THE GAZE FROM THE SEMI-PERIPHERY

Alternatives for civil society development in Southeast Europe

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By the end of the 20th century different international organisations, from UNESCO and the Council of Europe to the European Union, were fostering civil society development in the cultural sector seeing in those independent organisations new agents of change, new vectors of socio-cultural development in local communities and within the European nation-states. However, since the beginning of the 21st century, new demands and new policy frameworks imposed entrepreneurial logic on NGO development (Dragićević Šešić 2012). Political changes and economic crisis brought austerity measures, reducing public funds in many domains (for example, higher education and arts and culture). Thus, European cultural researchers and activists (regrouped in networks and platforms such as IETM, TEH, Culture Action Europe, etc.) were forced to discuss new "alternative" strategies for civil society development, proposing mostly entrepreneurial and business models for their survival and development.

These approaches became very visible in policy recommendations and strategies of collaboration within the European semi-periphery - EU-accession countries in the Western Balkans and in Eastern neighbouring countries (Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan). All those states entered into the processes of transition later than Central European countries due to numerous conflicts (from the Balkan wars to the Nagorno Karabakh). This had many consequences for the cultural sector as "transitioning" became a durational process while the vocabulary went further, trying to follow European policy recommendations often far removed from their reality.

The aim of this paper is to discuss possible strategies and tactics (de Certeau 1990) for the further development of civil society organisations in Southeast Europe without compromising their ethics and values.

CIVIL SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

Most of the NGOs in the first transition phase have been created to fulfil important social and cultural missions: fighting against nationalism, for social inclusion and human rights, innovative contemporary art forms, public dialogue, etc. NGOs offered new values to society. They worked in the public interest, in the areas not demanded by the market but against the market. It was clear why and for whom they were making programs. They belonged to the culture of dissent, to cultural counter-pub-

lics, strongly collaborating mutually, crossing sectoral barriers[1], trying in solidarity to overcome the precarity of their position.

The dominant policy discourse from the beginning of the transition period suggested that NGOs should become partners in policymaking and in implementation. A key book of that period *In from the Margins* reflected well the ethos of cultural work that should be community-based, responsible for cultural policy development and the status of the artist. The policy dialogue (participative policymaking) was seen as the indicator of the level of non-achieved democratic development. In the second phase, civil society NGOs developed common independent platforms, identifying the most appropriate methods and frameworks to survive: relating to each other, creating a networked corpus of individual organisations that were sharing the same values of art and culture practices (social responsibility, justice, empathy, solidarity, and trust).

The EU, the European Cultural Foundation and many European national agencies (Kulturkontakt, Goethe Institut, British Council, etc.) had offered training programmes raising the capacities of NGOs for strategic thinking and strategic planning, raising their impact and enabling them to achieve more with scarce resources. But, those capacity building programs that dominated in the first 15 years of transition (1990-2005) were then replaced by entrepreneurial and business education. The concept of creative industries came from the UK to the European continent and was offered as a panacea for diminished public funds.

Thus today, artists and NGOs are stimulated to learn strategic risk management, business management and entrepreneurism, to become self-sustainable and therefore reduce all demands related to finances, spaces, continuous professional development and other forms of support directed at the state. This policy shift made the whole cultural area (public and civil) insecure and uncertain regarding their future role. Neoliberal "New Public Management" became a mantra for politicians to denounce the incapacities of the cultural sector to take responsibility and to offer products and services for the market. This was the first attempt of the instrumentalisation of culture in the southeast of Europe.

Many NGOs have followed these lines, creating services that brought extra revenues and they applied for European funds (more available on the basis of meritocracy than local public funds). Sometimes this reduced their capacities to fulfil their mission as they had always to adapt to the call's demands. At the same time, the EU's programmes (Culture 2007-2013; Creative Europe 2014-2020) have fostered big players – small NGOs from the Western Balkans couldn't even imagine applying (not having matching funds to offer). Those who succeeded spent a lot of time and energy in the processes of extra fundraising for matching funds, moving away from their core activities while still staying in the situation of precarity.

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1   The Centre for Cultural Decontamination hosted numerous artistic collectives and human rights NGOs (Group Skart, Belgrade Circle, Igman Initiative, the Ignorant Master and its Committees, etc.); DAH Theatre collaborated with Women in Black and numerous theatre collectives creating the ANET network; Radio B92 offered a platform for independent artists, art collectives and NGOs (Dragicevic Sesic 2018).

This situation worsened in the last few years when politics went further right and became oriented towards populist demands. This meant supporting shows, festivals, entertainment industries and products of the creative industries that are important for nation-branding. Further, the private sector avoids financing NGOs, as their success depends on local politics that sees NGOs as an enemy. Thus, all available funds from the public and private sectors are shrinking. Philanthropy turned toward major social issues and disasters (recent wars, migrations, natural disasters, etc.). Therefore, part of the NGO non-profit sector turned itself to creative hubs, to entrepreneurial activities (start-ups) and other initiatives that might look appealing for a new generation of politicians. The other part (artivists) became even more engaged and galvanized around non-profit artistic and cultural activities offering to society "public goods".

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN NATIONALISATION AND EUROPEANISATION

The national (ethnic-based) dimension in Southeastern European cultural policies is still predominant[2], in spite of the fact that the majority of countries have signed the 2003 Declaration on Cultural Diversity and the 2005 UN Convention about diversity of cultural expressions and are often participating in regional programs of "intercultural dialogue". In the process of European integration, the cultural chapter is not taken very seriously. It is one among the first to be opened and quickly closed. The EU never discusses national cultural policy narratives, priorities and forms of actions, assuming that countries will follow paths opened by the Creative Europe program (use of culture for economy, social integration, etc.).

Thus, Southeastern European cultural policies are Janus-faced policies – tuned to national identity and European cultural values at the same time. To differ from the cultural policy of socialism which had, besides its ideological, explicit ethical and aesthetic platforms[3], the cultural policy of contemporary liberal societies tries to distance itself from any kind of explicit aesthetic platform, hoping to prove that freedom of creative expression is a fundamental principle and value while support for diversity should be a starting point and a policy result. In reality, upon reviewing states' grant recipients, it is obvious that rhetoric and practices do not coincide. Most states finance NGOs that practice traditional arts while contemporary art production receives minimal support. Thus, NGOs that are dealing with contemporary arts are forced to address foreign donors (more than 80% of the budget of DAH Theatre, Centre for Cultural Decontamination, Rex, etc. is coming from outside of the country), risking to be accused of anti-patriotism, especially if they are working on critical, controversial social issues. It was obvious that multiple obstacles to the development of civil society exist – the corruption of political elites, their will to control the civil sector and to impose their values within the cultural realm.

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2   Romanian ministry for culture is called the Ministry for Culture and National Identity; the draft Strategy of cultural development in Serbia starts with national identity; and the conflict between Greece and Macedonia is about control over the Macedonian national narrative: "control over the narrative means above all control over its own history, geography and notion of itself" (Dragouni 2018: 24).

3   In Yugoslavia the aesthetic platform was not socialist realism but socialist modernism. It enabled abstract and conceptual art, symbolical memorial monuments, atonal music, physical theatre, brutalist architecture (MoMa's exhibition in New York 2018).

This process of transition from the administrative cultural leadership of the nineties to the superficial introduction of new patterns of public management, such as calls for projects, juries for projects assessments, deadlines for implementation, reports and "evaluations", strategic plans, etc., was led under the influence of political and entrepreneurial elites (through legislation, new norms and standards and also through media deregulation) and that "market fundamentalism" (markets and market criteria) is becoming a true measure of value (Hall, 2003). The reluctance of cultural workers to join new political circles is even bigger now as most of the political apparatus does not belong (by education and practices) to the cultural sphere. Thus, old anxieties about "working with the bureaucracy" arise, although working on policy issues is not "less likely to be perceived as a 'sell-out'"[4] (Bennett 1998: 5). New political elites are adopting market and managerial values to be proactive and efficient, so they rush to create major decisions (grand projects) without prior consultations and research (the decision to create new "antiquity" buildings and monuments in Skopje, or the decision to remove the University of Arts campus in Belgrade for example).

Inspired by transitional and community problems, most of the NGO-artistic endeavours develop different perspectives regarding the future. These grass-roots projects bring a lot of challenges for policymakers, especially those addressing a "negative past", the commons and the use of public spaces that embed so-called socialist values.

The double peripheral nature of grass-roots projects is reflected in their position within the cultural realm of the country and within their decision to implement artistic ideas in spatial peripheries, be it urban "occupied" empty spaces or remote country areas. These peripheral spaces are becoming more difficult to conquer and inhabit as there are less donors and less willingness by public authorities to support the usage of public spaces that can be commercialised.

So, the only possibility for the existence and strengthening of the NGO cultural sector lies in mutual solidarity and the maintaining and sharing of values even when they are forced, from time to time, to implement projects that otherwise wouldn't be their priority. Squeezed between the practices that would fit creative industries and those promoting cultural development, they find and use different tactics and solutions. It is more difficult for them as the EU, whose values they embrace a priori, has promoted the idea of creative industries which doesn't really work for artists and cultural activists in pursuit of social improvement, cultural equality and diversity, neither for those that are exploring artistic and aesthetic approaches.

It is especially difficult for civil society groups and artistic collectives that are challenging the limits of freedom: those imposed from above (politically) and those imposed from bottom-up (related to national and religious emotions and sometimes towards questions of sex and morality). New types of governance (politically-controlled "managerial policies") are "framing" art practices by putting

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4   However, recently the office of the prime minister had created a council for creative industries that has integrated representatives of several NGOs that provoked a lot of negative commentaries within civil society.

them through a bureaucratic procedure limiting, in reality, freedom of expression (juries know the values of the present government and adapt decisions to them). Thus, queer festivals, pride parades, festivals such as Mirdita Dobar dan! or Sarajevo Days in Belgrade cannot obtain funds from local, politically-controlled, sources[5].

Even the ethnicity of an artist can be an "offense" for the population and the representation of its work (the organisers of a Cetinje exhibition in 2004 removed the conceptual art project of the Kosovar artist Albert Heta - an Albanian flag on the old Serbian embassy in Cetinje; in 2008, street riots prevented the opening of an exhibition of Albanian Kosovar artists – "Exception", Context gallery Belgrade; popular music concerts are often questioned as Istrian programmers do not organise concerts of "nationalist-musicians", cultural circles in Sarajevo usually protest against concerts of musicians, former refugees from Bosnia, while in Croatia Serbian pop-singers are not welcomed).

In all of these cases the reactions of cultural operators and artists were different. The debate underlined that the groups of artists valued ethnicity more than human rights[6], or are preoccupied with the country's image more than with art mediation. The main issue was defined: would the presence of an artist of another ethnicity be an offense for those who lost their families within a civil war? How to accept a musician who used to perform for paramilitaries? How to accept a singer who escaped and defected "to the aggressor?" These questions show that there are no policies of reconciliation yet.

CONCLUSIONS

The independent art and culture scene has an important role in bringing a culture of peace, tolerance, ideas of an open and inclusive society, a society of debate and intercultural, intergenerational, inter-religious dialogue in the region of Southeast Europe, a region still preoccupied with nation-building processes. The culture of dissent, which had developed during the 90s, created its own organisations, institutions, media, formal and informal channels of art distribution and idea debates. This culture emphasised the right to independent and critical thinking in the moments when "national unity" was demanded, and patriotism was a norm. It was the link between free individuals and groups, of the present to the past (with a "forgotten", "revolutionary", or "dissonant" past), the link between divided ethnic groups and to Europe and European values that although part of official discourse, are not implemented in mainstream culture.

This culture of dissent, the radical arts and critical intellectual platforms, hardly found its space and media to bring the art works toward larger audiences. Artistic movements had to create their own physical spaces and new media platforms, to contribute to discussions in societies destroyed by war, media war, nationalistic manipulations, economic transition…

All of those processes went through several phases. At the beginning, within the culture of dissent, artists, groups and movements opposing nationalism and war had to create projects in open spaces, on new art territories. The second phase brought independent platforms and centres for mutual action, strengthening civil society groups and their social importance, enabling artistic experiments, audience gatherings and open social debate. They entered into dialogue and collaborative projects, creating wide networks of clubs, creative individuals and projects throughout the region. The third phase (from 2000), as the context changed, brought neoliberal policies, demanding new knowledge and skills (entrepreneurialism, management, strategic planning, etc.). Civil society had to devote more time to management and marketing to endorse its own sustainability. These fights helped civil society to enter the fourth present phase by raising capacities for cultural policymaking, advocacy and lobbying. Some of them (Akcija Sarajevo, Mama Zagreb, Remont and Stanica service for contemporary dance Belgrade, Multimedia and Lokomotiva Skopje[7], Expeditio Kotor) became key organisations which connect, disseminate, collaborate, advocate and create lobby actions to achieve more democracy within the cultural realm. As key players in the region they are introducing new ideas, concepts, but also bringing new formats, genres (public or site-specific art experiments). These voices of dissent, which are at the same time the voices of reason and voices of dialogue, openness and challenges, are shaping the cultural values of today.

One of the best examples of this process could be seen in the development of the Balkan Dance Network that was initiated during a Balkan Express meeting within the frame of an IETM conference in Belgrade, in March 2005, that included several of the aforementioned organisations. Lokomotiva and Stanica, together with other NGOs from the network, developed a capacity building program called Nomad Dance Academy and, in 2012, had as a main focus advocacy for regional contemporary performing arts and for more support for regional cooperation. These advocacy activities have been continued by its members, and most recently realised in Belgrade by Stanica[8] under the slogan *Make room for dance!* On the other side, Mama in Zagreb participated in larger advocacy actions linked to the right to the city (Operation City, Right to the City, etc.)[9], serving as a model for developing partnership with civil society organisations outside of the cultural sector.

Precarity of civil society organisations and their activists can be overpassed by strengthening their new capacities for:

- internationalisation of work (crossing borders),
- transdisciplinarity of approaches,

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5   Thus, artist Živko Grozdanić, dealing with the Serbian Orthodox church, cannot count on public or on private support, as galleries are afraid of right-wing groups; performances of the Dah Theater about the Srebrenica genocide staged on a public square always had to be protected by police and the solidarity of civil society peace movements, etc.

6   http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Regions-and-countries/Serbia/The-Exception-Belgrade-didn-t-see, accessed September 30th 2018

7   Raising its own capacities during the third phase of civil society development, Lokomotiva became the real motor of cultural innovation both in its theoretical interpretation and in practice. Thus, they organised the international conference Modelling Public Spaces in Culture (Tanurovska et al. 2018) and contributed to the creation of Kino Kultura project space for contemporary performing arts in Skopje (public-civil partnership, op. cit. 16).

8   The Nomad Dance Advocates in Belgrade was organised by Station Service for contemporary dance in September 2017. It took place in Magacin, the independent culture centre (opened in 2007) as the first and so far the only space in Belgrade open to different NGOs in culture.

9   https://www.mi2.hr/en/suradnje/ visited on 04 11 2018.

- networking within and outside the cultural sector,

- digitalisation and participation in the digital world (both memory and artivist practices),

- raising entrepreneurial capacities[10]

- inter-sectoriality and partnership (using/offering partner's resources) – partnering with other organisations such as eco, feminist, human rights, etc.

- merging (with similar or complementary organisations to reinforce the strength and widen the scope of activities),

- acting in coalitions, consortia, alliances, etc.

These strategies might look contradictory, opposite to civil society organisations' need to act as artivist organisations, to embed their work in community and the context, but in reality, all these strategies should be intertwined. Ethics of the commons and solidarity should be embedded in all of the mentioned strategies.

Lastly, in this list of strengthening capacities for the NGO arts and culture sector, if there is one action that should be highlighted, it is that NGOs include archiving in their work, as a lot of their achievements have already been forgotten. Thus, artivism might be transferred from the real to the digital world, creating a vital resource, opening larger possibilities for acting from the semi-periphery.

The semi-periphery of Europe succeeded in developing innovative and creative projects and actions but it never had capacities (time, equipment and human resources) to keep its own memory, to organise transmission to new generations and to make "archives" as living resources used in daily practices for inspiration but also for research and presentation. That sent to oblivion numerous achievements and contributed to the disappearance of many NGOs, while new ones had always to start from zero.

Digital technologies open new possibilities for the development of audiovisual collections and archives that might easily be used within the NGO sector. Often websites of cultural organisations (CZKD[11], Rex[12]) are keeping archives within the web menu announcing events but rarely adding post-festum complete material, heritage of a project, from its research period till performance in front of the audience. Raising digital competencies is one of the key tasks for fostering the future sustainability of the NGO sector. Here heritage might be trifold: 1. own archive (digitalization of doc-

uments); 2. archiving of outcomes of their work (artworks that might be digital already: music, film, photography, video, PDF and other formats of book presentation) or recordings of performative art events and exhibitions and their translation in digital formats; 3. testimonies and oral history documentation, workshop and conference documentation, tools produced, etc. Without its own memory, the NGO sector is vulnerable and easy to disappear in times of crisis.

For instance, only a few institutions keep the memory, heritage and legacy of socialist Yugoslavia (the Museum of Yugoslavia and a few city museums linked to specific revolutionary events). Thus, not only dissidence but also side alternative movements have no place in such institutions. At the same time, museums such as the Museum of Theatre History memorise only the heritage of public institutions; thus, the existence of independent civil society organisations in the fifties and sixties disappeared unless published in a form of memory books or interviews (Dietachmair & Gielen 2017).

To conclude, focusing on processes that engage a variety of actors, including de-privileged ones, and a reflection on needs (expressed or latent) related to archiving should be the core of future strategies. This is especially important in time of reduced autonomy of the cultural sector and the huge political pressures on those who think differently.

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10   Entrepreneurial logic not linked to moneymaking but to the development of the new models of organisations, based on adhocracy and organisational memory, individual members' contributions and co-shared ethics.

11   CZKD digital web archive consists of programs, photos, videos, documents and bulletins. Programs are archived by date (month and year) and each is followed by photo documents (on average 10 photos per event)

12   Rex archive comprises major programs that happened during one or several years. Every project is presented by a short description and link that corresponds to a site created during the project implementation.