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From culture of dissent to culture of innovation and experiment

At times of dissolving values, rising of nationalism, fragmentation of the country, loss of identity, disappearing institutions, destructed society (Bolčić 1995) – the role of Soros foundation in cultural field was to identify those actors, those lonely voices who were ready to fight dominant nationalistic trends, to raise their voices against chauvinism and war hysteria.

The national euphoria, war and refugee flows – together with media manipulation and indoctrination, created atmosphere where capitalism was introduced without much discussion, and socialist self-governing system was abandoned even in education and cultural sphere. Both lost their autonomy by new restrictive laws which re-etatized institutional systems. The disappearance of the unquestionable frameworks of social reality (Stojković B. 1995) further enhanced the processes of social destruction.

Consequently, the cultural institutions have reduced their art projects and critical programming activities. Self-censorship, as well as escapism as policy started to prevail in theater or museum repertoires (if not polluted with nationalistic megalomania). The spaces of free expressions established in 70' (student cultural centers) or 80's (youth press and clubs), lost their importance and character. The wave of brain drain took the best and most energetic part of the youth, but also an important part of creators of Yugoslav new wave movement (and their audiences). Cultural market was diminished, hyperinflation made irrelevant any box office income, important publishing houses disappeared together with cultural reviews, cinematography and television stopped producing feature formats... The war in Bosnia further ruined social and cultural infrastructure and forced hundred thousands of population toward inner or outer exile.

In this moment Soros foundations throughout the region, entered this real social vertigo (Stojković 1995) focusing their policies on development of civil society, peace activism, independent media and investigative, objective journalism, intercultural dialogue and humanitarian actions – all which might lead toward open societies, in that moment so far from the horizon. In the first moment foundations had not shown interest for artistic sphere. But, very quickly, through all different programs art and cultural projects or at least their components, appeared as integral parts of submitted projects, specifically within Media program (B 92, *Pacific*, *Republika*, Radio Index, Studio B, *Vijenac* and *Arkzin*, in Zagreb, *Feral Tribune* in Split etc.), and in the Children program - Children Soros Camp (*Ludus*, 1993)². Thus, the need for specific strategies and specific approach in supporting Arts and Culture activities

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² The most positive policy outcome of the work of foundations in the region was exactly this interdisciplinarity. Support to civil society or to independent media till today is using culture as a powerful tool of social change and intercultural dialogue, like the cross-border project "Cross.Radio" linking numerous independent radio stations in the region mostly through exchange of music programs.

was expressed, and Art and culture programs very soon became the most visible and symbolically extremely important part of Soros foundations strategies in the region.

1. Art activism – grant giving strategy

The story of arts activism in Serbia starts with activities of Radio B 92 who was the key independent cultural actor of that moment. This role became evident during the first opposition meeting for free media (9 march 1991), when the authorities forbade B 92 to have informative (in fact any verbal program), so they continued their battle with music, and later with other types of cultural-political-media actions (*Kidnapped Stipe Mesić, First Belgrade barricade, Rimtutituki* - peace music caravan around Belgrade, etc.)... From there – to complex program of music concerts and happenings: *Urbazona* (initiated by cult underground figure Miomir Grujić Fleka) – was a small step. This was the path to creation of an independent art scene - a scene which wanted to act subversively in a society with whom could not enter in any kind of consent...

In ex-Yugoslavia, and specifically in Belgrade, this independent radical scene during 90` was not only countering nationalism and xenophobia, but also trying to find response to the embargo imposed from outside. In the same time, many artists have “left” institutions, choosing not to perform and not to exhibit in those institutions polluting atmosphere with hatred and nationalism. So, they created internal “embargo” - boycott of cultural institutions (joined by a large part of audiences also). In 1992 the boycott of National Theater was proclaimed, in 1993 of public television, and from 1994 – nearly the complete cultural system: student cultural centers, National museum, Museum of Contemporary arts, etc. where “abandoned” by both artists and critical audiences.

The meaning of the independent art scene was primarily to produce new ideas, new concepts, which the established scene, dead, suffocated and turned to past, over flooded with nationalism, was unable to produce. The independent scene brought together the aesthetical, ethical and intellectual positions which challenged the worldviews officially imposed by state and the church: nationalism, xenophobia, patriarchal values, hatred speech, media manipulation with ethnic stereotypes, etc.

Many projects that artists had organized in the first five years of 90` had been done with support of Soros foundation: in the frozen country - Ice Art projects, Fia group calendars, Dah Theater “research” performances³ and research of visual artist group Absolutely Novi Sad, ŠKART group happenings... Obviously, the number of “groups” is witnessing the need of individual artists to gather together in hostile surroundings, to fight isolation, to find synergy with others in the environment echoing with patriotic songs.

Independent artists also had to find new forms of presentations, using mostly unconventional places within the city. Thus art activities had been presented in apartments (Exhibition *Private-Public*), Tracks (Ice-Art), on the Green market (Škart), techno-rave clubs, underground passages, ruins etc.

³ *This Babylonian turmoil*, according to B. Brecht, was the first antiwar performance on the streets of Belgrade. Till today, the performances of Dah theater are bravely going against the stream (*Female side of War, Memory for the Victims of Srebrenica Genocide*, etc.)

That was how art and culture became instrument in raising voice of civil society – voice of dissent.

The networking of these projects under the roof of Radio B92 within the *Urbazona* project has strengthened the marginal scene which had not have any support except in that moment sporadic donations from Soros fund... Through its numerous exhibitions, publications (book serials *Apatrides*), concerts, music and video productions, Radio B 92 became very important actor in Belgrade cultural life, and thus introduced new “urban” culture in folklorize public space (Dragićević Šešić, 1996). It helped implementation of the projects which otherwise would be very difficult to realize. Although excluded from the world art scene, and deliberately self-excluded from Yugoslavian official art scene, artists and mediators tried to act, to provoke public opinion and incidental audience.

The most significant project in this sense is a project of art group Škart – *Sadness*. Every weekend in 1993 the group printed one poem⁴ and created performative action of distribution on the markets, railway stations... The names of poems: *The sadness of potential rifles*, *The sadness of potential vegetables*, *The sadness of potential landscapes*, *The sadness of potential travellers*. In those poems⁵ “travellers do not travel (changing places is not travelling)”, “landscapes are sadly neat”, and “belonging to mummy and daddy. (...) It’s sad if they think belonging to history and geography”. The poems witnessed predominant feelings of the people, never before expressed in poetry lines...⁶

Quickly, Soros foundation came to necessity to directly and transparently create program for the direct support to art and culture (not through other programs). It became specific program component with its own aims and strategies, little differing in priorities from country to country. At the beginning, it had only support to publishing projects and cultural reviews, but as Arts and Culture program focused on:

- a) Support to independent artists and activists groups (raising awareness, peace culture, intercultural dialogue...) – support to radical art movements, activism
- b) Support to innovative and challenging art forms (performing arts, digital culture) – to art which were crossing boundaries of disciplines and genres

Support to publishing projects and cultural reviews was very important, specific part of foundation programs – which culminated in 1994 by joint presentation of achievements on Frankfurt book fair. That was the first moment for new publishers and publishing companies to meet – from Antibarbarus and Durieux (Zagreb) to

⁴ The Group, besides different artistic actions, continue even today with art activism, outside of „project logic“ and without a budget, like „**KITCHEN WISDOMS**, New Embroideries-**approved utopia**: Self-initiated project, financed from personal pocket-money and independent from any cultural/social frames, succeeded to exist for almost 9 years, and is improving itself in local and international scenes. Recently New Embroideries won award for contemporary art in October Salon in Belgrade and represented Serbia at the Design Biennale in Sent Etienne, France. "I don't want to be silent any more" loudly said Lenka at one of the openings." (2008)

⁵ Translated in English by David Albahari

⁶ Latest project of the same group – Pesničenje, returned them to poetry... This represent serial of happenings where poets of all generations, amateur or professional, are gathering to recite their poetry. Money from box-office is used to print small poetry booklets, which then are distributed for free on next gathering which happens in independent cultural center Rex.

Vreme knjige (Stubovi kulture), CLIO, Belgrade circle, Zoran Stojanović publishing house, B 92... At the debates organized by Palais Jalta and East-West meeting point, numerous colleagues from the region came, as it was first “going out” of independent Serbian publishing scene... The Catalogue, presenting independent publishers and all books and cultural reviews supported by Soros foundation, had on the Cover the reproduction of the first number of “L’impossible”, FIA group artistic review. This review was published every month on one page, choosing for the title, the title of review published within Yugoslav vanguard zenithist movements in the 20’s. Red face of the FIA group leader, shining from the cover, brought discomfort and raised many questions, achieving its aim of provoking and “disturbing” within culture of dissent.

It was obvious that in this first phase of its activities Soros foundations recognized importance of individual artists and artistic production which was the only way for many of them to show their disobedience, protest to the governmental policies and practices. Foundations realized that those were the strongest voices of dissent, which, if united and given better conditions (spaces) for their activities may strengthen the civil society movements and expressions. Thus a need to create a space outside polarized political scene – government vs. nationalistic opposition (Savić.O) became visible.

2. Independent centers - culture of activism and innovation

An important moment in development of civil society has been marked by creation of independent cultural centers through Soros foundation support to arts and culture of dissent. It was obvious that through grant giving programs, although a lot of initiatives and projects could be implemented, a systemic and more important cultural change could not be achieved. Also, the actors on independent scene still felt isolated, lonely in their efforts of culture of dissent. So, in order to develop their activities and achieve deeper impact, they started to look for spaces where they could install their activities.

Metelkova (the first squat) initiated this process, as those caserns of Yugoslavian army in Ljubljana had important symbolical meaning for the Slovenian independence and civil society development. In other countries of ex-Yugoslavia this process also followed the rise of artistic activism and civil society movements. Only when critical mass of projects, programs and groups exist the such space becomes necessary – but also, sustainable. Thus, in September 1994 the Rex – cultural center of Radio B92 was opened with energy and commitment of Darka Radosavljević, in the abandoned building of Jewish community (which changed a lot of purposes in its history, from Jewish community home, “Braća Baruh” cinema, municipal auction hall for objects in apartments inherited by municipality etc.). Soon, this process joined the Center for Cultural Decontamination – opened in Pavilion Veljković in January 1995, as well as Apostrophe in Novi Sad and Concordia in Vršac. Throughout the region similar initiatives had developed, from Mala stanica in Skopje to Powder Mill in Osijek, Kibla in Maribor (July 1996), etc.

Those were “parallel worlds” (Savić O.) – only free spaces of normality and openness which enabled gathering of creative personalities, free thinkers, but also re-establishment of regional cultural cooperation. Previously, only LUR - *Flying class*

workshop organized in Belgrade, Skopje, Mostar⁷ was bringing artists from the region together. That is why we in Belgrade (isolated due to embargo, visa, economic crisis...) still remember excitement when first *Dibidon* caravan with 30 artists of new generation went from Belgrade to Slovenia⁸ (September 1994), and even more, during *Kontradibidon*, when the Slovenian artists for the first time came from Slovenia to Serbia...

Kontradibidon had happened in different spaces now available for alternative emerging artists: Rex (Stripburger exhibition), Center for cultural decontamination (Jurij Krpan – City metaphysics), but also in KST (music bands) BITEF theater (performances) and Belgrade Cultural center (photo exhibition and debate of editors of cultural reviews) whose artistic director Ivana Vujić and director and program editor Vesna Danilović had been brave enough to host it⁹.

But, in Belgrade without contact with outside world, specific marketing technique – rumor, brought immense audience to a *Kontradibidon* performative fashion event – models dressed in chocolate and sugar foam according to the idea of a young Slovenian fashion designer Leonora Mark. Although many questioned such an event in that moment in Belgrade where majority of population had been on the edge of survival due to an unemployment, a high inflation rate (salary was paid four times in month, supplemented by “food” or hygiene artifacts), this high interest had shown a “hunger” of Belgrade audiences to see the life behind the frontiers which cut horizons and limited experiences (Dragičević Šešić, 2001 b)

Quickly other collaborative events have followed: *Living in Sarajevo* (May 1995), *Tuzla – Belgrade* (February 1996) and *Pertej*, exhibition of Kosovo artists (July 1997). However, these events happened sporadically, and in the first big event organized con-jointly in Center for cultural decontamination and in Rex – festival *AlterImage*, only one group of artists from Croatia was present – Labin Art Express... It shows the extent of broken links even among artists and artistic groups which in 80's had quite developed collaborations. But those who were mostly hurt were the young, emerging artists, those whose professors and friends left country, cultural institutions closed for experiments and innovations, media spoke only about war and politics... There were no spaces for real art practices and cultural debates, for gatherings and project developments – so, there were high expectations from newly created independent cultural centers.

Festival *AlterImage* (September 1996) was a key event in profiling of the role of independent centers. Although linked to Bitef festival (to offer better visibility to independent art scene), it had presented all those artists and art groups which in previous five years had experimented but also brought ethical issues in art projects – from theater groups such as: Dah, Ogdalo, Mimart, Omen and Dodest from

⁷ Initiated by writer Biljana Jovanović, LUR succeeded in organizing small collaborative events outside main public institutional system.

⁸ Besides Partybrakers, majority of participants had never before been in Slovenia, belonging to just emerging generation of artists (i.e. bands DLM and Playboy).

⁹ Later, managing director of Bitef Theater did not have courage to accept donation from Soros fund, as political repression toward Fund was escalating and all those receiving grants were treated in official media as antipatriots and traitors – attributes which persist till today in nationalistic press such as Pečat.

Podgorica (whose theatrical project *Museum of bicyclist rebellion* questioned the raise of nationalism, its musealisation and canonization), to artists-performers Dušica Knežević, Ljudmila Stratimirović, Marija Krtolica, Saša Marković Mikrob, Talent Factory, Jelica Radovanović and Dejan Anđelković, Nenad Racković and numerous others... The atmosphere was festive and celebratory – but also “reflective”, as it was a unique occasion for academics and critical intelligentsia together with artists of different disciplines to get acknowledged with each other work, and for the initiation of future more complex collaborative projects.

Those independent institutions offered infrastructure and better conditions for production and presentation of art work in the second part of 90`, for all of the independent groups who brought the true energy of the alternative radical arts movements. The thoughts and emotions of the artists, faced with war atrocities, with the closed, isolated society, bring about eruptions of unusual creative expressions, contributing to the implementation of a new art break-through, and to the creation of a radical artists and intellectuals core group which would become important very soon, in the first massive citizen protest for democracy in winter 1996-97 (Dragičević Šešić 2001a).

Since that moment, the rhythm of artistic actions, the rhythm of creation and development of concepts - production of meaning, has been established together with theoretical scene (represented by reviews such as *Transkatalog*, *Pro Femina*, *Reč* etc.), both deeply connected with political groupings such as Belgrade Circle, Women in Black, later Resistance (Otpor) etc. In this way synergy of operation, but also mutual exchange of thoughts and ideas, had enriched activities and enable more complex and strong projects, like project *Worried September! Wilhelm Reich in Belgrade – Lust for life*¹⁰.

Lust for life had multiple dimensions: publication of a book of Wilhelm Reich *Listen Little man* and a serial of street action-theater (invisible theater) performances derived from the book, film program comprising documentaries about citizen protest (G. Marković, R. Andrić) and feature films like Chaplin’s *Great dictator* or Makavejev’s *WR*, theater performances¹¹, academic conferences, psychological workshops, and exhibition of the paintings “*Svečana slika*”¹² where central place was having a painting of Mića Popović, banned during first exhibiting attempt in 1974 depicting ruling Dutch and Yugoslav family (Despotović J. 1999). This exhibition was deconstructing the “production of glorious reality” in the time when “little man” was hardly surviving. The whole project was devoted to a small, common, ordinary man, citizen of Belgrade and the world, who, feeling hopelessness and incapacity resigned from life, from responsibility for its own being and future. That is why, according to Reich, a “little man” is “responsible” for the evils of XX century, for any form of totalitarianism, from fashism to nationalistic euphoria.

¹⁰ Vuk Stambolović, prof. of Social medicine gave the idea, and L.Đukić, Soros fund coordinator gathered number of artists and intellectuals (Dušan Makavejev, Borka Pavićević, Ana Miljanić, Velimir Čurguz Kazimir, Jovan Despotović, students of Faculty of Applied Arts, etc.).

¹¹ The Serpents jacket (The remains of the snake) of Slobodan Šnajder, directed by Roberto Ciulli, Theater an den Ruhr in Mülheim.

¹² Festive paintings ?

To reach this “common man” Ana Miljanić decided to perform this serial of performances throughout the city. She had planned ten performative 15 minutes street actions from 10a.m. to 7 p.m., realized in one hour intervals. Each of the performances was intended for a specific city neighborhood (*site specific*) and for a different target group (retired, refugees without citizenship, “consumers”, secondary school children, commuters on city buses, radio audience, newcomers in the city, and finally – TV viewers – those who wait to be given an opinion because “who are they to have an opinion of their own”... In one word, to all those Reich`s book *Listen Little Man* was meant for). All the participants and incidental audiences had been invited to come to final gathering in the Center for Cultural Decontamination, as symbolical place for debating that experience at 9 p.m. in the evening.

This serial of performances had different effects. Extremely successful with retired population gathering on Kalemegdan park or with working women going back home in artistically “humanized” public bus (efforts of Škart group) – the project met frustrated refugee “audience” in municipality queuing for citizenship¹³, and enthusiastic “shoppers” not realizing criticism or irony of the performance in Shopping mall...

It has shown how difficult it is to reach with message the population which, saturated by media propagandistic pollution and obsessed with survival issues is not ready to critically rethink even its own position and values. Although going outside of the protected cultural space – artists could reach only some segments of population for whom even the name of the Center where they have been invited to come sounded scary and suspicious. Reviving Augusto Boal`s ideas of the Theater of the Oppressed, Ana Miljanić had shown the importance of social interventions using different artistic forms. It was the beginning of such complex exploratory projects which throughout the region had been developed, such as Zagreb Cultural Capital 3 000, or WHW projects: "What, how and for Whom - on the occasions of the 152nd Anniversary of the Communist Manifesto" and "Broadcasting Project, dedicated to Nikola Tesla".

“Institutionalization” of radical arts through specific alternative art institutions and festivals - film, theater, video-art..., etc. contributed to the preservation of free spirit, political resistance, ethical stands, but also of experimental tendencies, in spite of the both political and market pressures (public money was not given for those institutions and projects considered “subversive”, and audiences had been on the edge of survival that entry had to be mostly free).

Therefore, the meaning of the notion of independent, alternative art scene has been formed in the region in a culturally and historically specific situation, and it would be hardly understandable outside that context. That is the reason why such centers did not have in 90s programs like dj`s evenings – as those programs were linked to “clubbing” events, often regarded by radical artist as part of evasive processes – runaways of realities. Thus in the political turmoil in the streets (1996-7), when the citizens finally freely make their views known – the alternative spaces were not only spaces of creation, they directly became the platforms for free encounters, civil society open discussions and talks on the key issues of the political moment.

¹³ which they will receive only four years later.

Ethics, specific sense of the place characterized all independent organizations acting as platforms for artistic projects. Those were spaces with a clear political and cultural position. Even programs in Rex – open to the youngest audience – from comics to rock, sales of fanzines to media-opera, were in their essence a political debate on current reality.

And that was possible, as the foundations were behind its idea, behind its existence as autonomous independent places, but also behind its projects. That is how multiple platforms for cultural creativity and debate flourished in the region, from Rex and CZKD, to Točka, Multimedija in Skopje, Lamparna in Labin, Mama, Močvara, ... in Zagreb, Pekarna and Kibla in Maribor and later CK 13 in Novi Sad, Abrašević in Mostar...

Innovation – entering Digital worlds

In the repressive everyday situation, where independent centers have been permanently under pressure, alternative art scene in the region with the help of the national foundations entered the free space of World Wide Web long before public cultural institutions and art schools. Ljudmila (Ljubljana Digital Media Laboratory), CyberRex in Belgrade, SCCA in Skopje, Lamparna in Labin and later MaMa, **Multimedia Institute** [mi2] in Zagreb, had a goal to introduce to artists and audiences new media culture, Internet and digital arts, but also “socially inflected approaches to new technologies” – such as open sources, free software, etc.

The educational project “*Against windmills*”, was in the base of future Cyber Rex, offered artists new skills and opened new horizons of creativity and cooperation, providing opportunity to art professors and students to create new type of projects, using digital technology as a tool of creation, presentation, distribution and archiving. The paradigmatic project of the first “generation” of “trainees” was the project Yugomuseum of Mrđan Bajić. This project questioned the key moments and key artifacts of creation and dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia. As the first virtual museum project – it gained wide dissemination and due to its artistic value, but also critical regional relevance – the recognition in artistic and intellectual circles (the project started in 1997, developed through time and represented on Venice biennial in 2007).

In Skopje, within Soros Center for Contemporary Arts Melentije Pandilovski had organized Skopje Electronic Arts Fair (1997-2002), and numerous web data base projects, even Internet auctions of contemporary Macedonian artists, while in Croatia Teo Celakoski since 1998 and "LABinary" CyberCafe in Lamparna (Labin) together with "LABinary" newsletter, organized international CyberKitchen CyberFem School, and since 2001 in MaMa net.club many programs, such as artEfacts/BECOMING_DIGITAL or "media.art.theory.week".

Thus, the virtual sphere was conquered and created new free space for independent critical thinking and innovative artistic creation. Vuk Ćosić, Žana Poliakov, Teo Celakoski and many others used the web to foster further regional collaborative practices and created a tool for socio-political actions, linking social movements and

radical artistic practices. This new virtual space gatherings enabled that widespread sense of isolation was beaten and new communications channels and platforms developed.

3. Collaborative decentralization and capacity building

One of the major problems of cultural life in the region, its centralization in capital cities, was confronted by artists themselves who felt need to connect with similar activist groups and individual initiatives. Those “horizontal exchanges” developed cultural needs and reinforced local capacities, so a number of open clubs and NGOs had been created to fight isolation of local actors and feeling of helplessness... That was the third phase of strategy development of Art and culture program of Soros foundations.

Through small collaborative actions, completely opposite of the state policies of decentralization (limited on touring and support to main stream festivals), Soros funds in the region supported challenging ideas such as Flux¹⁴ or real collaborative projects bringing arts and artists in socially deprived neighbourhoods, outside of empty spaces defined as “cultural”.

One of the issues in the Balkans divided by wars, policies of hatred, victimization and national megalomania was a position of minorities... This issue has a multiple dimensions, and consequently, solutions and strategies have been differentiated, from simple support to minority’s own cultural initiatives or to survival of minority institutions (specifically publishing houses and cultural reviews) to the support of innovative performative projects (like in case of Ujvideki Szinhaz in Novi Sad and Kozstolanyi Dezso Szinhaz). Sometimes complex initiatives had been developed like (on the initiative of Boris Buden, see Kršić, D.) linking spinof project Multimedia center in Zagreb with Serbian minority institutions, very traditional and conservative in both forms and content of operation. It was a good move to reach new audiences and new generations for both organizations, to show new ways of activism and operations to minority groups, but also, to open spaces of innovation to youth from minority groups, often excluded from contemporary processes.

The Soros foundations focus in this third phase (end of the nineties), besides permanent battle for open society and critical thinking, was put on achieving sustainability of cultural sector. Emphasis was put on capacity building in management and marketing, project making and fundraising. The first seminar of the kind was organized in Belgrade for all Soros art and culture coordinators and managers of SCCAs from Estonia to Mongolia, from Russia to Albania. The seminar has shown how regional know-how¹⁵ together with western knowledge should be used, as cultural management in transitional countries, linked (or opposed) to public policies, community traditions and values, demands specific approach in implementing changes and introducing new standards, such as logic of strategic planning, evaluation, fundraising ...

¹⁴ <http://rexold.b92.net/fluxokonas/>, accessed 27th february 2011

¹⁵ Teaching cultural management have already long tradition in the region as Belgrade Faculty of Drama Arts had opened this program in 1961. , so the Reader was prepared as well as different training materials.

Numerous other trainings had followed, but also few long term capacity building programs such as Kultura nova¹⁶ – which regrouped Serbian, Montenegrin, Croatian and Macedonian foundation together with European Cultural Foundation in Amsterdam. This was a new form in developing a joint program targeting NGOs who already had achieved a lot regarding art production, dissemination and community work – but who lack knowledge necessary for further development and sustainability. The program monitors conjointly developed new training methodology and approach together with 15 selected organisation, among them Montenegromobil art Podgorica and Open Cultural Forum Cetinje, Exit theater, Mama, Soros center for contemporary art from Zagreb, Art Workshop Lazareti Dubrovnik, Remont and SCCA Belgrade, Kuda.org Novi Sad, Concordia Vrsac, Darhia Skopje, Media Artes Ohrid, Youth Cultural Center Bitola, etc.

The Ngos entered this demanding three year action program where peer and practice-based learning was the core methodology. Asked to develop pro-active approach in learning, to research and produce strategic analysis and then produce concrete long term strategic plans, all those NGOs acquired complex skills and knowledge which enabled them to become key factors in later development of both civil society and policy making, not only in their countries, but in a wider area of the Balkans. It was one of the most effective programs in the region, showing what joint foundation efforts might produce, and enabling further selfdeveloped actions, programs of all the involved actors separately, but also in a partnership.

Mama, while developing its own strategies, realized necessity of a network, initiated creation of Clubture (2002), regrouping more than 30 independent organisations in Croatia. That helped not only program development, but also spreading knowledge and skills throughout independent sector in Croatia, fostering entrepreneurialism and enabling selfsustainability of numerous organisations.

4. Agenda setting: policy, advocacy and lobbying

Advocacy, lobbying and pro-active approach in policy-making became daily “job” of cultural organisations in civil sector, and from cultural field spread toward urbanism, social inclusion (battle against homophobia), education (where the most important victory was achieved in lobbying for free university education in Croatia). Mama, as one of the organisations who went through Kultura nova program, was in the heart of all those processes, enlarging and fostering further those capacities in whole Southeast Europe linking with new generations of independent cultural organisations in the region, such as Walking Theory in Belgrade, promoting principles of self-organization and self-learning.

The strength of this actions was even bigger, as capitalizing on networking experiences, using Clubture and all its members strength, civil society came right in the heart of cultural policy and wider public policy debates. The movement *Right to the city*, fighting against neoliberal destruction of public spaces and for community-based approach in planning and policy development, although not always having success (“Varšavska street” action), had shown that civil society became not only

¹⁶ <http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/annex05/Case21InformalArtistsNGONetworks.pdf> accessed 28 February 2011.

equal, but leading partner in a policy discussions, raising awareness and creating agenda in cultural policy spheres.

Multimedia in Skopje, regional coordinator of *Kultura nova* program, later developed further numerous trainings and conferences with regional dimension, spreading know-how and energy among public actors of cultural policies (cities of Bitola, Kičevo, Gostivar, Prizren, Novo brdo...), local cultural institutions (city libraries, museums and cultural centers) and, naturally, independent organisations, being among the seven who created a lobby group – coalition of NGOs in Macedonia (2007). Thus Multimedia acted especially in a peripheral areas, outside of capital cities, connecting western Macedonian and Kosovo cities with the rest of the region (from where, due to a language barrier, cultural actors had often been excluded from collaborative programs).

Similar were processes launched by Kuda.org in Novi Sad where coalition *Za nove kulturne politike* (for new cultural policies) had been created (July 2009) opposing city cultural policy emphasizing creative industries and cultural consumption – limiting field of culture on mostly popular festival practices.

The major achievement in this area came recently: A creation of a Coalition of associations and initiatives of independent cultural scene of Serbia. The Coalition regrouped hundreds of actors of independent scene whose initiators went through *Kultura Nova* capacity building program and other relevant trainings supported by OSI, both national foundations and Network Art and Culture Program, but also Policy Fellowship programs, SUN CEU summer schools and other OSI initiatives.

The protocol signed in January in Zrenjanin¹⁷ between independent scene and Coalition represented independent sector, is a benchmark of a new relations – of “shared policies” (Dragičević Šešić 2006) and a good sign of achieved capacities of independent sector who became equal partner in influencing and designing cultural policies and strategies. From now on, each committee in Ministry of culture will have a representative of civil sector, nominated by the Coalition, not by Ministry. The results of this process is also seen in the fact that the head and majority of new strategic group of Ministry of Culture (created in December 2010) comes from independent sector, as it was obvious that this is a new energy and capacity within Serbian cultural sphere, who has a strength and knowledge to foster European integration processes.

New policies of independent sector – memory culture

During the period of dissolving of the country, creation of the new independent states, transition toward capitalist social system, a new culture of memory dominated – culture which wanted to re-examine the political taboo issues of socialist period, but also culture which wanted to erase memories of socialism and often of antifascist past. This deleting of antifascist past and positive memories on “brotherhood and unity”, coincided with new policies of Nation-states, creating new identities and new memories, often in conflict with human rights (chauvinistic) but also with historical sciences.

¹⁷ <http://www.kultura.gov.rs/?jez=sc&p=5863>, accessed 28th February 2011.

Officially expressed (explicite) cultural policies of Balkan countries on their path toward “europeization” have more often used technocratic vocabulary in defining its goals and strategies, usually expressed as policies of de-etatisation, decentralisation, introduction of new legal system, procedures in decision-making, transparency, etc. Even when intention to contribute toward reinforcing national cultural identity was explicite, usually this part of national cultural strategy was not defined (neither in law or in priorities nor through instruments). But, through practices, those “implicit” cultural policies were more “telling” using different action forms: destruction and removal of the “memory of the other”, negligence, or sometimes even conservation but without support to make this heritage living... These three different strategies regarding “dissonant heritage” (Tunbridge J.E. and G.J. Ashworth, 1996) provoked fear and further exodus, like in case of Bosnia, when destruction or threat of distracting was at the beginning of huge displacements of population, or a “policy statement” like in Croatia, where in the last 20 years 3 500 monuments and memory signpost representing World War Two antifascist battle or historical figures of culture of “other” had been destroyed or removed (Vežić, 2010). The mobilization of intellectuals and artists started firstly around name of Square of Fascist victims, but developed toward more coherent artistic-political actions, such as projects of the WHW group, or projects , etc.

On the other side, heritage neglecting policy (both from ottoman and socialist periods) and monument constructing policy in Serbia (religious leaders, medieval or resurrection against Turks heroes) and Macedonia (policy of antiquization), as policies which were dividing memories and colonized people’s subconsciousness, provoked many artists and artistic groups to react and to create numerous projects on public scene, such as Monument group since 2002 (Milica Tomić, Nebojša Milikić, Branimir Stojanović, Darinka Pop Mitić, Svebor Midžić, Damir Arsenijević, etc.), a project De/Construction of Monument (Centre for Contemporary Arts, Sarajevo, 2004 –2006)¹⁸, or the most recent activism in Macedonia where project Skopje 2014 raised such a kind of public action that Open Society Institute in Macedonia helped in publishing of three books: 1. Disorder and Grotesque, 2. They are stealing the city and 3. Architecture and burial (edited by Templum and Plostad Sloboda), where whole of the public debates, satirical texts, analysis and studies, spread in different media, had been collected and reprinted, thus giving possibility for more comprehensive civil movements and action to be further developed.

In all of those raising awareness projects, culture of memory as a part of cultural identity policy was in a heart of debate, showing that there are still a lot of reasons why voice of independent civil society have to be heard. Unfortunately, the public cultural institutions, even those in charge for politics of memory and protection of heritage are not active in public debate (due to different political pressures and loss of autonomy of cultural field). Neither are media, for whom those “cultural” questions are not important that much as direct political issues (corruption and other forms of social pathology and anomie). Although manipulations with past can be considered as evenly important social anomy, without artist groups and independent organisations acting as debate centers, they would not reach public sphere.

¹⁸ <http://www.projekt-relations.de/en/explore/deconstruction/module/overcoming.php> accessed 10th May 2010.

Obviously, all those foundations efforts and efforts of independent centers and organizations such as Točka and Templum in Skopje, CZKD and Rex in Belgrade, Mama in Zagreb, Peace institute in Ljubljana, and many others, had succeeded in creating competent and skilled activists who can bring important issues on the public agenda, who know how to fight for it using precise advocacy arguments in raising public awareness and lobbying methods in achieving political results.

Conclusion

This short text had shown how during this past twenty years art and culture had important role in bringing peace culture, tolerance, ideas of open society, inclusive society, society of debate and intercultural, intergenerational, interreligious dialogue in the region of Europe preoccupied with nation building process. The Culture of dissent which had developed during 90s, created its own organisations, institutions, media, formal and informal channels of art distribution and idea debates. This culture which emphasized right to independent and critical thinking in the moments when the “national unity” was demanded, and patriotism without doubts was a norm, was in the same time the link among free individuals and groups, the link of the present with past (with “forgotten”, revolutionary, or “dissonant” past), the link among divided ethnic groups and link with Europe and European values (although declaratively part of official discourse, not implemented in mainstream culture).

This culture of dissent, the radical arts and critical intellectual platforms, hardly found its media of transmission and developmental support. That is why the role of Soros foundation was of crucial importance. Through competitions that thematized burning issues, announcing focus and priorities (competition for projects which stimulate changes and openness of society and raising social responsibility for happenings during the war and confrontation with the past¹⁹), national foundations together with Art and Culture network program opened new areas in cultural sphere and contributed to important systemic social changes in a societies destroyed with war, media war, nationalistic manipulations, economic transition... The most important fact was that Soros foundations “listened to the ground, and developed strategies according to our needs, even when sometimes those needs had not been clearly articulated. That was not often the case with foreign foundations, which usually came with their own agenda”.²⁰

Thus, following changes in the socio-political context and the needs of the Culture of dissent, the foundation cultural policies had to go through several phases, trying to change circumstances in which only limited number of actions was possible for independent actors. To achieve the main aim of its existence – open society, those policies focused in its initial phase on supporting individual artists, groups and movements and their projects, specifically those opposing nationalism and war. In the same time, those projects were innovative in their forms, in methods of producing and distributing (research-based or community-based artistic projects, site-specific, etc.)

From there, naturally a need to have “foci” for joint actions developed – so, a second phase brought independent platforms and centers for mutual action thus fostering civil society groups and their social importance, enabling audience gatherings and open

¹⁹ OSI Croatia, 29.4.2005

²⁰ Darka Radosavljević in an interview with author, February 2011.

social debate. Those centers had connected mutually, entered in dialogue and collaborative projects, and together with numerous Soros spinoffs created wide networks of open clubs, creative individuals and projects throughout the region.

Next, third phase demanded new knowledge and skills to all those activists artists now becoming managers and project and movements leaders. That imposed changes in the foundations strategies, reinforced also by the fact that in many of the cities and countries democratic governance replaced previous authoritarian system. So, support to the improvement of public governance aiming toward achievement of systemic changes within democratized (although never completely democratic) cultural policies, became one of the major strategic pillars...

But, created networks of independent cultural centers and open clubs, those new agents of cultural development throughout the region, demanded focus on raising their capacities in management and marketing so that they could become independent also from foundation help. In this phase endorsed sustainability of independent cultural sector enabled them to develop more complex, interdisciplinary and transborder projects, to enter European integration processes as the leading partners from the region.

The final phase of the foundation activities coincided with exit strategy of Arts and Culture Network program, and saw the focus in developing civil society capacities in cultural policy making, advocacy and lobbying thus achieving more of systemic changes in a societies still in a transitional turmoil, still obsessed with identity politics and national territorial issues... Following only few stories, story about Rex, Mama, CZKD or Remont, we can see how the key players on the independent scene developed their projects, and how they became key institutions which produce, connect, disseminate, collaborate, but also advocate and create lobby actions to achieve more democracy within cultural policy.

In this short story about the role and the impact of Soros foundations support to arts and culture, we could see the how civil society and independent art scene in the region was created. From simple support of culture of dissent, through support of culture of innovation and experiment, Soros foundations finally ended their activities in supporting policy development and advocacy in culture. The major impact can be seen through achieved results of independent art scene. Independent centers, organisations and networks which are today actively collaborating creating important art projects, but also participating in creating or evaluating cultural policies are key players in introducing new ideas, new concepts, but also bringing new formats, new genres, like public or site specific art experiments in the region. It would be difficult to imagine the region today without those voices of dissent, which are in the same time the voices of reason and voices of dialogue, openness and challenges.

Foci of creativity and critical reasoning, developed in mid ninties with Soros support throughout the region, still today is represented by network of people and projects who are crucial for the raising of controversial issues (such as genocide in Srebrenica), bringing the policy topics on public agenda (against neoliberal pressures on cultural policy) or for the development of the new generation of artist-activist, groups and movements. Not only that the impact was achieved, but the effects are still vivid, influencing new changes and bringing new paradigms.

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