Cultural Institutions after 12 years of "New Democracy" in Central and Eastern Europe

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Social exclusion disempowers people. It deprives them of access to experience of the arts - when faced, as a substantial number of people in Eastern Europe have been, with stark choices of survival, going to the theater or cinema can hardly be expected to be on their list of priorities. International declarations on access to participation in cultural life are academic to those living in poverty.[1]

Any paper presenting the current state of governance and leadership issues related to cultural institutions in Central and Eastern Europe should first and foremost bear this quotation in mind, in order to avoid the "hypocritical" impression that we deal with these issues within a "normal" socio-economical context, an assumption that would be a major mistake in analyzing cultural institutions in this region. In addition, if in 1995 the population of Europe was estimated at 727 million and Eastern Europe had 390 million inhabitants, then almost half of the European population today faces restricted access to cultural consumption, and Eastern audiences are a particularly poorly served cluster because of their daily struggle for material survival.[2]

The Key Issues and Current Trends

What would be, from this perspective, the most important evolution during the last 12 years in the management, organization, and development of cultural institutions? Some preliminary specifics must be noted, without repeating already well-known arguments.

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[1] "In from the margins—A contribution to the debate on culture and development in Europe," Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg (1997), English edition: 125.
[2] "Recent demographic evolution in Europe," Council of Europe (1995).

At the time of vast political change in 1990, the centrally monitored system of the state-subsidized cultural institutions was more or less common for all countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Some exceptions did exist, such as in Hungary, the Czech Republic or theYugoslav Federation, where cultural institutions had benefited from some incentive of independent self-management instruments during the communist period. However, after 1990 the situation of state support of culture began to change quickly, and this shift was characterized by two main strands:

First, post-communist countries had all strongly striven to differentiate themselves within the generic geographic space, seen as falsely homogeneous, of the Eastern European region. Central European Countries, Southeastern Europe, and the Baltic states have consequently departed from different cultural perspectives, chosen different investment priorities, and dealt differently with the issues relating to the reorganization and rebalancing of the relationship between state and private funding, including incentives for heritage preservation vs. contemporary art or for sectorial vs. global legislation for the arts.

For example, Hungary and the Czech Republic in 1990, or Slovenia, Serbia and Croatia after 2000, quickly turned their attention to hard-core privatization logic for cultural institutions, while Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria or Albania engaged in this logic at a slower pace, preserving for a longer period state-owned cultural enterprises.

This trend was concomitant with a second, opposing one, related to European harmonization of infrastructures, as defined by the European Union. On one hand, differentiation was a must within the region, yet on the other governments sought harmonization with European community requirements. From this point of view, traditional artistic institutions were not as much concerned as the cultural industries (music, publishing, audiovisual), a situation that led to a simple consequence: legislation and regulations governing cultural industries were rapidly initiated and implemented, while

legislative measures for the performing arts, heritage, museums, and libraries followed later. In

Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland, legislative changes pertinent to institutions of cultural heritage, the

performing arts, and nonprofit organizations have yet to be considered.[3]

From this perspective, we must also note that culture only resurfaced as a socio-political

concern about three years ago, as soon as the governments in Central and Eastern Europe

understood that the *cultural dimension* is inherent to economic and social development, not as an

ideological instrument, but *as a force for cohesion and a creative spring for newly designed*

democracies:

> Policy makers have been slow to recognize the need to foster cultural pluralism. In Central
> and Eastern Europe the priority was to bolster the authority of a unitary state and the
> dominance of the Communist party. The new, impoverished democracies struggle to cope
> with the demands of indigenous minorities, and unfortunately the debate has to be conducted
> at the political level.[4]

If culturally empowered, these societies could better deal with multicultural issues and accept inter-

culturality and cohabitation.

To the above-mentioned trends, we should add other criteria of key importance. Central

European countries differ in their responses during the last decade of transition according to:

Geographic placement and proximity to the Central, Balkan, Northern, or Eastern part of the

continent: Slovenia, Croatia, and Hungary have evolved more quickly due to their closeness and

deep historical links with Western Europe. Albania, Bosnia, and Bulgaria are more influenced by

their close southeastern neighbors and advance at a slower pace, while Letonia, Latvia, and

Lithuania have changed at a rate closer to the EU Nordic Countries surrounding them. Romania and

Poland bridge the East-West gap – one neighboring the Balkans on the south, the other oriented

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[3] "Cultural policies in Europe: a compendium of basic facts and trends," ERIcarts, Council of Europe (1999);
Privatization, desetatisation and culture, Conference Reader, Boekman Foundation, Amsterdam (1997).
[4] "In from the margins," op. cit. (61).

toward the Baltic countries of the north – and therefore evidence very diverse and gradual rhythms of mutation if we compare the northwest and southeast portions of each country.[5]

Dimension of population (potential audiences) and territory: Compared to the 2 million Slovenes, 38 million Polish will accept with more difficulty restructuring traditional organizational rules, and the heaviness of institutions in Poland as well as the distance between center and counties will allow less dynamic developments (local and central).[6]

Participation in Yugoslav Federation: This aspect, not very often discussed, has produced a mixed situation. On one hand, war, with its tensions and totalitarian leaders (Milosevic and Tuchman), encouraged strong responses and underground creative vitality in Serbia or Croatia. On the other hand, culturally rich regions like Kosovo and Bosnia lost their institutional memory, links were broken with aggressiveness, and tragic feelings are still very present. Religious differences between Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim communities became the source of hatred by which the region is still deeply marked. Known before as the most Western of post-communist countries, the former Yugoslav states suddenly confronted a period of stasis after the fall of communism and must now recover, rebuild, and restructure their confidence and their functional systems. All of this has to be done very quickly.

> The alternative art scene was very strong in some cities of former Yugoslav before the war: Ljubliana, Zagreb, Belgrade, Novi Sad, Sarajevo.... Artists' openness towards contemporary concepts and arts trends, their refusal of the banality of dogmatic socialist state ideology, turned them towards Europe, new media and new technologies. So, for these groups of artists, the rise of nationalist and chauvinist hysteria through "mapping" and the war which followed, provoked the most bitter feelings and forms of resistance.[7]

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[5] *Costs, Benefits and Chances of Eastern Enlargement for the ECU*, Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers (1998).
[6] Ibid.
[7] Milena Dragicevic-Sesic, "Borders and Maps in Contemporary Yugoslav Art," *Redefining Cultural Identities*, Culturelink, Zagreb (2001).

Let us look now into a second group of characteristics that have shaped the phases of Central European transition and remodeling of cultural institutions during the past twelve years.

The primary phase characteristics could be described as:

1. Chaotic and brusque shifts from cultural existence to cultural production. Artists and intellectuals, librarians and museum curators in Eastern Europe discovered the "cultural product" they could provide and, more importantly, sell. Of the private publishing houses, music companies, small theater companies, journals, and audiovisual studios that emerged immediately after 1990, 80 percent of them no longer exist today. [8]

2. A look toward Western Europe for approval and legitimacy of cultural projects, rather than from within the region. Between 1990 and 1994, no tours of theater companies or exchanges of exhibitions took place bilaterally East-East, unless initiated from the West. Even now, exclusive East- East artistic exchange is rare.

3. Search for new ready-made managerial models, capable of solving the complicated problems transition started to put forward, and unlimited *trust* in a sort of utopic, "holistic," "Western managerial model," which didn't take into account the fundamental differences between arts and culture administration in, for example, France with its strong state subsidies and central funding, and Great Britain with its arm's length principle, scarce state subsidy, liberal accountancy, and assessment-oriented cultural policy.

4. Need for basic competence in management know-how techniques, capacity to respond to the new marketing and cost efficient approaches toward culture, which were supposed to be radically promoted after 1990.

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[8] cf. National Report of Cultural Policy Evaluation Program, Council of Europe; Policies for Culture documents, ECF/ECUMEST (1998-2002).

This "alphabetization" with managerial challenges of culture-in-transition lasted for three to five years, but developed at different rhythms in each country, according to the criteria and historical contexts mentioned above.

The second phase could be described as a repercussion of the first: a market for culture was appearing, but was far from providing self-sustainability as ensured by state support, and also far from enabling the preservation and development of "mammoth like" cultural infrastructures that communism created and fully supported financially. Even if managerial solutions were found, legislative and infrastructural re-organization was a must, together with more sophisticated management and communication skills of cultural leaders, who were obliged to "function" within a dysfunctional system and to face recurrent crisis management situations.

Last but not least, this second phase brought about awareness of the fact that creating new institutions is easier than transforming the old inherited ones. But solutions had to be devised for these as well, and whatever these solutions would be, the "delicate" issue of excess human resources had to be dealt with eventually.

Two examples: "Archa Theater" in Prague was created out of a transformation of a repertory theater of the City Municipality. The transformation took place between 1994-1997. When the new theater opened, the Municipality took over the responsibility of disposing of the inherited artistic personnel and gave *carte blanche* to the new director to create and program for an international venue. Still, this remained a unique and courageous example of institutional transformation never repeated, neither in the Czech Republic nor elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

In another case, the late Minister of Culture in Romania, who was an actor, after having militated for the change of repertory theaters when he was an independent Union Leader, decided to preserve the old structural organization when arriving in power in 1996; a national inquiry resulted in

the impossibility to change the system before any social security legislation was implemented for the protection of artists.

Which of these two options was the best? This is a difficult question, but one is tempted to say both and neither. The conclusions that emerge for this second phase include:

a) The ambiguous character of the decision-making process regarding the cultural institution and the status of the artist within Eastern European societies. If transformation has to be done, then responsibility has to be borne at the political level. This transformation requires, however, existing social assistance measures, without which any radical change, done with maximum efficiency for the institution as such, can provoke dramatic human consequence. There are few success stories about institutional conversion.

b) State-subsidized cultural infrastructures in most Eastern European countries have employees for whom professional reconversion is impossible. For example, in 1997, "there were still more than 680 repertory theater companies of all disciplines in Eastern and Central Europe, employing more than 55,000 artistic, technical and administrative staff."[9] The situation is more or less the same for museums and state galleries, concert halls or regional cultural centers.[10]

The current and third phase is, one could say, the least entertaining. The image of a "golden Western solution" fades away, and a keen awareness emerges about the impossibility of conducting efficient management without reliable institutional infrastructures, a long-term perspective of development, and competent local and national policy-makers and legislators who understand these constraints on cultural institutions. After having implemented, for example, the Dutch cultural policy model in Hungary and having been inspired by a number of French laws on cultural heritage and

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[9] Dragan Klaic, ed., *Reform or Transition? The Future of Repertory Theater in Central and Eastern Europe*, OSY New York, Amsterdam (1997).

decentralization in Romania and Poland, the organizations that were functioning within these

borrowed patterns still had to adapt to the local context and to the economic limitations of transition,

quite different from their potentials for efficiency in a Western context. The democratic change in

governments brought about a simple but dramatic issue: no important institutional measure or

orientation outlived the mandate of a Minister. In Romania, Ministries changed 10 times in 12 years,

in Bulgaria 8 times, and in Poland 6 times over the same period. The ongoing changes of public

servants in charge of the cultural sector weakened even more the capacity for developing diverse and

stable cultural institutional profiles.

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The current key preoccupations related to the status of the cultural institution and facing the

general management teams of these institutions today are as follows:

Funding

Initiated in Bulgaria, the project "Technological Park Culture" aimed to bring together all

categories and levels concerned with the implementation and design of efficient cultural policies in

order to identify the most important issues to address. The first assessments in 2001 found that

funding was the only issue of common concern to all those surveyed, including managers, policy

makers, legislators, civil servants, academics, and cultural journalists.[11]

Comparison of funding levels for cultural institutions remains seriously problematic. Subsidies

for culture from the Ministry level vary between 0,03 in Romania, 1995, to 0,9 in Serbia, 2002, but

an important amount of this sum usually goes to heritage preservation and large, national institutions

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[10] cf. National Report of Cultural Policy Evaluation Program, Council of Europe (1998-2002).
[11] Policies for Culture Report on Bulgaria SC (2002).

that absorb significant sums (national theaters, libraries, museums). Even so, the amount of money

for development programs among these institutions or for new cultural enterprises is almost

nonexistent.

Slovenia, Croatia, and the Baltic countries have successfully applied the creation of the

national fund for culture, for example, or have taxed important investors with specific taxation

oriented to the arts (*Finnish model*).

> A variety of more or less similar tax-based (off-budget and/or general budget) funds and
> bodies, with a general cultural scope, sprang up in the countries of Central and Eastern
> Europe during the last decade, aimed either at attracting additional funds from alternative
> sources for the cultural sector (i.e. dedicated taxation) or at bringing different ways of funding
> arts and culture. Or both. Among these mechanisms, one can count: the National Cultural
> Fund Hungary (founded in 1993); the Cultural Endowment of Estonia (1994); the State
> Culture Fund for Slovakia; the Culture Capital Foundation, Latvia (1998); the Fund of
> Support for Culture and Sports, Lithuania (1998); the National Cultural Fund, Romania
> (1998); the National Cultural Fund, Bulgaria (1999).[12]

The Croat National Bank, among others, has very important sponsorship programs that allocate

important sums of money yearly. The Baltic countries, and also more recently Bulgaria, Croatia or

Serbia, will engage local funding seriously for cultural institutions.[13]

The rate of inflation, especially in the larger countries, and the old infrastructure of

management in the majority of cultural institutions in Eastern Europe remain key obstacles to the

cost-effective use of existing financial resources. At the same time, all subsidized state institutions

sometimes receive their allocated budget in June of the year they are administrating. This induces

serious planning problems, as well as insecurity and supplementary frustration for the management

teams and employees.

Regarding the funding issue, an important study to note is the Andrew McIlroy study,

published by the Mozaic program of the Council of Europe, entitled "Funding the Future, A User's

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[12] O. Radu, Policies for Culture Bulletin (October 2001).

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Manual for Fundraising in the Arts" (2001). While its perspective is distinctly Anglo-Saxon, and therefore is somewhat limited due to the region it addresses, the manual is useful. It presents the unavoidable need for fundraising capabilities, strongly linked to the leadership competencies, for the efficient and superior management of Central European cultural institutions.

A more complex and relevant initiative, coordinated by ERICArts and conducted with financial support of the Swedish bank between 1999-2001, *Creative Europe*, tried to deal with the topic of the role of foundations for cultural funding in Europe, with attention turned to the case of Central and Southeastern Europe. The round-table proceedings of Creative Europe, provided by Balkancult, Yugoslavia, are of real interest on the matter. The survey concluded that funding from non-governmental organizations (foundations) in Central Europe is almost nonexistent, if contributions from Western foundations are removed. But these have pre-established patterns for project submission, so no real creative laboratory can be encouraged.[14]

Finally, recurrent proposals to create a "fund for culture" in Central Europe or a "European heritage bank," under the auspices of the Council of Europe or the CEE testify to the growing awareness of the funding problem and the difficulties of finding realistic solutions.[15]

Privatization

The most exhaustive survey of the privatization process in Central and Eastern Europe that includes cultural institutions was produced by Circle Roundtable in 1997: *Privatization, desetatisation and culture—Limitations or opportunities for cultural development in Europe?*

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[13] see Policies for Culture implementation of cultural strategy in Plovdiv and Timisioara action projects, 2002; Croatia expert study on decentralization.
[14] Milena Dragicevic-Sesic, "Creative Europe Round-Table Report," Balkankult, Belgrade (2001).
[15] Raymond Weber, "Cultural Cooperation in South Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean," Vienna Inter-ministerial Conference (2000); "In from the margins," op.cit.: 203.

The conference produced some very interesting conclusions, and the published report offers an exhaustive survey of the state of privatization in Central and Eastern Europe.

The issue is delicate. If Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, the Baltic Countries and countries with a strong history of privatization in the arts have realized privatization at a quicker pace, the legal and policy instruments are still lacking for larger countries such as Romania and Poland. Here the privatization process of cultural enterprises has been reduced to either liquidation of state property (pursuant to the 1990 act of privatization in Poland), transfer of ownership (cinema halls) or favored as a priority for the creative industries (publishing, music, audiovisual). In 1997, where privatization was a priority for the seven governments, over 90% of property was still state-owned.[16]

A very interesting case is the one of the Timisoara state opera house in Romania, hosting opera, national Romanian theater, and Hungarian and German theater. In 1996, the "Artistic institution privatization project" was conceived and submitted to local and central Romanian authorities. Even if well designed and budgeted, the project collapsed because of inertia and fearful attitude to this kind of approach. Its author left Romania in 1998.

The central problem for cultural institutions remains therefore: "Which forms of privatization are desirable in the cultural sector as we try to create a cultural policy under which cultural life under respective countries can flourish, "[17] since, "in Eastern Europe, the question is not what to privatize, but how to privatize and how to keep privatization politically valuable?"[18]

Decentralization

Cultural institutions in Central and Eastern Europe now face pressures for decentralization strategies. It is perhaps one of the few topics that are common to Western and Eastern countries in

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[16] L. Varbanova, in *Privatization, desetatisation and culture*, op. cit.

[17] B. Boorsma, in *Privatization, desetatisation and culture*, op. cit.

Europe, as the decentralized cultural policy measures encounter different degrees of resistance in all centralized institutions, East and West. From a purely administrative point of view, decentralization of cultural institutions should be accompanied by financial and autonomy measures, which was not the case in Poland in 1995, nor in Romania in 2001.

Countries with powerful local governments, such as Yugoslavia, Croatia, Bulgaria, and the Baltic states, resolved the lack of centrally-taken measures for a smooth decentralization process as best they could. Extreme cases of national theaters being temporarily subsidized by local authorities to meet payroll costs occurred both in Poland and Romania.[19] Globally speaking, the decentralization process is only half engaged, and this creates an added managerial tension within important cultural institutions.[20]

New competence is needed at the management level of cultural institutions in order to undertake the reforms of cultural public administration. Without ensuring such competence, management is ill-equipped to cope correctly with the temporary dislocations in implementing decentralization measures and other unfamiliar procedures.

Current Keys: Principles of Governance and Leadership

Main challenges facing administrators of cultural institutions in Central and Eastern Europe could be listed, therefore, as both *strategic and managerial:*

> Along with the development of the democratic society and market economy, changes had to be obvious in the cultural policy as well (...). During the last 10 years numerous non-governmental organizations have been established, performing innovative activities in the performing arts field. Contemporary dance, international events, inter-sector projects, alternative training projects are a few of those activities. However, performing arts policies

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[18] E. Baginska, in *Privatization, desetatisation and culture*, op. cit.

[19] Cracow, Poland; TG Mures, Romania.

[20] see Cultural Strategy of Timisoara, Plovdiv, Policies for Culture; Croatia decentralization project; Ilkka Heiskanen, Council of Europe Cultural Policy Paper (2001); Eduard Delgado, "Roots and Visibility," Seminar on Decentralization, Varna (1999).

on the state level are still ignoring all these developments mainly focusing on sustainability of existing state institutions.[21]

The forces of change discussed above make the case for the following *managerial needs:*

- partnerships between the independent and state sectors, entered into with awareness and timeliness

- including the work of upcoming generations within the legitimate cultural institution

- learning to address traditional and new audiences in different ways

- capacity of cultural institutions to accept innovation as a part of ensuring sustainability

If management of cultural institutions was, until 1990, a "management of power," it must evolve, with the emergence of new artistic generations in Central Europe, into a "management of trust."[22] The leadership vocabulary must change gradually and engage in the logic of long-term planning and of creativity, rather than survival. Changing from a mentality of crisis management springs forth as the main challenge of the Eastern European cultural institution today.

In order to obtain this, *several strategic principles* must also factor into this management reorientation:

- creating solid, transparent partnerships with political, private and other sectors in order to ensure continuity of measures when government changes

- creating regular dialogue with policymakers, legislators, local and central authorities[23]

- ensuring strong presence of culture on government agendas as a facilitator for accession to the European community and factor in social rebuilding

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[21] B. Tjarve, Latvian cultural policy review, Policies for Culture (1998); see also "Management of Change," conference workshop reports, Graz (1998).
[22] Peter F. Drucker, *Management Challenges for the 21ˢᵗ Century*, B/H (1999).
[23] Policies for Culture Platform, Bucharest, Amsterdam.

- reestablish links between arts and education, and create training for cultural enterprises that adapt to local needs (finding the good balance between training for artistic management and implementation of innovative management within the real legislative and financial space of Central Europe)

- redesign interest for culture in the media[24]

- relaunch equitable cooperation programs with Western countries[25]

- understand the current role of civil society and the importance of empowering independent, small, cultural institutions within the new European approach to governance[26]

New kinds of cultural institutions have emerged since 1995: cultural centers like Rapsodia in Romania, the Eurobulgarian Center, REX in Serbia, Pac multimedia in Macedonia, Red House in Bulgaria, and Trafo in Bufdapest. Others include an observatory of cultural policies in Budapest; Archa theater in Prague, which became a well-known venue for international performances; the network of contemporary arts centers established by SOROS in 1994 that continued to encourage and give space to new work; The Book Fund in Amsterdam that encouraged many successful institutional publishing projects during 12 years in Eastern Europe; and EUROZINE, a network for cultural magazines. In conclusion, an impressive number of cultural NGOs emerged in the last 5 years.[27]

And yet, compared with 10 years ago, the mobility of artists is weaker, cultural regional organizations are reduced in number, and the creative nerve is fragile and unequal from one country to another and between artistic sectors. Significant inequalities are to be noted, especially between the institutional development of the cultural industry and traditional arts organizations. Capital cities in

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[24] Andrea Zlatar-Zagreb, Policies for Culture Bulletin (January 2002).

[25] Eduard Delgado, "For an Ethics of Cultural Cooperation," Bulletin of Forum of Networks (1999).

[26] Corina Suteu, Policies for Culture Bulletin (January 2002).

[27] see Balkancult database, FDSC, Romania database, SOROS database, etc.

Eastern Europe, or traditionally cultural regions, are clearly advantaged as compared to provinces, where many cultural venues have closed or just survive.

Western interest in Central Europe was developed through long-term commitments to the region by Soros, the European Cultural Foundation (Amsterdam), the Council of Europe (Cultural policy review, training for cultural administrators program, Mozaic program), The Book Fund (Amsterdam), KulturKontact (Vienna), EU through Phare, Cultural European networks (IETM, ENCATC, TRANSEUROPHALLES, EFAH, The Forum of Networks).

Three important questions remain concerning the applicability of the new leadership logic to this region. 1) Who assumes responsibility for culture today in Eastern and Central Europe, as politicians are too busy to keep the power steady? 2) How should one fill the gap between the now-existing cultural strategies and their efficient and realistic implementation by and together with the cultural institutional infrastructures?   3) How long will it take until the cultural institutions in Central and Eastern Europe will understand governance from the wider European perspective, in the full sense, capable of engaging in the globalized context, while remaining fully aware of their own cultural values and differences?

These questions remain open. After all, "what is the use of all understanding, if we cannot turn it into something practical and useful?"[28]

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[28] C. Handy, *Understanding Organizations*, 4th ed., Penguin (1998).

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