered. There are many decisions to be made from this moment on, until the election time comes and the government formation, it is too many decisions to allow me to talk about this as if it were a reality. What I see is that there is a series of initiatives for change within the sector – they have come from filmmakers first, then from writers and publishers, these days from musicians also, and from the independent culture since ever – and whoever happens to be

the minister will have to negotiate and shape the cultural politics using the participatory approach, without imposing ideas from the top down. Personally, I think that Croatia needs to work on the development strategies of cities and regions, and that the only feasible way of shaping cultural strategy is treating it as an inter-sectoral whole which connects education, environment, heritage, cultural industry, tourism ... And that is the direction that we at HNS advocate, the development of "creative cities", the development of regions.

Regarding higher education, what is your position on the initiative opposing the package of new laws (against tuition fees, against the reduction of quotas and the like), and what else could incite a new strike? Are you going on strike?

Since the first draft of the new Law on Higher Education, Science and University, and the discussions which it started within the academic community, it was clear that these laws cannot be "fixed", and no "further adjustments" could help them; the only thing to do is to reject them as a whole and, before anything else, to begin to analyze the current situation in our higher education and science sector, and only then to start shaping a national strategy for developing higher education and science. At present there are no systematic data on the effects of the Bologna reforms which the academic community "swallowed up" as a false lure for a common European university standards. The experience of these reforms in Croatia are very much subject to debate, and not only when it comes to "numbers of graduates", but primarily regarding the quality of studies. The new laws – and no one disputes the need for change – must be based on analysis of the current situation and a strategy rather than be imposed by the competent ministry's political will. When it comes to strategy, I advocate a method known as the "participatory public policy", which means that the design starts "from below" and involves all interested parties – from individuals and departments to universities and institutes, but also students, their organizations, as well as any other institution willing to participate in articulating the public interest in science and higher education sector. Given that none of this has happened, and weeks and weeks have passed in waiting for the government to move the bills through the legislative process, the strike – organized by Academic solidarity – is the only remaining possibility; as the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports still just ignores all the criticisms of the law which have come from a large part of the academic community. We are not talking here about some partial observations that could be "resolved through amendments", but a critique of the principles on which laws are based – the autonomy of universities, the danger of commercialization and privatization, and the scientific and educational system being subjected to short-term needs of the neoliberal market.

Commercialization in Rijeka

It has long been clear that the Humanities community has only to loose by engaging into the entire complex of the commercialization of higher education. It seems that technical and natural science faculties are by their nature abler to manage in this situation. For the Humanities the Bologna approach is disastrous. What about this?

If we look at how interested the "market" is for the Bologna graduates, the results are equally disastrous for both the humanities and technical or science faculties, as in Croatia the Bologna reforms have offered no more than cosmetical improvement of the higher education, inasmuch they show higher percentages of university graduates. There are several major problems in the stories about connecting the "market needs" with enrollment rates, and the establishment of closer relation between the country's economy and the degree programs. The first and most obvious one is that we have neither market analysis nor economic strategy, and it seems foolish

to form educational programs on the grounds of such an economy as ours presently is. The cycle of curricula creation and "production" of the first generation of graduates lasts at least seven years, and it would be good to hear what the current ministers know about what is that that we will need in seven years. Maybe we would need shepherds for guarding sheep? There is a mantra which swirls around this market-orientated study programming, that the humanities are redundant, unnecessary, and useless. It is clear to everyone that the pharmaceutical industry will grow stronger, but could any responsible person claim that Croatia does not need linguists, indologists, and philosophers? And thirdly, the worse about the idea that the economy should determine the degree programs and quotas is that the fundamental and basic freedom of scientific research would be lost.

All that nowadays could be read about the establishment of a Performing Arts Faculty in Rijeka is symptomatic, as students are expected to pay high tuition rates. Given that this Faculty would to be organized on the premises of the University of Rijeka, how should we interpret this phenomenon? Is not this the darkest form of commercialization?

How else should we call it, the realization of public-private partnership? Many mistakes have been done in this regard from the very start; from the idea itself for the faculty establishment to the teaching staff selection procedure. And here again I have to mention the issue of cultural policy and problems of arts higher education. The arts academies are and will be in a horrible situation as long as they are embedded in the current university system – neither the promotion system within the present academic career structure nor the way of financing projects (which actually excludes them from this possibility) allow academies to have a flow of teaching artist in decent financial conditions; and currently external cooperation barely exist; and without any projects it is impossible to hire new employees. The solution Rijeka has offered merely underlines illogicalities of the system as a whole. With the promotion system bypassing the principal institution, it is a political persiflage when a far-right Commission President elects a left-wing representative, as this is not about reconciliation but about their common interest we know nothing of. A transparent and a much better long term solution would be to start such an arts higher education institution which both the city and the state would support because they recognize the artistic quality – and this quality is not questionable. In this form, if the name guarantees the quality of studies, any price would be reasonable. In its present situation, this is just another example of the commercialization of the public universities system.

Is your involvement in a liberal party actually conflictual with your participation in the fight against the tuition fees?

That I ask myself daily, as well as many similar questions regarding a possible collision of academic work and political activism in general. In the same way I could, after all, ask myself what I am doing in a country with such a degree of corruption and abuse of public office. But for years now the HNS programs have seen education as one the greatest levers of development of Croatia and there is no logic by which one can conclude that the HNS economic program imply the idea of commercializing education. Although it might sound naive, I, as a citizen, expect the next government to enable the economic growth which will also bring improvement of standards in the public policies sector – of education, health and culture.

Do you follow the Subversive Film Festival? If so, you have probably seen that some media claim that former terrorists are visiting us. Earlier Karl-Heinz Dellwo was under attack, a member of the RAF, and now it is Antonio Negri, a member of the Italian Red Brigades. So, are we visited by terrorists or by revolutionaries?

I follow the SFF as much as can, but due to some very technical circumstances of everyday life it is less than I would have wanted. But I am very well familiar with its program. Given the alternative you have offered, the answer is – we are visited by revolutionaries. But I would actually say that we are visited and offered lectures and discussions by the serious scholars who are persons of high ethical standards and who are passionate for what they do – and that is the theme of criticism and change of existing social relations. I know Antonio Negri, Zygmunt Bauman and Terry Eagleton as authors; their books have changed me. I wonder, just out of interest, what kind of audience (and in what kind of venue) would show up if the Prime Ministers of their states would come to Zagreb in their stead. And this is not in prospect, this is not even a challenge.