



## New models of governance of culture

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*The opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe.*

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## The democratic deficit is a matter of culture

The crisis has had numerous negative effects in many vital sectors of European societies, but it has simultaneously revealed the existence of a serious democratic deficit in today's European societies. This deficit is not a completely new discovery, but the recent developments in the political arena and their repercussions on the streets of various European cities point to real reasons to fear that the gap between the decision-makers and the citizens is liable to grow even wider in the near future.

Art and culture are not, and cannot be, excluded from the overall context of the aforementioned issues, not only because the results of the crisis (often represented solely as red figures) are having negative effects on different aspects of cultural and artistic production, but also because ultimately, the culture crisis directly deprives the most vulnerable groups of their fundamental cultural rights. These groups embrace a range of artists and cultural operators, as well as many other citizens affected by policies that restrict their participation in cultural and social life. The threatened closure of 20% of public libraries in the United Kingdom is only one highly publicised example of the current state of art in this respect<sup>2</sup>, and throughout the continent and the world there are probably even more dramatic cases of cultural deprivation of citizens of which we may not be aware, as well as examples of improvements in terms of new governance models deriving from civil engagement. A look at the approach adopted in Croatia and other countries of the region can serve as a paradigm for the development of cultural policy-making under the pressure of a permanent, structural crisis, at the same time providing an encouraging example of practice in organising citizens for the purposes of democratising the public cultural sphere<sup>3</sup> and closing the gap between institutions and non-institutional cultural players.

## The regional view

Where cultural policy-making in the former Yugoslav countries is concerned, the current crisis has exacerbated the ongoing deficiencies in cultural systems which had been changing very slowly over the past 20 years, since the dissolution of the common State and the violent conflicts that have marked the region's recent history. Apart from financing independent organisations' programmes with a modest share of the State budgets<sup>4</sup>, the main instruments of cultural policies in all the countries of the region are still predominantly based on servicing the many traditional public cultural institutions, most of which are deemed remote from the citizens and closed to specific groups of artists, as well as lacking in public participation and transparency in governance. New ideas and demands for reforms and new cultural policy measures have begun to emerge in some countries in the region, and the main protagonists for change are usually the organisations and individuals working in the independent cultural scene.

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<sup>2</sup> Sources: <http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/>, <http://www.cilip.org.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> For further reading on the cultural public sphere and the challenges determining relationships in this field, see Jim McGuigan's "Rethinking Cultural Policy" (Open University press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> The situation varies significantly among the different countries of the region, with instruments of cultural policies being most highly developed in Slovenia and Croatia. All the countries of former Yugoslavia still have many similarities in their main characteristics, including the overall organisation of cultural policy systems.

Most of the organisations forming today's independent cultural scene emerged at the end of the 90s on the back of the democratisation movements which were sweeping across the region, perpetuating the tradition of the alternative cultural and artistic movements in the previous decades. Very broadly, this scene includes a number of different organisations and initiatives operating across all contemporary artistic and cultural forms of expression. Their work is based on the interdisciplinary approach and experimentation at the intersection of contemporary art and popular culture, and on active engagement in the local communities. At the turn of the millennium, independent cultural organisations began to spring up all over the region. They multiplied not only in quantity but also as regards the diversity of their activities and geographical dispersion, especially after most of the region's countries adopted new laws or significantly liberalised existing legislation on citizens' associations. This was when these organisations took their first steps towards building strategic partnerships in order to become relevant actors in the cultural policy field, endeavouring to redefine the cultural systems by promoting the participatory approach to cultural policy-making.<sup>5</sup>

## Independents united

In addition to demanding new cultural policy reforms, the independent cultural scene initiated a number of measures geared to bridging the gap between independent and institutional cultural production, as well as that between the perceptions of producers and consumers of arts and culture. The foundation of the Clulture network<sup>6</sup> in Croatia was one of the major steps in this direction. Established in 2002 as a platform for direct co-operation between organisations and the formulation of joint programmes, Clulture has achieved significant results in terms of democratising culture and decentralising cultural production in Croatia. Over the 10 years in which it has continuously run its key programme 'Clulture-HR: programme exchange and co-operation', which is based on joint decision-making and peer-to-peer co-operation between organisations, over 1 300 different cultural and artistic events have been organised in almost all the cities, towns and villages nationwide, directly involving over 100 organisations and actively engaging thousands of citizens<sup>7</sup>.

The living, active and heterogeneous structure of the organisations in the platform have made Clulture a catalyst for co-operation and a focal point for bringing in independent cultural organisations from beyond the Croatian borders. Over the years Clulture has developed other programmes aimed at strengthening capacities, public visibility and the influence of the independent cultural scene in Croatia, including a range of meticulously designed educational programmes designed to improve the organisations' capacities for strategic management and public promotion of cultural policies. At the same time, the Clulture network has pioneered the promotion of regional co-operation by involving independent organisations from across the region in an informal co-operation platform. Clulture has also gained international recognition with the

<sup>5</sup> Further reading: A bottom-up approach to cultural policy-making, Independent culture and new collaboration practices in Croatia, Emina Višnić, Ecumest/ ECF / The Clulture Network, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> [www.clulture.org](http://www.clulture.org)

<sup>7</sup> Further reading: Clulture - Culture as the process of exchange 2002 - 2007, Dea Vidović, at al., The Clulture Network, 2008.



first ever co-ordinated action by regional actors and the European cultural policy-making institutions, involving a public consultation procedure for over 70 organisations from different countries in the region. The action led to the adoption of a series of mutual policy recommendations calling for the implementation of concrete measures to help develop regional co-operation and build partnerships between cultural organisations from the region and the rest of Europe.<sup>8</sup>

## **Towards new models of cultural institutions**

A gradual process of networking, mutual sharing of values, knowledge and skills and joint programme production by independent cultural organisations was followed by a drive to create partnerships with strategic civil society organisations active in other important spheres of social life (youth rights, environmental conservation and good governance) and with experts in cultural and other relevant public policies. These major efforts to organise a tactical model for change were also accompanied by a whole range of awareness-raising activities involving active engagement with the public, in terms both of participants and audiences and of decision-makers and public cultural administration. Using tactical networking – bringing together independent cultural organisations, artists and experts, and later on developing partnerships with other important societal actors – the independent cultural scene developed a holistic approach to the public cultural sphere, which, far from being isolated from its social context, constitutes its most dynamic part, with the potential to effect a tangible societal transformation. Thanks to these methods, the independent cultural organisations have demonstrated that the effort to democratise the public cultural sphere is part of a broader struggle for the common weal, primarily fighting corrupt practices in public governance<sup>9</sup>. In this connection, they have launched a long-term campaign in Zagreb opposing the alliance between the city authorities and investors which has devastated the city centre pedestrian zone. After almost six years of constant endeavours to bring about genuine changes in the system – during which time the independent cultural organisations have been penalised or otherwise put under pressure because of their engagement, mainly through budgetary cuts in financing their programmes, but also by means of intimidation and negative media campaigns – reforms and major steps towards developing new models of governance and cultural policies have now begun.

## **Time for transformation**

The most useful changes in this field took place recently in Croatia with the introduction of the first hybrid cultural institution POGON – the Zagreb Centre for Independent Culture and Youth<sup>10</sup> – which is the first ever cultural institution based on a new model of public-civil partnership established and managed jointly by the local association of cultural and youth organisations

<sup>8</sup> Further reading: Exit Europe – New Geographies of Culture, Katarina Pavić and Milica Pekić, The Clubture Network, 2011 and [www.exiteurope.net](http://www.exiteurope.net)

<sup>9</sup> In 2006, independent cultural organisations in Croatia initiated the Right to the City initiative, one of the most publicly visible civil initiatives in Croatia and the region, active combating against corruptive practices and promoting preservation and good governance of public spaces in Croatia. For further info, check: [www.pravonagrad.org](http://www.pravonagrad.org)

<sup>10</sup> More about POGON – Zagreb Centre for Independent Culture and Youth: <http://www.upogoni.org/en/>

Alliance Operation City<sup>11</sup> and the City of Zagreb. POGON was established at the end of 2009, and has gained a great deal of influence in the local Zagreb context, where a great many organisations have regular recourse to its material resources for various activities involving the local citizens. The arrival of POGON in Zagreb has also raised the question of the requisite role of the public cultural institutions in the community, as well as that of their openness to changes in governance and programming<sup>12</sup>.

Another cultural policy reform measure initiated by the independent cultural actors has been the newly established 'Foundation Kultura Nova'<sup>13</sup>, a novel institutional format geared to promoting the development of cultural civil society in Croatia. The Foundation will support co-operation projects between organisations in Croatia, at the national level, and on the regional front, it will help develop co-operation between different sectors and provide operational support to foster organisational development.

## Conclusions and recommendations: the deficit is not just a problem for others

The co-operation and mutual advocacy practices developed by the independent cultural scene in the former Yugoslav countries have shown that reforming policy measures via bottom-up processes can achieve positive results in terms of narrowing the gap between institutions and non-institutional actors and directly influencing people's sense of ownership of cultural and other common goods. At the same time, these joint actions help develop dialogue and partnerships between all the stakeholders in culture, thus reducing the democratic deficit by emphasising the active role played by citizens in decision-making. Even though the above-mentioned experiences are peculiar to the independent cultural scene and its specific practices, their repercussions are felt in other vital spheres of cultural and political life, as the potential for reform are transposable beyond both the field of cultural and artistic production and the borders of any specific region.

We would accordingly encourage decision-makers and all other relevant stakeholders, especially those from countries in the region of former Yugoslavia, to strive to increase cultural participation by citizens, primarily by supporting critical art and culture produced by independent groups of artists and cultural workers, targeting active engagement with citizens as participants, experts, decision-makers and others. In order to bridge the gap between isolated cultural institutions, artist and citizens it is also important to secure the genuine, meaningful involvement of cultural civil society in cultural policy-making, especially by supporting bottom-up initiatives with transformative potential for cultural systems, for the benefit of all.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://savezzacentar.wordpress.com/english/>

<sup>12</sup> Further reading: Open Institutions - Institutional imagination and Cultural Public Sphere, Celakoski et. al., Alliance Operation city, 2011 and <http://openinstitutions.net/>

<sup>13</sup> The Croatian Parliament adopted the law on the 'Foundation Kultura Nova' in July 2011; the Foundation is currently making the final arrangements for beginning operations.

Furthermore, it is necessary to support, jointly develop and implement policy measures conducive to the realisation of the aforementioned aims, as initiated by civil society actors:

- bridging measures and structural solutions to facilitate the decentralisation of cultural production and democratisation of culture by means of co-operation among cultural organisations affecting citizens in different communities;
- new types of cultural institutions based on public-civil partnership, applying the principles of co-management open to different groups of artists and citizens;
- new types of cultural policy instruments conducive to further development of the independent cultural scene and of co-operation among cultural organisations, but also between cultural organisations and other important stakeholders in the social, political and cultural sphere.

In this light, it is especially important to emphasise the need to support cultural co-operation within the region's independent cultural scene and between the region and the rest of Europe. Joint work, transfers of experience, knowledge and practices, and the involvement of more citizens and other relevant stakeholders in the various countries of the region can ensure a knock-on effect and the multiplication of the beneficial effects on cultural policy development which are already emerging in some of the region's countries.