

## **The cultural policy and the artist or how to build in SEEurope a "sample continent for the innovation principle"**

**Corina Suteu  
Bulletin PFC**

In his book published in 2002, "Portrait of an artist as worker", French sociologist Pierre Michel Menger is developing an interesting theory that places the artist and the specificity of his type of labour as a symbol of the new kind of relationship established by the modern world between the individual at work and his environment. He is stating that the image of the artistic creativity is today more and more perceived as a crucial factor in the universe of productivity, and the very special status and characteristics of the artistic work: dealing with complexity, being innovative and autonomous, flexible and mobile corresponds more and more to the requested profile of the new man at labour in the western society. Arts are for Menger "laboratories of flexibility" and the artist's type of labour profile embodies the profile of the modern worker.

This theory is interesting and challenging indeed in the environment of post communist countries, if we try to define today the role that the artistic community, as professional community, submitted to the labour market requirements and to the cultural policy orientation, could play in inspiring and boosting the reconstruction of south eastern European production system.

First, let us remark that the artist continues, for the time being, to consider him as needing assistance in order to create and places himself still in a "sedentarized vision about his activity". When cultural institutions in SEEurope tried to operate radical reforms, striving to introduce contractual regulation for the creators, the balance fell in favour of a social approach to the matter. In most cases, for the older generation, the status of life-employment by a state cultural institution was preserved; in parallel, artists could, more or less legally, benefit of divers forms of limited contracts, better paid, of course, but not obliging them to the real risk, of fair market competition, as long as their low salaries were preserved meanwhile. For the young generation, the history is different; the lack of new places for life-employment type of contracts and, in parallel, the augmentation of the number of graduates of art universities, brought young generations to face two possible options: accept to enter the cultural establishments by all means and with a rather fragile employment status or derive towards the private system (audiovisual, publicity, cultural consumption industries). Usually, they did both. However, this engendered an important fracture between the older and newer generations and represents a serious obstacle for creative renewal of the artistic staff within the well known cultural establishments (theatre, operas, museums...).

A particular aspect is represented by the new generation of performing arts and visual arts that introduced emergent forms of contemporary images and expression modalities.

They had to deal with important obstacles in imposing these new forms and, institutionally, they did difficulty achieve the necessary recognition in order to benefit of venues and means to present their work. Pressure was, in this aspect, in most cases operated via the western cultural organisations and financial resources were, accordingly, found outside.

Many young artists accordingly looked for solutions of creating abroad and, the talented ones succeeded, of course.

Last, but not least, the Unions of artist, those that would have been supposedly the places for common lobbies on subject matters that will tackle these problems had quickly turned into interest-group organisations, half way between professional bodies and trade union

organisations, with scarce representatively for the emergent generation, which, in most cases, preferred to establish their own independent bodies(more or less successfully).

Question would be: could the artist really matter in the post communist complex and difficult economic and social situation of Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Bosnia, Albania, Macedonia, Croatia... Could he bring about, and how, a new model of labour in countries where the labour legacy is still deeply centralised and creative modalities do not seem to appeal yet to the production sphere. Following Menger theory, they could and surely would do so, on several conditions:

1/ if freed of an exclusively sedentarized employment status and obliged to boost their creativity and become more challenging for the audiences and for the market. It is artists alone who could really provide imaginary regeneration and revisit the established and outdated legacies at the social level.

2/ if less dominated by a purely administrative and falsely managerial control via the cultural policy measures, within which the artist is a "tool", not a subject of cultural existence(how many cultural policy measures in SEEurope encourage individual creativity?!) )

3/ if individually they will understand that the artist is not a worker like anyone else, but a "messianic figure" of any society, a mirror of the potential of evolution and accomplishment that a society potentially bears.

Cultural policy makers have to understand maybe, in their turn, that the artist's place is important as long as, like Milan Kundera says, "the time of regeneration of societies has to be measured not in the political reforms, but in the time needed for the regeneration of the arts".