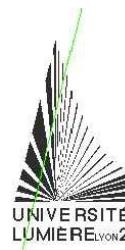




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## **UNESCO Chair in Cultural Policy and Management**

Master Thesis:

### **Artist-run Initiatives Advantages and Disadvantages of the Informal Model in Societies in Transition**

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## *Abstract*

Artist-run initiatives are an interesting phenomenon within the field of culture. Their activity represents often the most avant-garde trends currently happening in the arts, yet their marginal position in the society makes them fairly unknown to the large public. Part of the reason for this is their local character- their roots and their focus is in the local environment- but yet another reason for this limited impact might be the way these initiatives are functioning on the inside.

This study is aiming to look more closely into the phenomenon of artist-run initiatives- their characteristics, reasons for their emergence and conditions for their sustainability, advantages they have in comparison to the big institutions, their limitations, and problems they face in the unstable environment of societies in transition. This thesis focuses on models in which these initiatives organize themselves, and the way they function within the environment.

The extent to which a model of organization is based on structure, defines to a great extent its way of functioning and its impact. This thesis examines the inner organizational structure of these initiatives in relation to the environmental factors such as economical development, culture policy focus, social and labor legislation, social stability, etc. The aim is to determine what kind of interdependence there is (if any) between these inner factors and environmental factors- and how does this effect the overall existence and sustainability of artist-run initiatives.

The hypothesis was that artist-run initiatives would typically be non-hierarchical, loosely structured, informal systems that function in a very different way than the highly structured systems of public institutions or private companies which have clear official procedures and lines of reporting. Another hypothesis was that this informal and loose way of organization would give these initiatives a certain advantage in the troublesome times of the transition.

The research conducted for the purpose of this thesis focuses mainly on the territory of Serbia, with control group of initiatives in Austria. These two case-studies of Serbia and Austria cannot pretend to represent the situation on a wider scale- in Europe, or even in the

region- as circumstances vary drastically from one artist community to another, throughout Europe. However, they are used here to examine the effect of the environment (legislative framework, economic situation, overall culture climate) on creation and sustainability of artist-run initiatives.

Even though this phenomenon is present in all art forms, for the sake of feasibility, the scope of this research is limited to artist-run initiatives in the realm of visual arts (and related art forms).

This thesis is based on several resources, and the main source of information were in-depth interviews that were conducted with the representatives of artist-run initiatives in Serbia (eleven) and Austria (six). In these interviews, insights and opinions were collected from the individuals that once had or now have the experience of being involved with an artist-run initiative.

The research results and conclusions are accompanied by an attempt to predict the future development of artist-run initiatives in Serbia, in the further course of transition.

#### KEY WORDS:

artist-run initiative/ off-space, artist collectives, organizational models, level of structure, informal vs. formal, transition, legal framework, factor of environment, adaptation to environment.

## *Résumé*

Les artistes forment des groupes et des collectivités afin de créer des œuvres d'art ensemble, organiser des actions artistiques ou créer une masse critique pour la culture alternative ce qui leur permet de grandir dans un cercle qui fournit le soutien mutuel et l'échange.

Même si ces groupes ont parfois un impact fort et durable sur la culture, ces initiatives artistiques sont souvent de courtes durées. Elles ont des moments fleurissants mais peu à peu elles se dissolvent et disparaissent ou bien tombent en morceaux en laissant les graines pour une nouvelle génération d'initiatives. En général, il s'agit des systèmes non-hiéronymiques, peu structurés et informels qui fonctionnent de manière différente par rapport aux systèmes structurés au sein d'institutions publiques ou d'entreprises privées où les informations se dispersent d'une manière claire et bien définie.

L'objectif de ce mémoire est de rechercher et d'examiner les modèles d'organisation des initiatives artistiques : leurs caractéristiques, les conditions de leur apparition et de l'existence, leurs avantages par rapport aux grandes entreprises, leurs limites ainsi que les problèmes auxquels elles font face dans un environnement instable d'une société en transition.

Si l'on observe les types d'organisation dans le domaine de la culture, il est clair qu'il existe d'énormes différences entre les institutions publiques traditionnelles et les nouvelles, petites organisations sans but lucratif ou les groupes informels. Les différences sont visibles dans le modèle de fonctionnement, l'efficacité, l'impact et la durabilité. Cependant, cette relation n'est pas quelque chose de statique - elle change avec les changements que la société subit dans le processus de transition. Les modèles d'organisations, appropriés au système d'autogouvernance de ces dernières décennies, connaissent aujourd'hui des défis majeurs. Il s'agit des modèles rigides et incapables de suivre les changements rapides dans l'environnement. De l'autre côté, les nouvelles initiatives, tout en étant plus flexibles, font face à leurs propres défis car elles doivent grandir et vivre dans une période fragile d'un environnement difficile qui n'offre pas beaucoup d'appui.

La mesure dans laquelle un modèle d'organisation est basé sur la structure, définit dans une large mesure son mode de fonctionnement et son impact. C'est une question de savoir si cette initiative est basée sur la planification à long terme et la réalisation d'une position de statut et d'un impact plus large – ou si elle est lancée pour une action immédiate dans l'environnement local, concentrée sur ad hoc activités de guérilla.

Ce mémoire étudie les modèles spécifiques d'organisation des groupes artistiques par rapport à l'environnement – la comparaison des initiatives informelles dans les sociétés des pays développés et celles dans les sociétés en transition. Sur cette base, nous allons tirer les conclusions sur le modèle lui-même et sur la pertinence du contexte de l'environnement pour la durabilité du modèle. Finalement, basée sur les résultats de la recherche, une tentative est faite afin de prédire la façon dont les initiatives indépendantes en Serbie se développeront dans la suite de la transition.

Au début, l'idée était d'inclure les groupes et les initiatives de l'Europe du Sud-est où se trouvent les sociétés en transition et puis les initiatives de plusieurs pays occidentaux, en tant qu'un groupe de contrôle - vu que ces sociétés ne sont pas troublées par une transition en cours. Cependant, en raison de la grandeur de la recherche et des difficultés logistiques, j'ai décidé de me concentrer sur le territoire de la Serbie (avec quelques références sur l'histoire des initiatives de l'ensemble du territoire de l'ex RFS de Yougoslavie), tandis que pour le groupe de contrôle je présenterai des initiatives artistiques en Autriche. Ces deux études de cas, la Serbie et l'Autriche, ne peuvent pas être prises comme un modèle pour l'Europe entier, même pas pour la région. C'est parce que les conditions changent considérablement d'une communauté artistique à l'autre à travers l'Europe. Quand même, ces deux cas sont utilisés ici afin d'étudier l'effet de l'environnement (cadre législatif, la situation économique, l'image générale de la culture) sur la création et la durabilité des initiatives d'artistes autogérés.

Le terme *initiatives d'artistes autogérés* a été choisi afin d'inclure un large éventail de phénomènes : les collectifs d'artistes et les groupes informels, les centres d'artistes autogérés, les espaces d'artistes autogérés ainsi que les projets et actions artistiques. Les initiatives choisies pour cette recherche ont un statut juridique différent, de différents objectifs et elles sont d'une taille différente. En plus, elles se trouvent dans le différent stade du développement – certaines existent depuis plusieurs décennies, certaines sont tout à fait nouvelles, certaines ne sont qu'une chose du passé. Toutefois, le dénominateur commun pour toutes ces actions est le moment où quelques individus se rassemblent pour former une

nouvelle entité avec un accent sur la production artistique (l'accent n'est pas sur la politique culturelle ou le droit civil ou bien le profit). C'est pourquoi la plupart des ONG actifs sur la scène culturelle locale seront omises de cette recherche.

Bien que ce phénomène soit présent dans toutes les formes d'art, j'ai décidé, pour des raisons de faisabilité, de limiter cette recherche sur les initiatives d'artistes autogérés du domaine des arts plastiques (au sens étroit du terme et d'autres formes alternatives).

Ce mémoire est basé sur plusieurs ressources et les **entretiens approfondis** menés avec les représentants des initiatives d'artistes autogérés en Serbie et en Autriche sont la principale source d'information. Par ces entretiens, j'ai essayé de rassembler les idées et les opinions des individus qui sont ou qui ont été impliqués dans une initiative d'artistes autogérés. Le matériel collecté a ensuite été analysé afin de faire une liste des caractéristiques des initiatives d'artistes autogérés les plus fréquemment mentionnées par les personnes interrogées. Ces caractéristiques sont classées en deux paires : *interne* et *externe*, *avantage* et *inconvénient*.

L'accent a été mis sur les initiatives serbes, mais plusieurs entretiens ont été menés avec des représentants de l'Autriche afin d'essayer de distinguer les caractéristiques inhérentes pour le modèle d'organisation elle-même et les caractéristiques qui découlent du contexte de l'environnement (cadre législatif, situation économique, tradition d'initiatives similaires, etc.)

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Au sens organisationnel, les initiatives d'artistes autogérés se trouvent à mi-chemin entre un groupe d'individus et une organisation. Ce sont généralement des groupes informels sans aucune structure hiérarchique, ouverts aux nouveaux membres, qui peuvent spontanément joindre ou quitter le groupe. Néanmoins, ces groupes sont capables de créer des liens solides entre leurs membres.

Les initiatives d'artistes autogérés sont souvent comparées aux groupes de rock ou aux équipes de football non professionnel. Viktor Misiano les avait considérées comme «*l'institutionnalisation de l'amitié*.» Cette institutionnalisation va plus loin, littéralement, lorsqu'un groupe ou une initiative artistique commence à définir sa structure lâche et s'organiser comme une organisation conventionnelle.

Cela se produit en raison de pressions extérieures ou intérieures.

La pression extérieure vient en forme d'argent : soit en imposant des exigences structurelles sur les initiatives en tant que condition pour obtenir le soutien soit en injectant l'argent sous la forme de récompense.

La pression intérieure provient de la nécessité de définir les personnes qui ont accès aux priviléges des actions communautaires. Ces priviléges pourraient inclure l'utilisation de l'espace, le compte bancaire, le nom, le cachet etc. Tout cela implique un certain niveau de responsabilité et d'obligation, ainsi que de puissance.

Le financement est le problème essentiel du fonctionnement des initiatives d'artistes autogérés. Alors que les subventions publiques imposent des exigences structurelles, les fondations étrangères imposent une influence très explicite sur la programmation (même si cela ne se manifeste que par l'autocensure). Afin d'être en mesure de faire quelque chose d'authentique, certaines initiatives d'artistes autogérés cherchent délibérément à rester informelles, illégales et autofinancées.

Ce modèle des initiatives d'artistes autogérés n'apparaît pas seulement dans les sociétés en transition. Il pourrait même ne pas être un modèle bien adapté aux circonstances difficiles de la transition – mais il se pourrait bien que ce soit le seul modèle capable de fonctionner – comme un simple, brut, primitif organisme unicellulaire capable de vivre dans des environnements extrêmes. Il ne préfère pas cet environnement, mais il est capable d'y survivre.

Les résultats de la recherche ont montré que les raisons d'apparition des initiatives d'artistes autogérés sont plus moins les mêmes dans les deux environnements, ainsi que leur durabilité.

Les avantages et les défis internes de ce modèle d'organisation sont très semblables pour les initiatives d'artistes autogérés en Serbie et en Autriche, tandis que les facteurs externes varient de façon significative. Même si les défis externes sont plus petits pour des initiatives en Autriche, leur durée de vie moyenne (historiquement) est comme partout ailleurs, c'est-à-dire 3 à 5 ans.

La société en transition, avec tous ses défauts, donne aux artistes des raisons supplémentaires pour s'auto-organiser. L'environnement ne peut offrir aucun soutien aux jeunes artistes et créateurs, donc ils créent des cercles de soutien comme une sorte d'art dont eux-mêmes aimeraient profiter, mais qui n'est pas reconnu par les institutions, à la fois lentes et arriérées. La motivation pour la création des collectivités et des initiatives artistiques est plus accentuée

dans les sociétés en transition, mais c'est plus difficile d'y survivre. C'est probablement pourquoi la moyenne de durabilité revient au même en fin de compte.

Nous pouvons en tirer la conclusion que les raisons de la création *et* de la fin des initiatives d'artistes autogérés se trouvent dans les conditions internes qui réagissent avec les facteurs environnementaux (manque de contenus proposés et d'appui, absence de réponse, perte d'enthousiasme dans la confrontation avec la réalité au cours des années...)

Si cette interprétation est correcte, nous pouvons conclure que :

- Les initiatives d'artistes autogérés ne prospèrent pas mieux dans les sociétés en transition que dans d'autres environnements (c'est plutôt l'inverse)
- Le modèle interne d'organisation des initiatives d'artistes autogérés n'est pas qu'une méthode d'adaptation à l'environnement, c'est plutôt un modèle causé par des facteurs internes
- Le mode de fonctionnement des initiatives d'artistes autogérés n'est pas la forme de l'organisation la plus adaptée (de toutes les manières possibles de l'organisation) pour les sociétés en transition, leur impact et leur visibilité sont de taille plutôt limitée
- Pourtant, les initiatives d'artistes autogérés peuvent être la seule forme qui pourrait donner aux artistes la possibilité d'obtenir un certain appui dans la création et la présentation de la création contemporaine dans un environnement en transition

Si nous souhaitons bien comprendre les initiatives d'artistes autogérés, il faut tenir compte d'un autre facteur. Il s'agit du facteur de l'environnement local. Il paraît que ces initiatives sont profondément influencées par les circonstances locales, nationales ou même régionales. Cela ne signifie pas que les initiatives d'artistes autogérés ne peuvent pas être actives sur la scène internationale. Toutefois, leurs préoccupations et leurs actions sont le plus souvent situées dans l'environnement local. Les petits changements dans leur environnement ne les affectent davantage que les changements généraux comme, par exemple, la nouvelle loi sur la culture.

Ce facteur de *micro logique* ou de *niche environnement* ne permet pas de tirer des conclusions générales sur les initiatives d'artistes autogérés au niveau national ou de faire une quelconque prévision sur le développement d'un centre particulier à moins de connaître très bien les aspects spécifiques de chaque environnement local. Cependant, d'un point de vue

plus global, certains facteurs de développement général pourraient avoir une influence considérable sur le développement des initiatives d'artistes autogérés au cours de la transition.

Dans l'avenir, comme les fondations individuelles se retirent de la région des Balkans, et l'UE fonds culturels deviennent plus facilement disponibles, le niveau d'organisation nécessaire pour demander des fonds sera encore plus élevé. Pour les initiatives qui ont déjà fait un pas vers une organisation plus structurée, ce sera le point à partir duquel ils auront à décider soit de devenir professionnel et de grandir ou de s'unir avec d'autres centres similaires dans certains syndicats et réseaux, suffisamment grands d'être compétitif. Pour les initiatives qui ont une structure assez libre, et qui n'étaient pas encore inscrites en tant qu'une ONG, ce serait une exigence intimidante qui va les isoler et les pousser sans doute encore plus dans la clandestinité. Cela signifie que la stratification aurait lieu - parmi ces initiatives qui sont actifs aujourd'hui à peu près au même niveau, il se créera de grandes différences à l'avenir. Un groupe des initiatives grandirait pour devenir une organisation professionnelle, plus conventionnelle, tandis que le reste d'entre elles serait encore plus marginalisé et aurait moins facilement accès au financement et soit elles n'existeront plus soit elles survivront comme une guérilla.

Le problème de l'espace est l'une de causes majeures pour la survie des initiatives d'artistes autogérés. Concernant la Serbie, il est évident qu'un grand nombre de bâtiments n'ont pas encore fait la transition de la propriété publique à la propriété privée.

La question se pose : quel genre d'attitude devrait adopter la société civile dans cette affaire? Vu le fait que cette propriété est publique, c'est-à-dire il appartient à nous tous, est-ce que nous devrions insister d'être inclus dans la prise de décision au sujet de sa réorientation ?

Selon une attitude actuellement présente au sein de la société civile, nous, en tant qu'une société démocratique (ou comme une ancienne société autogérée), devrons le faire définitivement!

L'autre attitude consiste à dire que toutes les tentatives de coopération avec les institutions publiques sont fuitives, que c'est un labyrinthe bureaucratique, une démagogie qui fait perdre un temps précieux. Cette attitude insiste sur le fait que la seule façon de faire quelque chose est d'éviter l'institution. Appliquée au problème d'espace, cela se traduit par l'utilisation non

autorisée de l'espace public, y compris, mais sans s'y restreindre, l'occupation illégale d'immeubles. Quel modèle pourrait avoir plus de succès, reste à voir.

Il est possible, même en Serbie, que l'environnement finisse par changer à l'égard de l'art contemporain. Dans ce cas, la situation pourrait se développer en direction où se trouve l'Autriche aujourd'hui, c'est-à-dire plus de financement pour les centres dès leur départ, des limitations moins strictes pour leurs activités, plus d'incitations pour la philanthropie ... mais à ce moment-là, ce sont de pures spéculations.

## CHAPTER I

### *Introduction*

Artists form groups and collectives in order to create artistic works together, organize artistic actions, or create a critical mass for certain alternative culture to grow within a circle that provides mutual support and exchange.

Even though they sometimes have a strong and lasting impact on culture, these artistic initiatives are often short-lived. They flourish at times, and dissolve and die out at other times, or fall apart only to spread the seed and start a new generation of initiatives.

They are typically non-hierarchical, loosely structured, informal systems that function in a very different way than the highly structured systems of public institutions or private companies with clear, official procedures and lines of reporting.

The aim of this thesis is to research and examine models of organization of artist initiatives: their characteristics, conditions for their emergence and existence, advantages they have in comparison to the big institutions, their limitations, and problems they face in the unstable environment of societies in transition.

If we observe models of organization in the field of culture, it is clear that between the traditional public institutions and new, small non-profit organizations or informal groups, there are huge differences in modes of operation, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. However, this relation is not something static- it also changes as the society experiences serious changes in the process of transition. Those models of organization that were adequate for the self-governing system of the past decades, are experiencing major challenges now, as they are inflexible and incapable of keeping up with the fast changes in the environment. On the other hand, small, new initiatives, while being more flexible, face their own challenges, as they have to live through their fragile period of infancy in a troublesome environment that doesn't offer much support.

The extent to which a model of organization is based on structure, defines to a great extent its way of functioning and its impact. This is a question of whether an initiative is focused on long-term strategic planning, and achieving a position of status and wider impact - or it is

launched out of urgency for immediate action in the local environment, and is focusing on ad-hoc, guerrilla activities.

This thesis will examine specific models of organization of artistic groups in relation to the environment – to compare the informal initiatives in societies of developed countries and those in societies in transition - and based on that, to draw conclusions about the model itself.

Finally, an attempt will be made, based on the conclusions of the research, to predict the way the independent initiatives in Serbia will develop in the further course of transition- towards the models of more defined structure and formal procedures, or towards the models of loose, informal networks, and sporadic, ad-hoc projects and actions.

## **1.1 Research Scope and Basic Definitions**

This research is an attempt to look closer into the phenomenon of artist-run initiatives as a model of organization, and to assess the relevance of the context of environment for their sustainability.

Initially, the idea was to include groups and initiatives from the whole region of South-Eastern Europe, being societies in transition, and, as a control group, initiatives from several Western European countries- as societies not troubled by an ongoing transition. However, because of the size of the research and the logistic difficulties- I have decided to focus mainly on the territory of Serbia (with some reference to historic initiatives from the whole territory of former SFR Yugoslavia), with control group of initiatives in Austria. These two case-studies of Serbia and Austria cannot pretend to represent the situation on a wider scale- in Europe, or even in the region- as circumstances vary drastically from one artist community to another, throughout Europe. However, they are used here to examine the effect of the environment (legislative framework, economic situation, overall culture climate) on creation and sustainability of artist-run initiatives.

Term *artist-run initiatives* was chosen so as to include a wide range of phenomena: artists' collectives and informal groups, artist-run organizations, artist-run spaces, as well as artistic projects and actions. The initiatives that were chosen for this research have different legal status and different size and goals. Also, they are in different stage of development- some

have existed for several decades, some are quite new, some are already a thing of the past. However, the common denominator for all of them is a situation where a few individuals come together to form a new entity with primary focus on artistic production (not focus on culture policy, or civil rights, or profit). This is why most of established NGOs that are active on the local cultural scene will be omitted from this research.

Even though this phenomenon is present in all art forms, for the sake of feasibility, I have decided to limit the scope of this research on artist-run initiatives in the realm of visual arts (and bordering art forms).

This research will try to answer the following questions:

- *What are the main motives for creation of artist-run initiatives?*
- *What are the difficulties and what are the advantages of this model of organization?*
- *Are the difficulties and advantages inherent to this model of organization or do they stem from the environment?*
- *Which features of this model of organization makes the artist-run initiatives well-adapted to the unstable environment in transition, and which features are an obstacle to their sustainability?*

My hypothesis was the following:

Artist-run initiatives as informal models of organization, in the conditions of transition societies, have the advantages of

- flexibility, adaptability
- mobility, informal communication and functioning
- immediacy, direct approach
- by-passing complicated bureaucratic procedures
- enthusiasm-fueled action, personal investment
- social capital based on personal contacts
- minimal operational costs (administration, and infrastructure maintenance)

Artist-run organizations have the disadvantages of

- no management experience
- difficulty of financing/ no fundraising credit

- being at mercy of ever-changing environment, with no organizational or legislative buffer/fence
- no influence on decision-making on local or national level
- insufficient visibility
- limited impact

Based on the findings from this research, I will try to propose projections of the possible development of the independent initiatives in the course of transition: whether they will develop towards more structure (hierarchical organization, determined procedures, defined standards of operation, merging and joining into union-like organizations), or towards less structure (ad hoc and guerrilla approach). Third possibility is that stratification of the sector will occur, where one group of the initiatives will become increasingly structured, evolve into other, more conventional forms of organizations- and the rest of them will be pushed further into anonymity and ghettoization.

## 1.2 Methodology

This thesis is based on several resources:

As a main source of information, **in-depth interviews** were conducted with the representatives of artist-run initiatives in Serbia and Austria. In these interviews, I tried to collect insights and opinions of the individuals that once had or now have the experience of being involved with an artist-run initiative. This material was then analyzed in order to make a list of most commonly mentioned features of artist-run initiatives, as stated by their members. These features are categorized in two pairs: *internal* and *external*, *advantages* and *disadvantages*.

The focus was on Serbia-based initiatives, but several interviews were conducted with representatives from Austria, in order to try to distinguish which features are inherent to this model of organization in itself, and which stem from the context of the environment (legislative framework, economic situation, tradition of similar initiatives, etc.)

On the basis of comparative **organizational analysis** of artist-run initiatives and their **organizational structure**, an attempt was made to draw conclusions about general features of this organizational model.

In order to have a more complete picture of the situation, **desk analysis** of existing research (interviews, capacity assessment surveys, critical reviews) of civil organizations in the field of culture (mapping of the sector) was used to assess the contribution of the independent initiatives to the overall picture of the cultural landscape in the region.

So as to put the current artist initiatives into context, a **historical overview** was made of the artistic groups and collectives that used to be active on the territory of former Yugoslavia in the decades before the break-up. This overview was based on available critical and theoretical essays that are documenting the works of these groups.

In addition, a **review of the existing comparative analyses** of the **legal framework** was made in order to determine what effects of the environment are determined by legislation, and which are determined by other factors (economic situation, audience level of education, etc.)

The aspects of policy that were examined are: availability of space, availability of public subsidies and direct financial support, limit on self-earned income, taxation and all other relevant policy instruments or common practices that influence significantly sustainability of artist-run initiatives.

For this comparison, a **desk analysis** was made of the existing comparative policy research papers, that are addressing the above-mentioned issues.

These methods were supplemented by author's personal analytical **observations and insights.**

## CHAPTER II

### *Artist-run Initiatives*

#### **2.1 Off-space/ Independent Space/ No-Space: Terminology and Definition Issues**

Independent artist-run initiatives and art spaces have become an interesting phenomena related to the production and promotion of art and culture. Mostly founded by artist collectives in urban areas, they are aiming to provide an alternative space for the production of artworks and circulation and exchange of ideas. There is, however, more than one name to describe such initiatives. There is a certain difficulty of finding accurate concepts and definitions in terms of naming and describing those art practices and their activities.

In Germany and Austria, there is a wide use the term *off-space*, resembling Off-Broadway<sup>1</sup>, for activities outside ‘main business’ perceived as those of galleries, museums and institutions. But this term is not even recognized within Germany as a whole, not to speak of the rest of the world. For the English speaking countries and those who borrow from their culture, term *artist-run space* (ARS) has been established as common in the U.S.A. and *artist-run centres* (ARCs) in Canada, while *artist-run initiatives* (ARIs) is more common in Australia.

*Artist-run space* is (a name commonly used for) a gallery space run by artists, which is then, being an independent venue, circumventing the structures of public and private galleries. Although these spaces could operate in the art market similar to commercial galleries/ publishing houses/ venues, they have a role totally different from them. Private galleries are profit organizations that are seeking to promote artist as economic investments, and they have to generate a return on the investment made. Independent artist-run spaces and centres are non-profit organizations developed in order to provide autonomous and free spaces- open

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘off-space’ was born on Broadway, where artists gathered in the wake of large shows and started giving their own, small performances. These could take place anywhere: on the street, but also in a bar, an atelier or basically any room accessible to the artists. The alternative, nomadic character of the artistic practices and the temporary inhabitation of certain space to host them led to the term ‘off-space’, referring to their ‘off-Broadway’ character.

environment that would enable artist to research and experiment freely avoiding external conditioning i.e. from art market, politics and established hierarchies.

However the term *artist-run space* is too narrow in its scope to cover all practices falling out of the grid of mainstream art representation practices. First of all, not all spaces need to be run by artists. In fact, some of the very prominent initiatives are not (only) managed by artists (in the narrow sense). The concept *artist* seems to imply a certain style of operation different from *curator* or *gallerist*. The term probably has more or less a historic and sociological connotation referring to the fact, that it was mostly artists who pioneered these practices first. Nowadays we should reconsider the meaning of term *artist* in this context. We have to look at the mode of operation of the practice in mind, not at who runs it or what kind of object it is.

There are also many projects of this kind without any (permanent) space at all. They can therefore better be considered as *artist collectives* than as artist-run spaces.

They are not based in one location, but present their activity every time in different locations- whether exhibition space, or public space. Sometimes, these locations are provided by other independent initiatives (artist-run spaces) who incorporate these nomadic projects into their program.

The terminology is sometimes also stretched to *Independent artist-run spaces*, referring to their artistic, strategic and financial autonomy in relation to the cultural industry. However, these spaces should not necessarily be considered as some sort of breeding grounds for anarchistic practices. Their goal is not to undermine the cultural industry, but complement it with the creative atmosphere that the market fails to provide. I will therefore avoid calling these spaces *underground* or *avant-garde*, but rather *alternative* art spaces that can be used for exhibitions, workshops or the general production of art.

Likewise, terms like *non-profit* or *non-commercial* are of little use in defining the practices we have in mind. If we look at video- or performance art, for example, we could hardly say that there is any commercial market for these kind of practices. In fact, any radical and advanced art practice is without any commercial value at the beginning and often stays like this all the time. Since we're already talking about some alternative practices, i.e. working outside established forms of art presentation, it's rather natural and consequent to drop the use of term *non-profit* altogether.

In the lack of a commonly used term, for the purposes of this study, the term *artist-run initiative* has been used, as it seems to be the least restrictive. It is used here as an umbrella name for variety of artist-generated activity (whether space-bound or not) defined by its existence outside of the traditional, conservative art system and the art market.

## **2.2 “Confidential Projects”**

Artist-run initiatives (ARIs) are a very fragile, fleeting form of organization. They are by design somewhat paradoxical. On one hand they are trying to challenge established hierarchies and static institutions by insisting on openness and accessibility, freedom and spontaneity - on the other hand they are joint efforts with an aim -they join energy and resources of few individuals in hope of achieving greater efficiency. In other words- this is a very thin line between informality and structure (between absolute freedom of individual spontaneity on one side and collective responsibility, planning and establishing procedures in order to be more effective).

This level of organization is very hard to maintain in the long run. This is why most of initiatives disappear within 3-5 years, while a few of them cross the trash-hold into a higher level of organization- and become in fact conventional organizations. Very small number of initiatives manages to stay on this thin line between organization and spontaneity for a longer period of time.

Artist-run initiatives (ARIs) are just one step away from individual effort in the direction of organization. This is, in fact, a sociological phenomenon closer to that of friendship, or love affair, than a real organization.

This kind of community is maybe best defined by a concept that was once established by the Russian curator Viktor Misiano: “the institutionalization of friendship”<sup>2</sup>.

In his highly influential article, Misiano describes the nature of artistic communities and puts the conditions of their creation in relation to the environment of transitional societies.

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<sup>2</sup> Victor Misiano (2003), “The Institutionalization of Friendship” article about the Moscow and Ljubljana art communities and their relationship, which started in 1992 with the Apt-Art International exhibition organized in Moscow, and was followed by the Moscow Embassy, Interpol and Transnacionala.

Misiano writes that the real thing that all these projects of artists' communities have in common is the “[employment] of the resources of friendly relationship as part of the program”, and he calls these projects “confidential projects” with the strategy of “institutionalization of friendship”<sup>3</sup>. He claims that these *confidential projects* are characterized by a “freedom from hierarchy and functional specializations” and an “absence of thematic program”, as well as describing this situation as “where themes emerge spontaneously out of communication itself”<sup>4</sup>.

Considering the structure of the *confidential project*, the main feature is that the human aspect dominates the professional. Because friendship is not creative cooperation, but the “ethical form of Eros”. The *confidential project* excludes the possibility of a representative selection of participants. The choice is immanent in relation to the friendships. Friendship is a product of choice, although this is the only case of unmotivated social choice. Friendship is a choice within yourself. That's why the usual curator's routine — such as gender, national, generational, and regional balance — is impossible in such a project.

The *confidential project* is equally indifferent to external representation: to the artifact and to spectacular effects. The substance of *confidential project* is the concealed emotional, psychic, and intellectual experience, which cannot be exhibited or shown. The main issue lies in the internal, not external, communication. Friendship does not require a promotion. It cannot be for others, only for yourself. The secret essence of *confidential projects* is that such projects can generally ignore the public. Friendly communication cannot be maintained on-stage.

The *confidential project* is also characterized by a freedom from hierarchy and functional specialization. Friendship is not a hierarchical form of social relationship: it presumes a complete equality between all parties. Friendship does not know the Father. That's why the *confidential project* tries to ignore the role of the curator as power-source, which is inevitable in traditional exhibitions. Even if the function of the curator as an ideologue or manager is preserved, it should be carried out in such a way that it should create a regime of collective responsibility for every moment in the project, and for the ultimate result. There can be no successful or unsuccessful project in friendship. There can only be disappointment.

According to Misiano, what all these projects of artistic collectives have in common is their

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<sup>3</sup> Misiano, 2003: 169

<sup>4</sup> Misiano, 2003: 170

approach to dialectics between Eastern and Western Europe as a starting point, and the restoration of earlier avant-garde movements and political systems. Misiano is making clear that this friendship is between artists. This transcendental friendship becomes more clear and material when Misiano tries to explain the logic of its existence; the “structure of the confidential project is nothing but an attempt to create a structure for a collective artistic practice in the situation of the absence of an art system … which is a type of transitional society characteristic of Eastern Europe”. So, apart from the friendly relationship, which is above any kind of opportunism, the reason why these two artistic communities of Ljubljana and Moscow have such a strong relationship is that they both suffer from a transitional misfortune. The structure of the *confidential project* is nothing but an attempt to create a structure for a collective artistic practice in the situation of the absence of an art system. Thus, the *confidential project* is a response to a time and environment of transitional society. In an institutional, ideological, and moral vacuum, friendship becomes the last shelter for culture.

The direct result of the institutional and symbolic collapse is the crisis of any objective justification for artistic practice. The old aesthetic ideology not only provided an objective foundation for official art, it also gave birth to an alternative. Avoiding official institutions and taking root in the sphere of the everyday, this alternative culture was also controlled by strict ideological principles. Acting as an opposition to the official institutional culture, alternative culture required the ideals and principles of “comrades-in-arms” and “the common affair”.

While in the 1960s and 1970s “the common affair” of avant-garde artists was the rigorous system of communism (or less rigorous, but still ideologically clear, system of socialism), today’s avant-garde artists are suffering from the “transitional mad dynamics of social transformations”<sup>5</sup>. This is pandemic to all the post-socialist states.

In the situation where not only the normative ethics of the authority collapse, but the “comrade-in-arms” and “common affair” ethics of opposition collapse as well, it is friendship, “the ethical form of Eros”, which remains the most invulnerable. Finally, the ethic of friendship does not accept any relativization of moral feelings, which (especially under the old aesthetic regime) was the most efficient opposition to official morality. Links between friends can’t avoid morality, that’s what takes them beyond simple acquaintance and relations

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<sup>5</sup> Misiano, 2003: 171

between colleagues. While accepting any forms of human expression (including transgression and excess), friendship denies only one — irony. The *confidential project* is a characteristic symptom of the new situation, in which ironic strategies are left in the past. It is based in a deep earnestness, almost an obsession (transgression and excess). In this sense the *confidential community* is the only possible form in which to preserve ethics in the period of the transition from the ideological ethics of communalism to a relativistic ethics of the transitional society.

The *confidential community*'s denial of irony is an acknowledgement that deconstruction has exhausted itself as a strategy, and that what's needed is a strategy of reconstruction. The constructive character of the *confidential community* is the utopian element that exists in any real friendship. The confidential project is the project of an ideal community or an ideal art system. In this sense, the idea of the institutionalization of friendship is mobilizing the major advantage of any transition epoch, when the old order has collapsed and the new one has not yet been built. What is most significant as Misiano claims is that this “openness of confidential community can avoid ideological dogmatism, and can remain open to the chaos of the transitional epoch”<sup>6</sup>. The silent political conclusion of this “reconstructive openness” is that artistic communities managed to survive communism, and can now easily adapt themselves to the chaos of capitalism.

One could rightly ask: what made these friendships possible? What made all of these people get together? Their intellectual positions are almost always very different- they agree on almost nothing. It appears that the *confidential project* has another function characteristic of the transitional period: prophylaxis. Compared to a traditional exhibition (works delivered by trucks, assistants, the opening, and dinner with sponsors) the *confidential project* is extremely uncomfortable. Its experience can be justified by only one thing: its therapeutic impact. These projects are nothing but voluntary group therapy. These endless discussions are nothing but wholesome public acts of speaking out in order to eliminate depression and neuroses. The therapeutic impact of the *confidential project* is effective because it plunges the participants into extreme situations; it provides them with some kind of a threshold experience. The lack of comfort and the hardships of the *confidential project* are compensated for by the intensity of experience. Friendship cannot be routine, it's always an adventure. Participants in the *confidential project* think of it as one of the most important moments in their lives, similar to

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<sup>6</sup> Misiano, 2003: 172

how worn-out veterans recall the years spent on the battlefield as the happiest period of their lives.

### **2.3 Organizational In-betweenness**

As argued above, artist-run initiatives are in their nature something between an informal human relationship and an organization. Networks of informal relationships have been also studied extensively by organizational scholars in the context of real organizations, because of their importance as a rich source of information, knowledge, and expertise. Scholars have argued, networks of informal relationships are often crucial to the way work and processes of innovation within organizations take place. This explains why new HR practices such as communities-of-practice have received so much attention in organizational and management literature. Communities-of-practice are sites where people do not only share knowledge and information, it is a place where people come together because they have mutual interests and goals. As such it is a meaningful site and a source of sensemaking, identity, self-esteem, hence, motivation. Paradoxically, though, by revealing, facilitating, and structuring informal relationships, organizations formalize the informal. Also the temporary and non-bureaucratic nature of these communities of practice is restrained by embedding these informal think-tanks into the formal structure of the organization.

Considering organizational structure, ARIs vary greatly from one example to the other, and from one environment to the other. Even though their functioning is typically less rigid when compared to corporations or institutions, among ARIs themselves, modes of functioning vary from very informal to almost conventional. *Functioning* here refers to both relations between the members in a group /collective, and modes of operation that are visible from outside of the group.

As mentioned before, some initiatives are not organized around certain space, but operate rather as an artistic collective or informal group. These two models- the space-bound and nomadic one- generally have a different level of structure, because the commodity of the space imposes a higher level of responsibility. However, variation is present even within these subgroups.

#### **2.3.1 Informal groups and cooperatives**

Artist-run initiatives (ARIs) are often started by a group of artist in some kind of collaboration. This collaboration can take very different forms. As mentioned above, ARIs are not conventional organizations founded with a clear mission, vision and aims. They are rarely (if ever) functionally structured in advance- they find form in the process of functioning. The way that the communication among individuals in a collective functions, the level of autonomy of an individual in a group, the level of consensus among members of the group about the purpose of the initiative, the level of established procedures... this all speaks about the form in which the initiative operates. Nature of relationships within this collective that starts an initiative can be ranging from that of interdependence to almost-complete autonomy. Irrespective of its legal (official) status, a group of artists in an ARI can function among themselves as an loose group or a tighter form- a cooperative.

An informal group is a collective of individuals with looser relationship among members. Their joint activity doesn't depend on certain specific collaboration and/or complementary competencies. The interdependence among members is small or non existent. There also isn't a clear line dividing insiders and outsiders. People can become members freely and sometimes spontaneously. The membranes of an informal group are porous and they allow for the fluctuation in number and structure of members. Relationships are undefined and the sharing of responsibility and involvement of members vary considerably.

An artist cooperative (or co-op) on the other hand is a kind of collaboration that implies stronger connections among group members. (Whether a group of artists is explicitly named a cooperative is irrelevant, but their functioning is here compared to that of traditional forms of agricultural and other co-ops). Since co-ops are based on sharing resources and benefits- their membership is usually very clearly defined. The line between members and non-members is clear. They also usually have a better division of responsibilities among members and the ethic of equal contribution is important. The feeling of belonging is stronger- both in sense of responsibilities and protection.

A cooperative, generally, is an autonomous organization, enterprise, or association, jointly owned and controlled by its members.

Cooperatives typically provide professional facilities and services for its members, including space, equipment and educational resources. By design, all economic and non-economic benefits and liabilities of the cooperative are shared equally among its members.

Traditionally, cooperatives<sup>7</sup> are democratic organizations that are governed on a one-member one-vote basis. Cooperative members usually elect a board of directors from within the membership, that makes major policy decisions and may hire a manager or staff to maintain day-to-day operations. Some cooperatives operate as collectives where all members function as the board of directors and make decisions through consensus.

Cooperatives offer several benefits to artists and craftspeople. By working together artisans can gain marketing advantages, reap quantity discounts on supplies through joint purchasing, and share studio space and equipment.

### 2.3.2 The ‘off’ in off-spaces

As mentioned before, functioning of a space-bound artist initiative requires a certain organizational capacity that informal groups don’t need to achieve. The difference between an off-space and a standard gallery is sometimes (depending on the vision of people who run it) not so stark as one would expect.

Off-space is normally a space which is not defined as a traditional gallery but as some empty box which houses exhibitions from time to time. It may be run by artists or not. Its token and justification is the propositions that it shows art not shown anywhere else. The manager very often shows his or her friends who he or she feels to be underrepresented by the traditional exhibition system.

However, an off-space can sometimes operate on a formal level almost like any gallery or institution: it sends out invitation cards, has openings, opening hours, a few shows a year, and provides a preferably neutral background (white walls) for the display of its art. The main difference between an off-space and a (commercial) gallery is, that the manager of the off-space, though selling pieces from time to time, is neither interested nor able to push his or her artists into the art market. Young artists very often start their career by serving an off-space,

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<sup>7</sup> The US Department of Agriculture listed three principles that uniquely characterize a cooperative organization:

- The User-Owned Principle: The people who own and finance the cooperative are those who use the cooperative.
- The User-Control Principle: The people who control the cooperative are those who use the cooperative. They democratically elect a board of directors. The board sets the overall operating policies, approves the annual budget, oversees its operation, and distributes the benefits derived from use of the cooperative to members. The board also hires professional management to handle the day-to-day operations.
- The User-Benefit Principle: The cooperative's sole purpose is to provide and distribute benefits to its users on the basis of their use. While the goal of agricultural cooperatives is not to generate a return on investment, they, like all businesses, must cover costs and generate capital to cover expansion and unforeseen emergencies.

probably in the hope that some curator or director of a museum might show up and “discover” him or her. Later these artists change into professional galleries or try so because these galleries are mainly interested in “building” their artists up, pushing them into international shows or attracting grants for them.

According to Marcus Graf<sup>8</sup>, an artist-run space has to be institutionalized to some extent in order to offer the artist something to help him build up a career. The term ‘independent artist-run space’ already refers to a certain business structure and organizational identity. “Like the official galleries, these off-galleries to a certain degree also have their own logos, their corporate identity and corporate design. Because if you don’t work professionally, you don’t get to your aim, whatever it is.”

In some environments (depending somewhat on legislative conditions), most of independent artist-run spaces seem to be self-conscious, more or less established venues (e.g. Vienna or Istanbul). They are all fully integrated in the local and global art scene, and have an extensive social network. They have formulated an official policy or mission, and a logo which they communicate through publications and the internet. Some may have a business plan, although they work non-profit and closely together with the artists. One could rightfully ask- what is so ‘off’ in these off-spaces?

This trend has, in the meanwhile, also created a wave of reactionism, calling for more courage with independent spaces:

*We should take art as a model for looking at artist run spaces. From such a space I'd expect the same flexibility and challenge towards its own parameters as that, which art did with its own ground in the past. The true artist run space should not imitate the mediocre white cube resemblance but should rather try to push the boundaries of art presentation beyond its present limits. This is especially urgent because free based curators and also institutions copy meanwhile a lot from forms outside their respected fields. The whole club culture has nearly been absorbed by the museum. Any so called artist-run space should therefore question all parameters connected to art presentation whether these are the white walls, operation modalities like invitation cards, openings, openings hours or the very nature of exhibition itself. Is there really a need for exhibition perceived as a form of display, as the presentation of a certain flatness of concept, like easing the way of the visitors into the display through means borrowed from mass marketing? (It can be questioned whether there's really a difference between a shopping mall, a gallery and a museum.)<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> Marcus Graf, a co-director of the independent art space 5533, Istanbul, quoted from an interview with Emma Bijloos, in: *Beyond the obvious: independent artist run spaces in Istanbul*, 2009

<sup>9</sup> quoted from: The Thing: Blog Kunst, Kritik und neue Medien, ein kollaboratives Unternehmen zur Umgestaltung Frankfurter Kunst  
*Artspace, offspace, any space? It's still rock'n roll to me*, posted by ‘stbeck’, on November 27, 2002

The level of professionalism, or formal resemblance to conventional galleries depends very much on the vision of people who run these spaces- this is implied by independence and autonomy that artist-run spaces stand for.

Nevertheless, even when they operate through a somewhat conventional form, artist-run spaces still offer an alternative for emerging artists that have little opportunities in an established hierarchies of an art world. As they are trying to survive by circumventing the state bureaucracy, independent artist-run spaces remain able to offer artists a ‘hassle-free’ base for artistic production. In this sense, they retain the transient character of the original off-spaces. This gives these spaces a certain character of ‘in-betweenness’, positioning them on the threshold of the art world.

## 2.4 Opportunity portal

Marcus Graf notices that “sometimes after an artist worked with an off-gallery or an off-space, he or she gets an offer to participate in another exhibition, or a gallery, or even maybe a biennale.” This idea of independent artist-run spaces as a first step in an artistic career brings us to the idea of their position in what Howard Becker<sup>10</sup> described as the ‘Art World’ (Becker 1982). According to Becker, what we define as ‘a work of art’ is not created by the artist alone, but by a whole range of artists, curators, critics, politicians, scientist and anyone who somehow influences the artist’s long climb towards recognition. A work of art is then defined by numerous participants that represent different channels in an interconnected structure -a network of relations of the Art World.

The independent artist-run spaces are then the first channel through which an artist is introduced into the Art World. As entering the Art World is perhaps the hardest, it is also the most important step in the career of the artist as it is then that they begin to build up his or her most valuable resource in the form of a social network. These spaces are a unique way for artist to come together and to show their work to the public. They are not only spaces for the creation of the product but also for networking and exchanging ideas. More important than the exhibitions they make, these spaces are very useful as meeting points: spaces where people can cross each other.

Independent artist-run spaces are part of the cultural infrastructure that ties art venues, both commercial and non-profit, together. All the venues make use of each other’s networks, view

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<sup>10</sup> Becker, Howard S: *Art Worlds*, Berkley: University of California Press, 1982

each other's exhibitions and are attended by more or less the same public: people with an interest in art. All participants to the Art World are socially, culturally and economically tied together in one greater structure.

Bourdieu<sup>11</sup> pointed out how not only economic, but also social and cultural resources are forms of capital. The independent artist-run space focuses solely on the latter two: giving the artists a chance to focus on the development of their social network and their artistic practices.

The commercial gallery plays a very important role in the whole art system because it covers, supports and promotes artists and introduces them to the art scene. It is the art manager -but it has a commercial approach. Off-spaces are often run by artists who don't focus on selling: they're just focused on 'doing art'. Both the independent artist-run space and the commercial gallery play an important role in introducing the artist into the art world and the building up of a social network. The independent artist-run space remains the site where artists can improve their artistic skills, and work yet without the pressure of the market. In the independent artist-run space artists can gain confidence before confronting the cultural industry by themselves.

Artists reportedly often prefer collaboration with an off-space to an official gallery- and not only because of this breakthrough opportunity, but also because they feel like a part of the team. They can participate in the decision-making. In the other (commercial) galleries they can show their work, but for some of them the process is more interesting than the end product. The overall visibility of off-spaces is not too big, as their financial and organizational capacity is often limited. Also, they most often don't pay artists honorariums for exhibiting. Artist who show their work there do it because they prefer the different approach of the off-spaces- a "different energy".

## 2.5 Urban Context

In his book *Cultural complexity* Ulf Hannerz<sup>12</sup> points out how modern society becomes more demanding as it becomes more complex. Modern cities have increased enormously in number and diversity, making them attractive to all kinds of investors and producers. These

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<sup>11</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre: *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Harvard University Press, 1984

<sup>12</sup> Hannerz, Ulf: *Growth, Flux, Coherence, in Cultural Complexity*, chapter five of *Cultural Complexity, Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1991

businessmen have to innovative in order to compete, and in a society as vast and diverse as ours this has resulted in goods and services that apply to every human need and sentiment. For producers and consumers alike distinguishing oneself from the others, or the mass, has become one of the most important criteria for success. Trends and fashions succeed each other in great tempo. According to Hannerz this process of renewal is fueled by the critical discourse: intellectuals such as artists who keep investigating the borders and the content of the cultural industry. Renewal has become an inherent part of the cultural apparatus while the arts, the media and the educational system have become its renewal institutions.

Hannerz describes how in modern society subcultures have become the most important sources of inspiration for the cultural industry and its ceaseless search for more markets. In the history of contemporary art, an example of such subcultures can be made of the old avant-gardes. The avant-garde artists broke with tradition and picked up new forms and ideas of artistic practice. These new modes of artistic practice were soon detected by cultural entrepreneurs, and as time and money passed the avant-garde artists became the ‘rebellious darlings’ of the cultural industry. Now, most of their work is preserved in museums (once described as the ‘mausoleums’ of art by Theodor Adorno) and make up for a vast industry supplying millions of consumers. Of course artworks of such importance should be made available for everyone to enjoy. But what remains interesting is how these works and their artists have overtime become part of the industry they initially opposed themselves to. What was once new and revolutionary becomes a part of the standard repertoire of mass production; part of a the culture of conventions that it initially fought against.

In opposing themselves to the industry and its mainstream culture, the avant-garde artists in fact gave the system new impulses and showed where it could be improved. This is the same for the independent artist-run spaces who, like the avant-gardes, define themselves by their opposition to the cultural industry. The difference is that independent art spaces are aware that their relation to the market, and actively claim their position in the cultural industry as its research and development centers. At the same time, they use the cultural industry as a source of inspiration and a breeding ground for their critical practices. By pointing out its shortcomings, flaws and incapacities, independent artist-run spaces make themselves indispensable to the cultural industry as it needs their critical sting to be revived and kept alive. The official structure needs off-spaces, because they discover new talents- they breath fresh air into the system by introducing new artists.

### **2.5.1 The urban process of gentrification**

Large urban environments of the metropolises are most inspiring for independent artistic initiatives. The diversity and livelihood of neighborhoods within the city is where ARIs thrive. They benefit from the multitude of centers and their peripheries –from the impossibility of establishing a centralized hegemony or one-mindedness of suburbs.

Artist initiatives often prefer underdeveloped neighborhoods that have maintained some of their authentic identity (haven't yet been sterilized by uniformity of chain stores) – but that are not too far from the cultural epicenter around which artists' lives revolve. These neighborhoods are also usually cheap, which means that artists can afford them.

Unfortunately, by choosing these neighborhoods, artist contribute to their change –which then, paradoxically, forces them out of that place too. The process of gentrification, which is basically the flooding of old, traditional neighborhoods by the cultural industry, has 'robbed' many initiatives of their space.

The creative atmosphere brought along by the artists lays bare the formerly neglected qualities of the neighborhood. What happens then is a slow transformation of the character of the neighborhood as the cultural industry seeps in. As investors, entrepreneurs and merchants start renovating and erecting buildings, raising the rents and opening up shops and galleries, the neighborhood is made suitable for and is occupied by the higher classes, forcing the former residents to yet another periphery. The neighborhood may still thrive on its 'bohemian' character, but most artists have moved already to a less popular area, where the process of gentrification may start again.

The potential of the artist initiatives to contribute to gentrification has even been recognized by official institutions in some cities, who, in their plans for urban development intentionally create incentives for artists to populate the run-down neighborhoods.

### **2.5.2 Local climate**

Independent art spaces can make a strong claim in protecting the city's original culture, it's private heartbeat that gets eventually endangered by gentrification and globalization. In fact,

ARIs are very strongly bound to their local environments- they react to them, are rooted in them, supported by them, or defined by opposition to them.

Artist-run initiative seem to be affected more profoundly by the circumstances in the local environment, then by those on the national, or regional level.

This is not to say that ARIs can not be active on international level, but their reasons for existence and their primary focus most often is in the local environment and community. The change of one appointed official in an institution with which they collaborate might affect them more than the new law on culture. The fact that there is a private space of one of the members that the group can use for their activity, can mean the difference between the survival and fading of an initiative. They feel more directly the lack and the reaction in the local community, then the macro changes on international level.

ARIs often sprout out of the realization that spaces for exhibitions or collaborative projects are either lacking, ideologically fraught or otherwise run-down. Artists then mobilize alternatives to pursue their practices. The prevalent lack of institutional or governmental resources inflicts their practice, resulting in low-budget projects. In their struggle to survive, independent artist-run spaces have to depend greatly on their relation with their social connections and their urban environment.

ARIs' members testify that artists can learn a great deal from the 'survival methods' of the street. Not only does the street provide them with a source of inspiration for their artistic practices, the neighbors also help out when they have to deal with the bureaucratic municipality. It is often not clear how to get official permission for projects, and even if it is it is a lengthy bureaucratic procedure. But if there is a person in the given municipality that recognizes the existence of these initiatives, and believes this is something interesting, the official procedures can be overlooked, or at least made comprehensible.

Some ARIs reportedly have to get in touch with their 'nightly neighbors who have a relation with the police' so to be able to organize their projects which often take place on the street.

Contact with the neighborhood remains important for independent artist-run spaces as they derive their inspiration from the street and have to depend on their neighbors for support. But they should be aware of the risk of ideological patronage that is always involved in the

process. According to Tan<sup>13</sup> this is a dangerous, as ARIs positions themselves in a neighborhoods often completely unaccustomed to contemporary artistic practices. As long as the ‘ethics of locality’ are being discussed, the relation between independent artist-run spaces and their neighborhood remain healthy and genuine.

Independent artist-run spaces are professionals in dealing with change, experts in depicting everyday life and the drama’s of society. They know how to give meaning to what occurs around them. Public officials for the most part remain ignorant of the contribution these spaces make to the attractiveness of the city. Their strength lies in their international network, their open character and their ethical position in safeguarding the values of creativity and freedom of expression.

In a city that is striving to be modern, while retaining its cultural legacy, they should certainly not be overlooked.

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<sup>13</sup> Tan, Pelin: *Self-Initiated Collectivity: Artist-Run Spaces, Artists' Collectives in Istanbul* in Hilavazu, Hullanma (ed.): *User's Manual, Contemporary Art in Turkey, 1986-2006*, Art-ist /Revolver, Frankfurt, 2007

## CHAPTER III

### *Legislative Framework*

Unlike with the inner model of organization that depends on the relationships between individuals in a collective, official legal status of the initiative depends for the most part of the legislative conditions in the given environment. Certain legal forms are more appropriate for artist initiatives in one environment, while as in other- they might not be the best, or the easiest solution.

But the broader legal framework doesn't effect only the legal status of such initiatives- it effects their way of operation and beyond- it is closely connected to the reasons for which they were started in the first place. In this respect, the socio-economic status of the artist, as well as the position of the contemporary arts in general in the given environment, plays an important role.

The broader legislative framework affecting the creation, functioning and survival of ARIs, includes general and specific (for arts) labor and taxation laws, as well as social protection policies, and all other areas of legislation that affect artists' working conditions in the given environment. The narrower legislative framework that effects ARIs more directly is most prominently culture policies and regulation considering civil initiatives.

Some of the aspects of policy that are relevant for ARIs are:

- collaboration and partnership (whether the legislation recognizes possibilities of partnership of informal initiatives with private and public sector; the openness of public institutions for collaboration with autonomous initiatives)
- availability of space (urban policies; policies considering unused public space; repercussions in cases of illegal use of space; how accommodating public institutions are towards one-time use of the space by artist initiatives)
- public subsidies or guarantees for independent initiatives (amount of grants and/or aid for artist run or controlled production and distribution facilities; availability of support for informal groups- institutional conditioning)
- self-earned income (what is the legislative limitation on income of non-governmental organizations)
- taxation (whether there are special rates recognized for artistic non-institutional

initiatives or they are treated as private business, existence of taxation incentives for support of artists' informal initiatives similar to those concerning charity )

This legislative framework effects the ways of operation of artist-run initiatives in that it can offer incentives for ARIs to register as a regular civil initiative organization (and hence, gently push them towards more conventional way of organizing) – or it could discourage them from attempting to register and push them more towards margins and semi-legal activity. The organizational requirements that the institutions put as a condition for support to these initiatives, as opposed to creating possibilities for institutions to legally collaborate with informal groups- this all effects the form that initiatives will take. Also- the level of expertise and minimum capacity required for running a registered initiative might act as a discouraging factor.

The available support that is allocated specifically for small initiatives like this might be something that fosters the founding of ARIs, but, depending on the policies of distribution and on the allocated amount, it might also keep them from developing and/or from fighting for a better position. The absence of specific support programs might push small initiatives into joining into unions so to increase their lobbying power.

The body that distributes the support (its accessibility and its policy) also plays a role in the determining the chances of ARIs to survive. Whether this is an expert agency or ministry, whether it is on state, regional or local level, and whether it supports individual projects or yearly program – this all effects the situation of ARIs.

ARIs are also effected by the policies of urban development. Whether it is uncontrolled gentrification that pushes them out of their neighborhood, or it is intended gentrification policy that lures them into bad areas with hope they will start the development; whether it is liberal or restrictive policy of public space; whether it is centralized or decentralized public financial support for culture- this all effects where and how ARIs will be started and how long they will be sustainable.

Since artist-run initiatives are small and rooted in local conditions, it is the local policies that effect them the most. Since they are invisible for law makers, most of the legislation is not even intended directly for ARIs. Their operational space is often the gap between the official legislation and its implementation in the given local community. Very often they depend on

the human factor- the willingness of a soft-hearted official to make an exception, or turn a blind eye, or simply laziness of institutions that don't feel endangered by such small initiatives.

### **3.1 Artist-run Initiatives in Serbia: Current Situation in the Environment**

Currently, in 2011, situation for artist-run initiatives isn't easy. One could argue that the situation for self-organization of the artists is never easy by definition, but there are some factors that can make the environment more or less hostile or friendly for emergence and sustainability of such initiatives.

Two decades after the break-up of SFRY, and one decade into transition, the reasons for self-organization of artists are not less present- although they might be slightly different from those of the 1970s or 1990s.

The need to present and produce the kind of art that is not recognized by the cultural institutions is present today as it was before- it only might be another kind of art than in the 70s. Also the need to create a circle of support in the absence of functional public support system- this too is still very present. However, the marginalization of culture -and of contemporary art in particular- seems to be a more pressing issue today than it was in the 70s or 90s.

While in the 90s, the whole society was upside-down in a state of malaise, it was no wonder that culture did not have any importance. The physical survival and mental sanity were more pressing issues for the general population of Serbia- and the political struggle was the only focus for power structures. The artists felt marginalized- but they were not the only ones, and in that sense, not much was to be expected before a general situation in the society changed.

In the 70s, artists that propagated neo-avant-garde practices, and that had a reactionary attitude towards the establishment-promoted culture, were given a limited room to blow off their steam- they were given a niche of Student Cultural Center (SKC) where these transgressions were kept at bay and controlled. Even so, the artists succeeded to provoke the establishment to react to some of the actions- and in that way there was a sense of feed-back from the environment that was watching. They also felt at least connected to the like-minded groups within the country and in the international community of artists.

Today, culture is still very marginalized within Serbian society, but for reasons that are not so easy to justify. This especially goes for visual arts- and contemporary in particular. Museums are closed, budgets are cut, media attention is nonexistent. Partly, this could be interpreted by Serbia not being able to politically establish an official cultural identity- and it is waiting with renewal of culture until there is a clear direction.

The lack of support for younger generations of artists is obvious. While the art education system has (since the nineties) introduced tuition, there are still (for certain number of students) possibilities to study at the expense of the state. However- once out of school, the fresh graduates are practically facing a total vacuum- there is no system what-so-ever that would help them integrate into society, or art market. Paradoxically- the number of art academies and high schools for art has grown constantly in the last two decades- and so has the number of people graduating from them every year- without anything changing in the professional support system that is supposed to take them over.

As much as the socialist system was limiting to certain art expressions, the system of support for arts was at least a consistent whole. The Engineer State, or the Paternalistic State would educate a limited number of artists, then give them either jobs, or state commissions, ateliers, opportunity to show (at least) twice a year at spring and autumn Salon, give them state social and health insurance and pensions. That was a system of absolute dependence on the state- that had absolute control- but there was an option of a system -that one could opt out of. Today's art education is based on principles of liberal market- the students' future is their own problem. Sadly, there isn't a (liberal) art market to go with it. Not even the long established authors whose work is in museum collections can rely on sales (in Serbia) as a source of income, let alone emerging authors.

Generally, the policy instruments for support of contemporary creation currently existent in Serbia are problematic in many ways.

### **3.1.1 Serbian culture policy in respect of support for contemporary creation- and possible alternatives**

Serbia represents a model of culture policy that is a legacy of a socialist bureaucratic welfare system and a tradition of strong artists' unions as a self-management heritage, but is now in the midst of transition process, in which we are witnessing the dissolution of strong institutional infrastructures and the absence of alternative models to assume their role. The inherited

apparatus of state institutions sucks up too much money and provides no real support for contemporary creation. The inflexible and obsolete institutions abide only because they provide jobs for many non-artist employees- that, understandably, fear and oppose any proposed changes. The result is that the system is very expensive and inefficient: the money that, through these institutions, gets to the artist, in support of some contemporary creation is minuscule, in comparison to the cost of the system itself.

It is clear that models of cultural policy in each country are derived from the *idea* of the *role* that culture has in the given country. The countries where culture was understood to have a big role of shaping the national identity- these countries have seen a strong involvement of State in both funding and regulating arts and culture. Where arts is seen as realization of freedom of expression, diversity, or entrepreneurship (or *pursuit of happiness*), the State involvement is minimal, or is even seen as a negative, limiting or unfair.

Furthermore, the way in which the State support for culture is distributed to heritage and contemporary production, also projects the way in which culture is understood within the country.

Finally, the part of the whole culture budget that is given to support the artists, compared to that which is given for the running cost of institutions and culture administration, also speaks about this role of culture in the given society.

While the Nordic welfare model is approaching policy from the point of view of the artists (their need), the Anglo-Saxon model is based on the logic of support for what is useful. In the UK, art is recognized as a vital industry, and supporting it means boosting the economy- which is clearly a legitimate cause for the State. One sector is the fine arts- where the art market is showing a significant turnover: for this purpose the State is supporting the cutting-edge excellence. The other sector that has proved lucrative is the creative industries- and the State is willing to support entrepreneurship and self-employment of the artists in their first few years of starting a business with market incentive policies. The third sector in which the State is willing to “invest” is the accessibility of the arts for the purposes of education and social cohesion.

In The United States however, the public support is merely a sign of good will. The percentage of public funding in culture is about 4% on the average, which is unthinkable in European context. Federal and state grants serve more as a “stamp of approval” for the private donations and sponsorships. The public consensus tends to consider arts as any other entrepreneurial

endeavor- and it would be an unfair advantage to subsidize it with taxpayers' money. If something is not good or useful enough for people to support it by paying to see it- than it is not needed. This is the attitude towards the contemporary production, while art as heritage, or art for educational purposes are considered to be in public interest.

The tiny percentage of state support for the arts in contrast to the lively and vibrant art production and art market in the United States testifies of the hard work of culture workers, be it NGO or public organizations, and genuine interest in supporting the arts by corporations and individuals. The exposure to the market doesn't, as could be expected, result in the tyranny of the mainstream, but rather in diversity and competitiveness that sometimes also propels excellence.

At the other end of the scale, the dominant "traditional" continental European (French, German, Austro-Hungarian) approach was totally different, with a long-lasting tradition of direct governmental involvement in culture and the arts. Indeed, one of the traditional role of ministries was, alongside policy-making, regulation and control, that of financing.

Needless to say, public money spending/allocation is both an extremely important tool for shaping policies and implementing strategies, as well as being a very efficient instrument of administrative and political control. In addition to being a policy instrument, public money allocation may also create "clientelism", as well as conditions for various trade-offs, and concentrate undue power in a few hands. One of Romania's Ministers of Culture acknowledged this, stating that "the real Minister of Culture is my Finance Director".

In Socialist Yugoslavia, public funding ensured political control and social welfare for the artists. Serbia inherited the infrastructure, but also- and more importantly- the mentality of expectations from the State to provide for everybody. It is clear now that, not only is the system not sustainable, but it also is proved to be inefficient and producing impulsive attitude. Still, there is a great resistance on the side of both artists (unions) and administration against any changes that might take away the pretence of security. On the side of policy makers status quo means temporarily buying social peace.

The defensive and impulsive policy making in Serbia is testifying to the marginal position of arts in the society. Heritage is important for nation-building, but contemporary production is not considered socially relevant (with exception of, maybe, film), especially compared to, for instance, sports. It seems that artists will get a comprehensive system of support only when they themselves get organized to draft it and fight to implement it. It is not likely that the politicians will spontaneously recognize the need to support the arts.

When decision-making is concerned, some models are more “top-down”, and some are more “arm’s length”. In Finland and the UK, role of arts councils is essential. These are mechanisms capable of fitting within the administrative system, but still allowing for a certain distance between the government and the bodies entrusted with implementation of policies.

In Serbia, the decision-making on budget break-up is done within Ministry of Culture. The expert commission/jury decides on specific allocations (grants), but the Minister needs to approve them (although, in practice, Minister doesn’t question the jury decisions- they still need to be made within the budget frame that was preconceived by the Ministry). The participation in legislative process traditionally could only be done through unions. As these have lost their influence and purpose, the participation has been problematic for several decades now. The new law on culture presupposes the forming of an expert working group that is supposed to ensure a law that takes into account the complex dynamics within the field of culture.

There is a variety of ways in which the government can affect the flow of money to artists and ultimately their economic well-being, as a package of direct and indirect artist support policies. One problem when considering direct support to artists is that, in most countries where this exists to any extent, the share of total public cultural budgets directed at individual artists averages at around 10%, with the lion’s share going to financing cultural and art institutions such as museums, orchestras, theatres and libraries. This being a general problem, it is important to note that in such a tight space for creation, every percent really does make a difference.

### **3.1.2 Provisions of direct and indirect to artistic creation in Serbia<sup>14</sup>**

Support to creativity is the most underdeveloped area of Serbian cultural policy, which still needs a lot of work to build up measures, incentives and instruments. Real mechanisms of support for artistic production still need to be created.

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<sup>14</sup> based on the country profile in the Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe; Serbia  
<http://www.culturalpolicies.net>

There are no public incentives for free-lance artists to, for example, write a book, create a visual art work, etc. They do have the possibility of applying for funds to support the exhibition and presentation of their work (i.e. dissemination, and not production) inside and outside of the country.

Only 13% of the state cultural budget is allocated to project funding in all cultural disciplines. As public cultural institutions and heritage protection institutes are also entitled to apply for this money, the share given to individual artists is extremely small (approximately 10% of the 13% above).

As to the taxation- legislation that is concerned with the artists is minimalist- probably because the financial impact of artists' earnings is insignificant. For instance, there is no *income averaging* system that allows artists to spread some unexpectedly high income over several years for tax purposes (obviously because that happens very rarely in Serbia). Artists pay the standard tax rate for their earnings, but are allowed a deduction of taxable income of about 40-65% (depending on the art sector) for expenses related to their work (no proof necessary). This applies only to independent artists who have their status registered with an artist association.

The status of free-lance artists is regulated by the Law on the Rights of Self-employed Artists 1998. According to the law, independent artists are entitled to health, pension and disability insurance, which are paid by the municipalities. But only members of professional arts associations are eligible to have a *status* of free/independent artist and have their social security payments covered by the state budget. In order to get this status, the application is made to the Association, which then organizes an Expert Commission. The criteria to be met are based on artistic merit and achievement; they are laid down in special regulations. Once the application has been approved by the Expert Commission and confirmed by the Ministry of Culture, these artists have their retirement, disability and health insurance paid out of the national budget of the Republic of Serbia.

The countries of former Yugoslavia have not developed a uniform post-socialist model for the status of artists, but certain common trends exist, since these countries share a common history of socialist self management during Yugoslavian times, which finds its reflection in the strong influence of artists' organizations and a high resistance against the reform of inherited support systems for artists, even if these have become obsolete under the present

conditions. In Serbia, the loss of privileges that professional artists organizations had, provoked a lot of controversies and negative reactions among the artistic community, which felt rejected by the state.

The common trend is to replace paternalism by interventionism: paternalism<sup>15</sup> in its eastern version is a legacy of étatism, originating from the concept of a "nanny state", breeding a culture of dependency and bringing beneficiaries under central control. New democratic authorities want to abolish the former social security systems and guarantees of full employment and to replace them by an ideology of self-help, individual responsibility and entrepreneurialism. In a situation where the new state regulations are not yet in place, and the market-oriented cultural production does not yet offer new opportunities for artists - especially not for all of them - there has been a wide-spread resistance among artists against the newly developing systems of social security, pension schemes, labor laws, taxation etc.

Artists in Serbia are not fully part of labor market *or* art market (as this is virtually nonexistent for most sectors, design excluded). Policy makers should empower the artists to be self-employed by creating a realistic opportunities for artistic entrepreneurship, but also fence them against the extensive risks of the profession by providing a scheme of social safety nets that would give artists a sense of security and encouragement.

In all post-socialist countries, artists work under a multitude of different contracts in order to make ends meet, combining regular employment with authorship agreements or contracts for services, sometimes with a self-employed status- but in Serbia the most common case is that artists work illegally, without a contract, and get paid under the counter. These are usually one-time, short term involvements where artists provide artistic goods or services for other industries or art and entertainment sectors (film and television sets, dance and music gigs in venues, store-front set-ups, etc). For artists, this is an opportunity to get some overdue cash, but needless to say that in this way artists have virtually no rights protection, no social, health or pension benefits, and no guarantee that they will be paid the agreed upon fee, or paid at all.

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<sup>15</sup> - Vesna Čopić: *Problems of Transition in Central and South East Europe: A General Overview*, Ljubljana, April 2006

The new Law on Culture has been adopted in September 2009, and it came into force in March 2010. All the necessary specific regulatory acts however, have not been adopted yet, and until that happens, status quo remains.

### **3.1.3 Conditions for Civil Initiatives**

Since public support for individual contemporary creators is insufficient, artist join forces in order to create their own support schemes. Conditions for joint ventures are also regulated by law. Unless the collaboration of artist functions completely in the private sphere (as an informal group), registering as a cooperative of artists is under jurisdiction of legislative regulative that concerns civil initiatives and non-government organizations (NGOs). All civil initiatives are in the same category when it comes to legislative regulation in Serbia- no matter what their focus of activity is.

General current problems of third sector in Serbia are: overdependence on foreign foundations (which influences the program to a significant extent, according to the foundations' politics), insignificant share of public funding given to contemporary production, project-based funding which doesn't include operational costs, limit on earned income, insufficient impact on decision making on culture policy level and on funding distribution, voluntarism discrimination and marginalization of NGOs by the state in the decision-making process, small lobbying power, fear of politicization by distribution of (future) EU cultural funds through domestic institutions...

Even if artist-run initiatives have the capacity to reach the level of organization of an NGO, and have the capacity to write projects and apply for funds- this effort might not be worthwhile as this is not an easy source of support. Most of the time- the procedure of applying for funds is so complicated and time-consuming that the artists decide not to involve in such activities that would take up the time they would spend on creation. Even if they do decide to involve in it –the chances that they will get support are smaller for groups that don't have a single person skilled in project-writing or project management.

However, a legal status (or a cooperation with an organization) is a necessary condition for projects to be able to apply for funding in Serbia. Few municipalities recognized the possibility of granting support to individuals (without necessity to incorporate) until recently- but this has now changed.

The possible sources of public funding are budget for culture on state level (Ministry), city level (City Secretary), or municipality. These funds however cover mostly the regulation of the functioning of the state culture institutions. Foreign foundations that focus on civil rights and democracy are pulling away from this region slowly. Private foundations that foster culture have discretion rights and completely un-transparent procedures of decision making.

All of these above-mentioned problems have pushed the independent culture workers of Serbia into forming a union of Independent Cultural Scene of Serbia (*Nezavisna Kulturna Scena Srbije- NKSS*). This union is meant to fight for the equal treatment (and some benefactions) of independent culture organizations in Serbia.

Small initiatives in particular benefit from such a union- since they themselves don't have the capacity to apply for big grants, but can access these funds through such umbrella organizations.

### **3.1.4 Availability of space**

A major problem for artists in Serbia is the problem of space. This is also a problem that concerns entire civil sector, not just artists and artist-run initiatives.

Since civil sector is non-profit sector (and there is a legal limit to self-earned income from tickets, publications, bar, etc.)- the rent of the space is a big issue- especially as almost no project grants cover the running expenses of organizations.

Public policy hasn't been very helpful in this respect. There are ever-more buildings of industrial heritage that are not being used for their original purpose- that could be repurposed for culture- but so far, this has not been possible, as the official policy is profit driven and there is a huge pressure to privatize all public property that has any potential.

Some attempts have been made recently to squat some of the abandoned industrial buildings (see *INEX FILM* in Appendix 3) – but this is a new strategy that hasn't yet been neither approved, nor banned by the public officials.

The politics of the space should generally be within the competence of local officials and urban development planning. Culture (especially independent initiatives) have traditionally been on the forefront of urban regeneration and gentrification- hence, this policy could have

economic justification for local authorities. However, this issue doesn't exist on the agenda of municipalities or city government and has so far been dealt with strictly on individual bases.

Public cultural institutions have a great potential in this respect. As remnants of former socialist system (where culture centres were built by automatism in every town) – they have at their disposal significant resources (usually a lot of space and a great deal of equipment) and not too many program ideas- especially outside of urban centres. These public culture institutions could offer their spaces for new initiatives to create program in them- to mutual benefit. There are some good examples of such practices (see *Elektrika* in Appendix 3), but they are too rare and mostly depend solely on human factor (open attitude of leadership of Cultural Centre) and are not part of an overall policy.

### **3.2 Conditions in Austria<sup>16</sup>- a comparison**

Compared to circumstances in Serbia, the environment in Austrian Republic is generally less difficult for artist-run initiatives.

Looking at Vienna, there is a notable trend of off-spaces (independent, artist or curator-run galleries). This is in part reaction of a large group of young artists which have limited opportunities to present their work in an established hierarchies of art scene and decide to take initiative themselves. Young authors think the established scene is old and lacking capacity- most of the doors are closed and there are no spaces for experimental approach. One outburst of such initiatives happened in Vienna in the 90s- and most of the spaces closed pretty soon (as expected), with one or two spaces turning into commercial venues. The current trend of off-spaces started in 2006- the independent scene has more than 20 off-spaces in Vienna currently, and is still expanding. One additional reason for this might be spreading of the trends from other urban centers, such as Berlin.

Other reason for such a trend must be the fact that the state support for arts explicitly puts contemporary creation in the first place- resulting in almost all artist initiatives to be funded with public money.

Sources of public support are available on all levels- state (BMUKK- the Ministry), regions (Bundesländer), city, (MA7, and, in Vienna, also Bezirk- municipality). Other than that, there

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<sup>16</sup> see the legal framework in Appendix 4, as well as profiles of concrete initiatives in Appendix 2

are independent agencies that support specific projects- like, for instance, *Departure*, an agency for support of creativity (with focus on creative industries).

These bodies have different granting policies. While Ministry grants more significant support on the bases of yearly program, the city grants relatively small amounts of money – to almost anyone who applies- and is project-based.

Public support system in Austria deserves to be praised for its very quick response in recognition of small initiatives (almost all initiatives get support the very first year of their start-up)- which allows them to survive in the very beginning and develop fast. The obligations that initiatives have towards founding bodies are to submit the invoices and yearly report of activity at the end of a fiscal period.

The common legal form for ARIs in Austria is a *Verein* (association, co-op)- it is a form of civil initiative that has fairly simple legal requirements and limited liability to founders.

Artist initiatives almost always register as a *Verein* because this allows them to apply for funds, and the procedure of registering is fairly simple. Applying for money is possible even if the initiative is not registered, but is not as simple. Public funding bodies encourage initiatives to register, since this allows them to easily control the spending. Every association is obliged to have two people in charge of spending control, responsible to the Ministry. In its yearly report, association is required to submit a report to funding bodies, proving that the money was spent in accordance with the mission of the association (which is public)- and this makes the process fairly transparent. *Vereine* technically can not have debt as the banks can not grant them credit. This limits the liability of the persons involved in the initiatives.

The legal limitations on self-earned income for a Verein are not strict, and in fact, many initiatives are funded in a great part by selling drinks or other goods (unlike in Germany, where art associations- *Kunstvereine*- are funded mostly by membership donations). This is resulting in a much better position of independent spaces than that of similar initiatives in other countries (parallels being drawn to Spain and France). All of the money earned goes back into the initiative, of course, because the form of *Verein* implies that it is non-profit.

Even though private sponsorships are given taxation incentives<sup>17</sup>, this form of funding is generally not contributing enough to the culture in general. This said, it is also true that independent initiatives are more active and hence, more successful with securing private

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<sup>17</sup> please, see more in the Appendix no. 4

sponsorships, simply because they need them more. These are almost always in-kind sponsorships though.

The biggest challenge for ARIs in Austria might be the availability of space. The rent in urban areas is very high, and public spaces (owned by the city or state) are not available for such purposes. Squatting has not been a wide-spread practice in Austria- although a few famous examples of successful squatting are still functional (WUK, Arena...), these are initiatives from the early 80s. Such practices are still attempted, but are not tolerated by the authorities.

The specific kind of solution that developed in Vienna to this situation is the deals of ARIs with real-estate agencies. Namely, several real-estate agencies have realized the potential of artist-run initiatives and off-spaces to raise the price of real-estate, or make it more appealing. They developed a common practice of allowing ARIs to use the space they own with no rent payment, under condition that, as soon as a regular client expresses interest, the initiative has to move. In this case, ARIs are often offered another space owned by the same real-estate agency. As much this is a sweet deal that might be saving a lot of rent money, the downside is that galleries become associated with a certain address and every move causes a drop in audience. There is also always a threat of being let down completely- because the contracts signed with these real-estate companies protect them legally from any liability.

Artist-run initiatives are generally short-lived in Austria, as in other places. the reasons for this are mostly inherent to the form of organization itself. The people running them are almost never earning a living out of it- which means that they have to earn a living elsewhere. This split of personal energy leads to a burn-out or drop in enthusiasm usually within 3-5 years. In this time initiatives either disappear or become more professional, sometimes even commercial spaces. The people running these initiatives end up getting a regular paid job- which is true for arts in general- as the financial base for professional living (in any branch) in the art field is small compared to other industries.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Historical Perspective*

#### **4.1 Historic Initiatives in the former SFRY**

Contrary to the common understanding of the social and artistic situation in Eastern Europe before the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, which tends to ignore differences in favor of a homogeneous view that suitably supports the political agenda of the cold war, developments in art were rather heterogeneous. As in the West, the art in the East during the 60s, 70s, and 80s was connected to differing neo-avant-garde, conceptual, performance-based and post-conceptual practices, announcing the opening not only towards innovative forms, but also towards innovative ways of presentation and validation outside of the established art system. Neo-avant-garde practices emerged in opposition to ideological instrumentalization of art as well as in opposition to a moderate bourgeois, apolitical and decorative modernism.

Only recently, and partially prompted by the interest of Western institutions in the history of avant-garde production in the countries of the former Eastern bloc, has a process of gradual and still insufficient valorization of the art of that period started in local environments.

Acting against official institutions, or at least apart from them, marginal practices developed during more tolerant periods and situations in countries of Eastern bloc, as well as in non-aligned, "pro Western" Yugoslavia. These practices were politically engaged, but not as a "battle against the darkness of Communist totalitarianism". The political practice of art was realized as a fight for the complete self-realization of individuals and culture, against real bureaucratic limitations, taking socialist ideology more seriously than the cynical political élite in power did.

Though critical artistic practices intensified during the 70s and 80's, a few examples can be found already in the 1960s, as is the case with neo-avant-garde *Gorgona* group, active in Zagreb, Croatia from 1959 to 1966. *Gorgona* consisted of artists (Josip Vanista, Marijan Jevsovar, Julije Knifer, Đuro Seder, Ivan Kozarić, Dimitrije Basičević – Mangelos) who shared common affinities and not any stylistic program. *Gorgona*'s activities were of an unspectacular nature; *Gorgona* was a process of searching for artistic and intellectual freedom, the achievement of which was itself their aim and purpose. The way they conducted

their activities had nothing in common with most artistic groups, and its non-formality is one of the reasons why *Gorgona* remained unknown and undocumented so long. *Gorgona* affirmed absurdity, emptiness, monotony as an aesthetic category; nihilism, metaphysical irony, and its nature might be compared to the poetics of Fluxus or neo-dada. Through its publications and numerous art concepts and projects, *Gorgona* established correspondence and contacts with numerous international artists like Piero Manzoni, Robert Rauschenberg, and Lucio Fontana. Although its members were not socially marginal, *Gorgona*'s activities at the time occurred mostly in total anonymity, without any prospect of their work being recognized.

Like *Gorgona*'s, the activities of the Slovenian group *OHO*, active between 1966 and 1971, are a unique introduction of Fluxus-like activities into the cultural space of former Yugoslavia. *OHO* has never been formally established, though the year 1966, when a book *OHO* and a programmatic text known as *OHO Manifesto* were published, is considered as its beginning. The large and shifting membership included many artists, critics, poets, filmmakers: Marko Pogačnik, David Nez, Milenko Matanović, Drago Dellabernardina Iztok, Geister Plamen, Tomaz Salamun, Franci Zagoričnik, Naško Križnar .... The Group indulged in "hooligan" behavior (unconventional outfits and behavior, listening to rock music, etc) as an expression of personal dissatisfaction with the consumer society.

The work of the group is well documented; there has been historical periodization produced and a pre-history established. Igor Zabel acts as a chronographer, describing the group's gradual evolution through genres and media, the evolution of their politics, their place in the ideological debate of Tito's mildly totalitarian Yugoslavia, and their relation to the western influences of the time, their gradual abandonment of the avant-garde for the sake of a "cosmic body" in conceptual art, and of the concept of the cosmic body for the sake of a healthy lifestyle- traditional-agriculture-artistic-practice community, the *Šempas Family*, in the countryside in the 1970s.

In the 1970s, many artists were part of an unofficial alternative artistic movement of the so-called "new art practice".

The Student Cultural Centre (SKC) in Belgrade was opened in 1971 as consequence of the students protests in 1969. It offered artists and cultural workers a relatively free space and became the most important place for numerous avant-garde groups in the 1970s.

Most prominent was *the informal group of six artists* formed by Marina Abramović, Neša Paripović, Gergelj Urkom, Era Milivojević, Raša Todosijević and Zoran Popović at the beginning of the 1970s.

The young people gathering and collaborating within the SKC were culturally and economically isolated, but there was also some interest from the institutions, mainly the Museum of Modern Art in Belgrade, for their work and in making them representatives of the then-Yugoslav art. There were many guests from abroad visiting Belgrade and taking part in the cultural events at the SKC. Especially the *April Meetings for Expanded Media* brought artists such as Joseph Beuys, Germano Celant, Barbara Reise and many others to Belgrade. “This nonconformist situation was very important for young artists- you didn’t have to apply for organizing exhibitions or screenings, there were always people around you and it was very easy to organize something and talk about art”<sup>18</sup>.

“Although there was a climate of relative liberalism and an innovative and experimental spirit during those years, we were acting at the margins of society and culture. This is true for the SKC in Belgrade as well as for the Youth Centers in Novi Sad, Zagreb and other cities. It was a kind of “game,” a position we could describe as “let the children play.” We were allowed to express ourselves freely as long as the officials were not attacked directly and, above all, as long as we did not criticize Tito directly. Generally speaking, we were not taken seriously.”<sup>19</sup>

As a parallel phenomenon in this time, the *Black Wave* movement appeared in film art, with directors such as Želimir Žilnik, Dušan Makavejev, Živojin Pavlović and others who were facing very serious problems and repressions, which even took them to jail or into emigration. This is because the medium film was considered much more serious and dangerous because of its broader distribution and public presence.

The ruling dogma in the art of the 1970s was still based on the classical disciplines of painting and sculpture. The professors were promoting intimist Paris-style painting and were not open to the changes that were rolling over the art world in that time.

Body art, photography, Performance art, Conceptual art, Happening, Fluxus, Neo-dada, Land art, Process Art, Mixed media, and Arte Povera were the artistic practices in which young generations were interested, and these radical changes were marked by real generational clashes between the students, their professors, and the so-called dominant establishment. These ideas were denounced as “imported from the West” and as not conforming.

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<sup>18</sup> Raša Todosijević in Conversation with Dietmar Unterkofer  
published in ARTMargins ONLINE <http://www.artmargins.com> (accessed in July 2011)  
<sup>19</sup> ibid.

In this period, young artist gathered around SKC were in intense contact with artists all over Europe: Vienna Actionists, Art&Language around Kosuth, Italian Arte Povera scene, “young Wilds” from Germany.

This was possible because contrary to the countries belonging to the Eastern Bloc in Yugoslavia artists had the freedom to travel. Because of the Yugoslav wars during the 1990s these international contacts came to an end. Those were years of complete isolation and there were also cultural sanctions imposed on Serbia that made it impossible to keep up contacts on a global scale.

In the mid-70s, in Zagreb was active (another) *Group of six artists* (Boris Demur, Željko Jerman, Vlado Martek, Mladen Stilinović, Sven Stilinović, Fedor Vučemilović). This too was an informal group but their collaboration was somewhat tighter. They worked together from 1975 to 1984 and put the focus of their practice into the public space- they appear intensely on streets and squares, explaining their artistic practice- texts and drawings, photography, experimental films... Their attitude of search for understanding form common people, as well as their reappropriation of public space is what makes their practice symbolically charged. Their activity was rooted in the everyday life and society of late socialism.

Group *KÔD* (code) was founded in 1970 in Novi Sad. The members were Slavko Bogdanović, Miroslav Mandić, Mirko Radojičić, Slobodan Tišma, Janez Kocijančić, Branko Andrić, Peda Vranešević (and others). The first actions of *KÔD* group had the character of neo-dadaist and fluxus happenings and interventions in public space.

In the shape of informal groups *Januar* and *Februar* they formed short-lived provocative artistic and existential movement of “Alternative Scene” of Novi Sad. What these groups have in common is critical and subversive attitude towards the dominant “moderate-modernist social-bureaucratic culture” (Miško Šuvaković).

The provocative neo-anarchist position of these groups led to confrontation with bureaucratic structures- in which center is the Youth Forum (*Tribina Mladih*) and magazines "Polja", "Uj Simpozion" and "Index". This confrontation resulted in changed leadership of these institutions (orders from the top) and two members of the *KÔD* group being sentenced to prison for their provocative texts.

Even so, the group was invited to present themselves at Paris Biennial along with big names of conceptual art from the region and Europe. This however led to disagreements within the

group considering the purpose of exhibiting- which led to group break-up in April 1971. There were several smaller groups that were derivative from this group- *Intimate Circle*, group *E*), and group *E*- *KÖD*. Some of the artists from the group continued to practice individually the kind of actions that the group developed: Paratheater, Actions, Land art, Interventions, Ambients, Conceptual poetry, Conceptual art, Textual conceptual art, Invisible art.

In the early 70s, at the far north-east of Serbia, in town of Subotica, another neo-avant-garde group was active. Group *Bosch+Bosch* was founded in 1969 and was active until 1976. Group members were Slavko Matković, Balint Szombathy, Attila Csernik, Laszlo Szalma, Ante Vukov, Katalin Ladik and Laszlo Kerekes. Some of their interests include visual, concrete and typographic poetry, actions and interventions in space, Performance art, Conceptual art, new comics, Mail art...

Ratomir Kulić (art historian) and Vladimir Mattioni (architect) were active as an artistic duo *Verbumprogram* since 1974 in Ruma. Ratomir Kulić was exploring the field of poetry and language and processes of mental perception. Vladimir Mattioni was researching in the field of scenery and design, and film media. The fields of their artistic activity are expanded media, graphics, sculptures, theory of visual arts. Their first public appearance was in SKC gallery in 1975 (*Verbumprogram: Dokumenti 1-12*). Until 1980, the duo (“more than an individual, less than a group”) was very active in producing their joint artistic works and presenting it on Yugoslav alternative scene. In 1980, they continue their artistic work individually, only to re-join in 1985. In 1990 they have their final joint exhibition in Ruma, after which, separated by living in different countries, they stop collaborating. Ratomir Kulić today lives in Novi Sad, and Vlado Mattioni in Zagreb.

In the mid-seventies in SFRY, certain social circumstances and cultural climate made the appearance of artistic groups a rather frequent phenomenon in those times. The fluctuation of the amount of civil liberties that were allowed to the population (the openness of pre 1968, and the “re-stalin-ization” of 1970-71.) produced reactions in the art scene that, unsupported by the institutions, turned to a support of a circle of like-minded artists. Reasons for forming of these informal artistic groups were equally of spiritual and artistic, as of existential nature – and finally, consequentially, they were also ideological. In the general atmosphere of the

Great Refusal<sup>20</sup>, these creative micro-collectives formed outside of the institutions- even when they didn't openly declare themselves as such- presented a form of opposition, an alternative to the dominant direction in art and culture.

Although artists worked in relative freedom in Yugoslavia—the inheritance of that period is a strong tendency towards the development of parallel systems and tensions between progressive practices and institutional support. The institutional sector was largely dominated by a mainstream understanding of art, that was negating and marginalizing actual contemporary practices of artists, and for many artists forms of self-organization were the main alternative.

## 4.2 Transition

The term ‘transition’ is today used in two senses, the narrower and the broader one. In the broader sense, the word transition represents the change of a social system<sup>21</sup>. This change of the social system is not something which comes about ‘naturally’, by itself, but it is a deliberate, politically initiated change. The very change encompasses a range of social subsystems: the economical (acceptance of the free market and introduction of all the institutional changes which enable its functioning, the intensive economical ‘opening’ of the society, liberalization and restructuring of the production...), political (introduction of basic elements of democratic institutions, political participation and encouraging of the democratic redefining of the social role of mass media...), legal, cultural, etc.<sup>22</sup> The complexity of the transition is caused by the fact that it is not possible to change all segments of the social order in equal speed, nor simultaneously. Therefore a series of specific crises and transformations of the subsystems accompany the process of transition.

Although it is still sometimes used in the broader sense, the term transition today it is primarily used in a narrower sense to describe the political, economical and social change

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<sup>20</sup> In his *Essay of Liberation* (1969), Herbert Marcuse speaks about the notion of "Great Refusal" as the proper political response to any form of irrational repression: refusal of all forms of oppression and domination, relentless criticism of all policies that impact negatively on working people and progressive social programs.

<sup>21</sup> according to Švob-Đokić, 2004: 9

<sup>22</sup> ibid: 98

characteristical for the contemporary post-socialist societies which have abandoned the socialist social order and are striving towards capitalism<sup>23</sup>.

Nowadays one usually speaks of transition from socialism into a certain type of liberal capitalism, especially regarding the post-socialist countries of the Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe. The contemporary post-socialist societies are today facing the necessity to abandon the centralized, governmentally regulated and planned production, and to transform into the market-oriented mode, which is again related to the nature of property (the private property instead of the social one).

The transition in post-socialist countries repeats, in a way, the historical processes typical for the establishment of original capitalist societies, such as various models of the preliminary accumulation of capital, formation of new elites, total impoverishment and marginalization of certain social groups etc.

When it comes to the European countries coming through transition at the very moment, it is important to recognize that we are not only dealing with certain lateness in the phases of the pre-capitalist and early capitalist development, but also with abandoning an alternative (socialist) model. Although Hungary, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia belonged to the group of the newly-industrialized countries, none of them managed to complete the transition so rapidly and successfully as Asian countries and Brazil. It turns out that everything is far more complex when it comes to leaving the alternative solutions and adopting a different system, then when it happens to be an almost ‘natural’ transition from the pre-capitalist into the capitalist order. The former socialist countries are transgressing from one world to another, which is very functionally different, and with differently structured values. At the same time it is often forgotten that neither of the systems can fall apart at once, nor can it leave a ‘vacuum’ in which a new model can be implanted immediately. The social consequences of such an inability to conceive, direct and conduct the changes in an organized and systematic way, lead to the very problematic situations in many post-socialist societies, with Serbia being one of the most notable examples.

In many post-socialist countries, the collapse of the socialist regime was followed by the rise of the new authoritarian regimes, the power of which was not based upon the successful economical transition and the actual democratization, but upon manipulation with all that was

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<sup>23</sup> *Tranzicija deceniju posle: pouke i perspektive*, 2004: 10

left behind the previous regimes: mostly criminal privatization i.e. distribution of the ex country's wealth; preserved and even worsened governing methods; populistic exploitation of the cultural and civilizational merits of the people. The new authoritarian leaders manipulated the developmental transitional crises, but they did not resolve them. These leaders relied upon the new elites which were given rise by the usurpation of the former communal properties or by the external help; they did not truly support the changes of property or the creative changes in societies. The establishing of authoritarian regimes in the new European countries was a sign of the incompatibility to control the crises caused by the transitory changes and to direct the social development towards some kind of liberal capitalism. The recentralization of the governmental system, the strict and yet unsuccessful controls of all the spheres of social life and production, the shameless accumulation of the economic power achieved by stealing and usurpation the properties which did not belong to the new elites, are the basic characteristic of the new authoritarian regimes.<sup>24</sup>

When it comes to the ways of introducing and conducting the transitory changes into the former socialist countries, there are two basic types of approach: the first is called 'shock therapy' and is related by its nature to the revolutionary changes, while the second one – the gradual approach – is based upon more gradual, evolutionary transformations.<sup>25</sup> The shock-therapy is a model which implants the change primarily into a single area (for instance, a financial area), where it produces a shock, and it is expected that the effects of that shock should initiate positive changes in all other, related spheres. Its constitutive elements are firm monetarism, strict budget restrictions, cancelation of social subventions, radical privatisation, and minimized role of the state.<sup>26</sup> According to Radmila Nakarada, this model contains numerous similarities to the Bolshevik transition. Firstly, transition is concieved as a revolution (which is the very essence of the shock-therapy), and not as a gradual reform which takes into consideration specific characteristics of the society, as well as its citizens' experience and historical background. Secondly, the neoliberal model of capitalism is presented as an ultimate problem-solving paradigm, as the only way to go towards the desired goal. Thirdly, transition is conducted as a social engineering, which means imposing the changes upon the society with such a pressure as if it was a *tabula rasa*, and not a historically grounded and shaped society. In short terms, the present time is suspended for the sake of

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<sup>24</sup> ibid: 64-65

<sup>25</sup> *Tranzicija deceniju posle: pouke i perspektive*, 2004: 11

<sup>26</sup> *Tranzicija deceniju posle: pouke i perspektive*, 2004: 100, 203

future, as if in socialism, but with expectance that ‘the bright future’ is much nearer – that it can be reached within several years. The unexpected outcomes, problems and crisis are also interpreted in a bolsevist way: all the problems are caused by the inconsistent or incomplete application of shock-therapy – while in socialism all the problems were explained by the inconsistent realisation of the socialist program, or its insufficient development.<sup>27</sup>

Shock-therapies have been acknowledged as the ‘simplistic ideology of changes’ and are exposed to severe criticism. The effect of shock-therapies has been marked out as ‘mismanaged transition’. The course of events gives support to the gradualists school, because it turns out that the accelerated privatization does not lead to good results, and also that the institutional changes are very important as they represent a valuable part of the successful reform. The conviction of the first school that the newly-achieved private property and economic liberty should build immanently all the necessary institutions is unrealistic, and it is necessary for the state to conduct these changes on its own.<sup>28</sup>

Both options have their advantages and disadvantages. The two different approaches lead to a mutual conclusion: the process of change must be designed in every society in accordance to its specific developmental strategies and possibilities for systematic restructuring; however, the process is simultaneously a part of global changes, therefore the global situation can not and must not be neglected while designing one's own developmental strategies.

The relationship between globalism and transition is not just one of intertwining but also of mutual tension. Globalism puts pressure on the erosion of the social state in the name of competitiveness, while the painful economic reforms in post-socialist countries demand for the network of social protection. Unevenly distributed, the drastic prize of transition can cause social clashes and the return of the non-democratic regimes. Globalism neutralizes the power of the national state, although a successful transition requires a measure of an effective intervention of the state, at least in the first phase.

#### **4.2.1 Institutional reforms as a part of transitional process**

In post-socialist societies, the aim of the institutional reforms in political and social spheres could be defined as improvement, or even optimization of the social organization, then, reduction of operational costs of organizations which define a society: the state with all its

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<sup>27</sup> ibid: 203-204

<sup>28</sup> ibid: 100

organizations (legal, political etc.), as well as non-governmental organizations (professional, religious, cultural ones etc.)

Vesna Čopić<sup>29</sup> points out the fact that the old (socialist) system of life-long grip of the job positions by public employees, and fixed relations among the institutions, in which the achieved results had not been evaluated, led to the deterioration of the level of professionalism and performance. It had been perfectly morally acceptable to receive a salary without actually doing anything to earn it. Such a system also led to the fact that entire generations had lost a sense for entrepreneurship, daring, independence, responsibility, professional competence and creativeness.

The fact that salaries have become top priority leads to conclusion that the main social goal is preservation of the social peace, and not performing the activity which justifies the very existence of these organizations - and that is the creation of goods and services. Therefore, one speaks more commonly about the social policy in the domain of culture than about the cultural policy.<sup>30</sup>

In order to enable transformation of the social sphere, it is necessary to define precisely the nature of social organizations and their position within the state. Of course, nowadays it is pretty much clear that the position of the cultural organizations from this sector will be increasingly ‘insecure’ because of limitation of the subventions, the decreased number of the permanently employed workers and introduction of the public competitions for financing the projects in the domain of culture, the competitions in which public organizations have equal opportunities with the organizations from, say, the civil sector to win - or not - the requested finances for realization of their programs. The communal cultural organizations will be forced to take - in the name of autonomy - more risk and more responsibility towards consumers of the public goods.<sup>31</sup>

#### **4.2.2 The influence of transition to the cultural sphere**

In the cultural field, wars and break-up of Yugoslavia caused a strong advent of nationalism and an aggressive renewal of national myths and false histories. In the very beginning of transition in the ex-Yugoslav countries, and especially during the wars, all the cultural

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<sup>29</sup> Čopić, Vesna: *Problems of Transition in Central and South East Europe*, 2006: 44

<sup>30</sup> ibid: 47

<sup>31</sup> ibid: 50

institutions experienced radical deterioration of their social position - the decrease of financing, the loss of professional personnel, the first encounter with the market-oriented business logic, the rise of the nationalistic cultural myths, lack of self-criticism, the interruption of the cultural contacts with neighboring peoples and the oppression of the minorities' cultures.<sup>32</sup>

Dragićević-Šešić and Dragojević (2005) point out that the issues of cultural democracy and the quality of cultural life are not the primary concerns of societies shaken by crisis (i.e. transitory societies). The greatest efforts are being directed towards the preservation of the cultural system, which is commonly related to the big city centers and public institutions. Hence in these areas the breakthrough of the global cultural production is even easier, because of the great cultural 'white spots', both in the sense of the spatial distribution of organization, programs and projects, and within every single area of culture. The liberal concept of open market has got an especially destructive potential in turbulent areas.<sup>33</sup>

After fifteen years of transition in SouthEastern Europe, this region was radically changed, under the influence of external factors, as well as under the influence of the local efforts to join the EU. Besides permanent efforts to find the right measure between extremes of worshiping national cultures and succumbing to the global streams, the post-socialist countries of the South-Eastern Europe face additional challenges posed by globalism, which are related to the change of the total social context in which cultures are born and developed. Namely, they are influenced by national politics, employment policies, means of communication, processes of production and distribution of goods, the new role of the state, the ascension of the civil sector and the influence of non-governmental organizations on the domain of culture etc. The new position of the cultures is also defined by market integration of cultural production with other types of production, by global economic inter-dependence, technological and scientific influences, de-territorializing of cultures, their hybridization and the constitution of new cultural and creative areas.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Švob-Đokić, 2004: 2-3 and Dragićević-Šešić, Dragojević, 2005: 23-24

<sup>33</sup> Dragićević-Šešić and Dragojević, 2005

<sup>34</sup> Dragićević-Šešić and Dragojević, 2005: 9

#### **4.2.3 Transition in Serbia and relation to artist-run initiatives**

The term *transition* is in Serbia, like in many other post-socialist countries, used almost synonymously to *trouble*. These hard times are not just encompassing to the socio-economic sphere, but also very much haunt the realm of culture- in its narrower sense, art.

The socialist system represented a stable ideology and it in this sense, it allowed for a clear alternative and reactionism to develop. The identity crisis that followed after the break up with socialism left the post-socialist cultures in a state of stupor for a fairly long time, unable to articulate clearly some new positions in the time of complicated inter-play of subtle, relativistic, micro-reactionisms. This stupor- inability of self-positioning and contextualising- resulted in early over-simplifications that were obvious in projects like “After the Wall” exhibition in 1997.

This identity crisis- and its resolution- didn’t happen in the same way all over the post-socialist world - as the socialisms were different, as well as the positions towards the West. In the territory of former SFR Yugoslavia, this transition had many twists and U-turns. Not only that the form of socialism that was present in SFRY was unique, but also the path that these countries took after the break-up with socialism was controversial and self-conflictual. This is particularly true for Serbia that still struggles to establish the hegemonic identity- always flirting with both ethno-nationalism and western democratic liberalism.

In this impossibility of establishing hegemonic identity- and hence, also opposition to it- the sphere of culture has been put on stand-by. The deterioration of institutions of culture (that remained from the socialist times) is actually slower than it would normally happen- because, in the absolute lack of any new structures, these obsolete mammoth bureaucracies are constantly reanimated, so as to provide for at least minimum of infrastructural support.

In this situation of almost nonexistent system of cultural support, artists create their own micro-structures of mutual support and try to operate outside of the system.

This is what we see with artist-run initiatives: they are collectives formed to provide basic support for the individual artist- and they are relying mainly on personal resources and try to upkeep their activity on their own, completely bypassing the dysfunctional official institutions.

While most artistic groups are formed with this idea of creating a micro support system, some of them also see this collaboration as a conscious social project. This new positivism of collectivity is not only filling the gap of institutional absence, it is also a form of resisting the dominant system of art-market and capitalist call for specialization. It is in a way a productive and performative criticism of ‘post-communist normalization’<sup>35</sup> (Boris Buden), challenging of the one-sided critiques of left projects of self-management.

In the vicinity of this position are also those initiatives that abide in absolute skepticism toward the supposed positive transformation into a western democracy, which is supposed to happen as the *new culture* uncritically follows the conditions of European foundations. The aggressive political agenda that is imposed on so-called independent culture scene through funding conditions is explicitly criticized by some ARIs, and demonstrated by refusing to participate in this process, and intentionally maintaining a guerrilla position.

All these reactive and critical positions imply a conclusion that a political orientation of an artist collective is always, inherently, that of the Left. (That is, in a way, also implied by terms *collective creativity, cooperative, artist collective*) Paradoxically, this was the position of artist collectives even during socialism, when they advocated for more horizontal manner of self-management practices in all areas of social life. This was a movement in the 70s that called for the politicization of art against red bourgeoisie and state bureaucracy, which they regarded, in the aftermath of 1968 events, as “the class enemy of the proletariat”.

Artist-run initiatives, of course, exist also in the societies that never witnessed the challenges of transition. Their existence is straightforward- as an opposition, or as a complementary element to the established hegemonies and hierarchies. In transitional societies, however, they exist for many different reasons, but most of all- because of the sheer lack of other opportunities for artists.

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35 According to Boris Buden : In the shoes of communism  
<http://www.postcommunist.de/home/index.php?kat=veranstaltungen&subkat=kongrpro&lang=en>

## CHAPTER V

### *Research Results*

The research that was conducted for the purpose of this thesis focuses on artist-run initiatives in Serbia, with the parallel being drawn to the similar initiatives in Austria.

For reasons of feasibility, this research was limited to initiatives in the sphere of visual arts (and bordering disciplines).

Research was done on the bases of in-depth interviews with the representatives of these initiatives. Interviews were organized around five main groups of questions<sup>36</sup>: reasons for the start of the initiative, organizational and functioning model, relationship with the environment, challenges and advantages, and visions of future.

Research conducted in Serbia included eleven initiatives<sup>37</sup>- six of them in the city of Belgrade and five from other cities in Serbia. Initiatives that were chosen for this research range from very young (less than a year old), to very experienced (ten and more years old)- to some that are no longer active. Other features are also quite diverse- number of artists in the group, way of functioning, reasons for the start of the initiative... The research doesn't pretend to include all possible models and positions, but it should offer a fairly even overview of the current situation.

The small research that was conducted in Austria included six initiatives<sup>2</sup> and it was focused mainly on city of Vienna, with only one initiative situated in city of Salzburg.

Among initiatives that fit the scope of my research, chosen were those that seemed most prominent, or representative for a larger group of similar initiatives.

Even though the interviews were made with a small sample group, this research allowed for some conclusions to be made about the environment in which these initiatives are started and maintained. Certain patterns could be observed in models of organization and interaction with the environment.

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<sup>36</sup> for the full list of questions, please see Appendix 3- *Questionnaire for Artist-run Initiatives*

<sup>37</sup> for more detailed profiles of the initiatives, please see the Appendices 1 and 2

Interviewees were asked to speak about their own organization, as well as about their perspective of the whole artistic scene, trends and forces within the overall cultural environment. Some reoccurring topics were evident.

The following chapter will present, analyze, and discuss the data obtained in this research.

## 5.1 Data Analysis and Discussion

### 5.1.1 Reasons for starting an Initiative

When asked to describe the reasons that made them start an artist-run initiative, interviewees were describing different local circumstances that are particular for the local artist community. There is a notion that, in general, artist collectives react most to the situation in their proximate environment- local community. How small are the borders of the “local” community, or the local artistic scene, is defined by what is the common environment for the given group of artists- this is usually the city, but it could also be one part of the city, a neighborhood, or a whole region.

Even though the circumstances in every local community might be different, the reasons for starting of artist-run initiatives could be grouped in only few categories:

- **reacting to the lack on the culture scene** - artists self-organize in order to promote a certain form of art, or artistic expression that is not recognized and supported by the established (public or other) culture institutions.
- **collective creativity** – artists create artistic groups and collectives in order to exchange artistic ideas and create joined work that they individually would not have otherwise made. These initiatives act as incubators for artistic thinking and free development of ideas.
- **creating a support group** - artists create a circle, a close community of like-minded people for which art is an important part of their lives. The lack of institutional support for arts is not just the lack of money- it is also the marginalization of arts- lack of interest, lack of feed-back, absence of the whole system of evaluation and competition... In such environment artists self-organize as an attempt to create a

bubble with an artificial atmosphere (support system, values reference, as well as peer pressure) amidst of vacuum.

- **promotion of own work** – for those artists that face the closed doors of the established hierarchies of the art world, self-organization is the only way to get some visibility. Whether it is the lack of exhibition spaces that are open to the not-yet established, emerging artists, or it is the institutions that are not interested in experiment, or the art-market that is reserved for the best sellers- artists are starting initiatives in order to by-pass the conditioning from both the institutions' bureaucracies and the established positions of the art world.

The initiatives in Serbia that were included in this research most often gave the reasons of **reacting to the lack on the culture scene** (6 times) and **collective creativity** (5 times).

Here are a few excerpts from the interviews where artists describe their initial motives:

*Zaječar is an impassive environment –there is a lack of events. I had already gotten used to visiting culture events in Belgrade. When I had to come back to live in Zaječar, this frustration made us want to make a festival. (Zalet)*

*There is a human, artistic need to do something. And there is a strategic need. We are all aware that the old structures have come undone- especially in the region, in the ex YU-galleries have stopped working, museums are closed- we can either sit and weep, or do something... (Treći Beograd)*

*Kosmoplovci are a platform that gives us all a possibility to express ourselves without any outside pressure. For me- Kosmoplovci are a place to experiment with things I otherwise would have never learned. (Kosmoplovci)*

*First we hung out together and we got along well- then we somehow started doing things together... We applied for this festival together- and then we just continued working as a group, cause we were doing well... (Ilegalni poslastičari)*

*The idea was to make possible for people who are into some kind of creativity- we can call it alternative- to come together outside of an institution. Everywhere it works always through some kind of institutional filter- through a jury or an editor's concept... The plan was that here it would work differently- with no conditioning from the outside- so one can react fast and be spontaneous... People interested in this kind of thing would be closer to alternative than to some high-end production: everything would work directly, based on personal contacts- with no money and no censorship... (Elektrika)*

*We started the whole thing without thinking much (if we knew what it takes- we probably would never get into it). We just wanted to show those “other” comics (the alternative scene) that was not seen in Niš... (Čaj...odličan)*

*That alternative approach- that was obliterated in the 90s... what one would consider normal- that other vision of art and culture- that disappeared... It became a necessity, a need to express one self- to show that there are other things out there, not just amateurism, folk, popular trash... that was the reason why. (Art Klinika)*

In Austria, the reasons that prevail are **reacting to the lack on the culture scene** and **promotion of own work**. This is probably connected to the way that interviewees describe the local art scene- as hierarchical, closed, not big enough to accommodate the great number of new art graduates.

*There is an extremely high artistic density, but the market is too small" -the galleries can't manage to reflect this diversity anymore. Out of this situation comes "the need for autonomous, independently-run spaces. (Ve.Sch)*

The difference in attitudes of young artists in Serbia and in Austria is in that: in Serbia there is a feeling that the whole culture world is marginalized in the society -and that within art world institutions are making things static and uninteresting; while in Austria, there is no complaints about culture being marginalized in general, but there is a feeling that the scene is closed and that the emergence of young artists is controlled by established hierarchies. In Serbia, public funding is characterized as an unavoidable evil- as politicized and controlling. In Austria, the attitude is not so antagonistic towards public support- it is welcomed- there is just feeling that more would be better.

Support circle of other artists of the same generation is equally needed in both environments. In both Serbia and Austria, young graduates from art academies feel absence of support system that would give them some direction or motivation to continue practicing art.

Even though in Serbia, the main reasons in the given sample are connected to the wish to promote a certain kind of art, or to promote it in a certain way- and/or to create art in a collective, most interviewees describe the environment as: static, institutionalized, uninterested, politicized. **Promotion of own work** appears as an explicit main reason only once (although, it appears a few times as an additional reason) – reason for this being that - young artists don't necessarily feel that exhibiting of their work is not possible, but rather that this doesn't make any impact on the society, or their own carriers, the way it is done.

TABLE 1: Reasons for starting an initiative

| Initiatives<br>(SERBIA)  | Founding<br>(starting)<br>year | Town     | Number<br>of people<br>involved<br>(core) | Member<br>age<br>(average) | Member<br>background         | Reasons for starting the<br>Initiative                                 |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|----------|---|----------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| A3 format                | 2007                           | Novi Sad | 4 - 5                                     | 30                         | multimedia,<br>sociology     | collective creativity  |
| Elektrika                | 2007                           | Pančevo  | 10 (5)                                    | 32                         | artists,<br>other            | reacting to the lack on the<br>culture scene                           |
| Treći Beograd            | 2010                           | Beograd  | 8   | 36                         | artists                      | collective creativity ,<br>creating a support group                    |
| Zalet                    | 2005                           | Zaječar  | 20 (4 – 6)                                | 32                         | artists,<br>other            | reacting to the lack on the<br>culture scene                           |
| Kosmoplovci              | 2001<br>(1990)                 | Beograd  | 30 – 40<br>(4 – 5)                        | 30<br>(20-60)              | various<br>creative<br>forms | collective creativity,<br>reacting to the lack on the<br>culture scene |
| Škart                    | 1990                           | Beograd  | 2   | 43                         | architecture                 | collective creativity  |
| Art Klinika<br>(LED ART) | 2001<br>(1993)                 | Novi Sad | 7 - 10                                    | 27<br>(23-60)              | artists                      | reacting to the lack on the<br>culture scene                           |
| Dez.org                  | 2005                           | Beograd  | 11  | 35                         | artists                      | creating a support group,<br>promotion of own work                     |
| Čaj...odličan            | 2001                           | Niš      | 4   | 37                         | comic<br>artists             | reacting to the lack on the<br>culture scene                           |
| INEX FILM                | 2011                           | Beograd  | 20 - 40<br>(3 - 8)                        | 27                         | various                      | reacting to the lack on the<br>culture scene                           |
| Ilegalni poslastičari    | 2005                           | Beograd  | 4 - 6                                     | 40                         | artists,<br>other            | collective creativity  |

| Initiatives<br>(AUSTRIA) | Founding<br>(starting)<br>year | Town     | Number<br>of people<br>involved<br>(core) | Member<br>age<br>(average) | Member<br>background  | Reasons for starting the<br>Initiative             |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|----------|---|----------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| COCO                     | 2008                           | Vienna   | 2   | 30                         | artist,<br>curator    | reacting to the lack on the<br>culture scene       |
| Ve.Sch                   | 2008                           | Vienna   | 3   | 30                         | artists               | reacting to the lack on the<br>culture scene       |
| Ausstellungsstrasse      | 2009                           | Vienna   | 7 (2)                                     | 25                         | artists               | promotion of own work                              |
| LOVE_                    | 2010                           | Vienna   | 9   | 25                         | artists               | creating a support group,<br>promotion of own work |
| Kulturnetz Hernals       | 2011                           | Vienna   | 4   | 32                         | artists,<br>gallerist | reacting to the lack on the<br>culture scene       |
| Periscope                | 2005                           | Salzburg | 4   | 30                         | artists               | creating a support group                           |

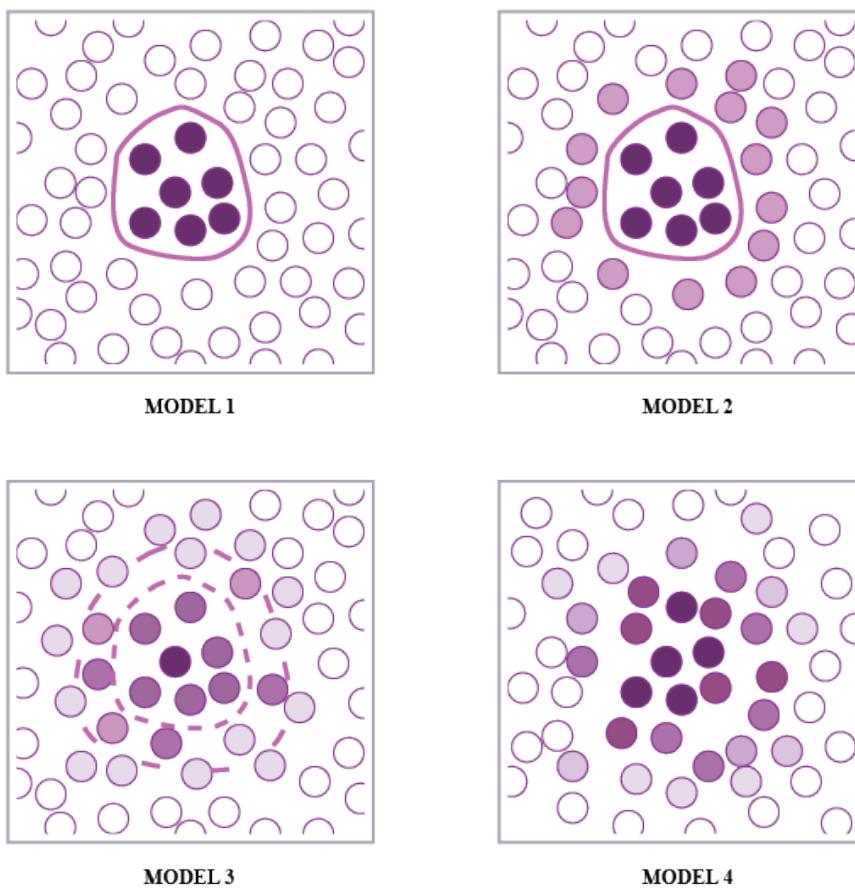
### **5.1.2 Organizational Models**

Within this research, special attention has been given to the organizational aspect of artist-run initiatives: to the different models in which individuals come together to form a new entity –a group or an organization.

When analyzing these organizations, both the inner and the outer functioning of the group was observed: model of group definition, relations between the members, level of hierarchical structure, division of responsibilities, decision making process, level of established policies and procedures, efficiency in project implementation, social capital, networking and lobbying power, fundraising capacity, visibility, and impact.

Since these initiatives are undertaken by groups of individuals- it was interesting to see how these groups are defined in terms of the group limits. The research shows that the groups are defined differently and the membrane surrounding the group can be firm, flexible or very blurred. Four models of group definition have been proposed to illustrate different group situations.

**Models of group definition**



Model 1 describes the situation where a group is clearly defined- the members are easy to identify both from the inside and the outside, as there are clear criteria by which members can be distinguished from non-members. Group is fairly homogenous in terms of level of involvement of the members. All activities- organizational and creative are done by the group only.

Model 2 describes the situation where a group is still clearly defined- the members are easy to identify both from the inside and the outside, as there are criteria by which members can be distinguished from non-members. However, there is a circle of people around the group that contribute to its work- these are collaborators, supporters and fans that contribute to the group's activity.

Model 3 describes the situation where a group's edges are slightly blurred- there are different levels of membership, like concentric circles around the hard core. Membranes between the levels, as well as between the group and surrounding are porous- they allow for the flux of people coming in and out. Even in the center of the group there is a slightly different level of involvement of the members. Group communicates and is connected to the environment out of which it recruits new members.

Model 4 describes the situation where a group has a character of a swarm of insects or a magnetic field –the closer to the center, the pull is stronger, and it gradually fades towards the periphery, with no clear levels of involvement defined. Group is very diverse in terms of level of involvement of the members. Even the hard-core group is hard to pinpoint- the members' dedication is not constant- it fluctuates and shifts in phases. The group allows for the very fast and liberal transferral of members from the outside of the group to the center and vice-versa.

According to these models, most groups, both in Serbia and in Austria tended to feature models 2 and 3 of group definition (with a few examples of model 1 and 4). This means that the groups are moderately defined –not too strictly or too loosely. The group definition doesn't seem to be directly connected to other features describing group level of organization (such as schedule of regular meetings, group size, registered legal status, etc.) though.

**Table 2: Organization**

| Initiatives<br>(SERBIA)  | Founding<br>(starting)<br>year | Number<br>of people<br>involved<br>(core) | Legal<br>status<br>(since<br>when) | Clear<br>division of<br>responsibiliti<br>es | Model of<br>group<br>definition | Yearly<br>calendar<br>of<br>program | Regular<br>meetings |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| A3 format                | 2007                           | 4 - 5                                     | (2008)                             | yes  | 2                               | -                                   | -                   |
| Elektrika                | 2007                           | 10 (5)                                    | (2011)                             | program-based                                | 3                               | -                                   | yes                 |
| Treći Beograd            | 2010                           | 8   | (2010)                             | no   | 1                               | -                                   | -                   |
| Zalet                    | 2005                           | 20 (4 – 6)                                | (2006)                             | no   | 3                               | N.A.                                | -                   |
| Kosmoplovci              | 2001<br>(1990)                 | 30 – 40<br>(4 – 5)                        | -                                  | no   | 3                               | -                                   | -                   |
| Škart                    | 1990                           | 2   | -                                  | no   | 1                               | -                                   | yes                 |
| Art Klinika<br>(LED ART) | 2001<br>(1993)                 | 7 - 10                                    | (2001)<br>(LEDart)                 | program-based                                | 3                               | yes                                 | yes                 |
| Dez.org                  | 2005                           | 11  | (2005)                             | no   | 2                               | -                                   | -                   |
| Čaj...odličan            | 2001                           | 4   | -                                  | no   | 2                               | -                                   | -                   |
| INEX FILM                | 2011                           | 20 - 40<br>(3 - 8)                        | -                                  | no   | 4                               | -                                   | yes                 |
| Ilegalni<br>poslastičari | 2005                           | 4 - 6                                     | -                                  | no   | 3                               | -                                   | -                   |

| Initiatives<br>(AUSTRIA)            | Founding<br>(starting)<br>year | Number<br>of people<br>involved<br>(core) | Legal<br>status<br>(since<br>when) | Clear<br>division of<br>responsibiliti<br>es | Model of<br>group<br>definition | Yearly<br>calendar<br>of<br>program | Regular<br>meetings |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| COCO                                | 2009                           | 2   | 2009                               | yes  | 1                               | yes                                 | yes                 |
| Ve.Sch                              | 2008                           | 3 - 4                                     | 2008                               | yes  | 2                               | yes                                 | -                   |
| Ausstellungsstrasse                 | 2009                           | 7 (2)                                     | -                                  | no   | 2                               | -                                   | yes                 |
| LOVE_                               | 2010                           | 9   | 2010                               | no   | 2                               | -                                   | yes                 |
| Kulturnetz Hernals<br>(Kunst Macht) | 2010                           | 15-30 (4)                                 | 2010                               | no   | 3                               | N.A.                                | N.A.                |
| Periscope                           | 2006                           | 4   | 2006                               | yes  | 2                               | yes                                 | yes                 |

In the most ARIs, relations among members are not organized into a hierarchical structure. There are no lines of reporting and no advancement opportunities. This is to be expected from a collective based on friendship, or gathered around a common interest. However, even though there is no hierarchical structure- not everybody's influence is equal in these collectives. Depending on a group definition model, sometimes there are different levels of involvement in the group activity (model 3 and 4). Those people in the core of the group, that are present at the group for the longest time and that invest most time and energy with the group activities, naturally gain status of more influential members. This is process that happens organically, with no previously outlined procedures and conditions for the rise of influence status. So, for instance, we have situations where the members of the group who are most influencing the group program are those oldest, founding members (Nikola Džafo for *Art Klinika*, or Igor Đorđević for *Kosmoplovci*), or situations where the core group is formed through just persistent shown interest in the initiative and will to invest time (*INEX film, Kulturnetz Hernals*).

A clear division of responsibilities is rarely established in the artist-run initiatives. Those few ARIs that have it established also have a group model of the tighter kind (either model 1 or 2). This is a way necessary because a definite number of members is a condition for interdependence, it allows for the responsibilities to be distributed for the longer period of time and for the members to get specialized in certain kinds of tasks- which would increase efficiency. Definite number of members seem to be a condition for a clear distribution of responsibilities – but doesn't always necessarily lead to it.

The other model of distribution is the one that looser initiatives have- members take up one particular line of program and then take all the responsibility connected to it. This allows for autonomy of individuals within the group - mutual dependence and sharing of responsibilities among members is limited this way, and it is easier to organize one's time and duties.

When it comes to procedures and policies, most ARIs state right away they don't have them. Through conversation though, it becomes clear that they do have "their way of doing things" – although it is not formally and officially shaped as a policy, but rather developed as a common practice. The extent to which practice is defined varies from one ARI to another. This includes: admission of new members, publishing collaborative work, initiative for new programs and activities, scheduling of meetings, etc.

*One of the members initiates a new idea and then we discuss and that usually brings us to completely different results from the initial idea, only some of the elements are kept intact. It's a very exciting process- one person suggest an idea- then that is being digested by the group, then the weight is shifting to one side- and then it happens.. (Treći Beograd)*

*So far, new members have been admitted based on consensus- recognizing that certain form of artistic thinking. When we see some artists that are consistent and have a strong artistic energy- we invite them to join the group. Art doesn't allow for such procedures –like a simple form with clear references- everything is based on feeling, intuition, observation- it's a complex question... (Treći Beograd)*

*Conflicts are not really being resolved. If you are eager to do something- you just do it- and it depends only on you. Others do other stuff simultaneously. There's no VETO, no protection on the label "Elektrika". Considering there's no money involved- if one person cares to do something, why would someone else interfere? (Elektrika)*

*Nobody can publish something to the name of "Kosmoplovci" on their own- it has to go through a filter of review. A few of us, oldest members that have a certain authority- we all have to agree that something is finished, that it is ready to be published. We are all different, individual authors- but until we reach a consensus, it can't be published.*

*The initiatives from all directions- it's very democratic in that way. The whole process can be described as an exchange (of ideas, work...) and complementing- it should be relaxed – like freedom of expression. But it's also important that there's a system of reviewing –and that this isn't in the hands of one person. Every individual has to be able to stand behind everything that's published as a group. (Kosmoplovci)*

*The distribution of responsibilities happens on the principle of recognition - the one who's interested in doing it and is available, takes up that task.*

*The programming decisions are made like this:*

*"What do you think we do this?"*

*"I'm not into it but you just go ahead- feel free to do it." (Dez.org)*

The initiatives that were researched in Austria had different level of development of procedures -or defining common practices. The ones that were started recently have not yet developed common practices, and the ones that have been active for more than two years have them already. The initiative that was most organized in this way was *Periscope*, which, (by coincidence or not) is also the longest-active initiative of the ones researched.

Among eleven ARIs in Serbia, five of them registered as an organization with a legal status of civil initiative (NGO), five of them have not registered and one is a liminal case- not registered as an organization itself, but as a project of another artist initiative (*Art Klinika /LED ART*).

As reasons for registering, most ARIs that did so states as the primary motivation- the possibility to apply for funding. This the case in Serbia as well as in Austria.

*In that moment we decided to register as a NGO, so it's easier for us- so we don't have to get all that paperwork done through other organizations- we decided to be self-sufficient. (A3-format)*

*Based on a lesson that we learned the first year (when we used JAZAS<sup>38</sup> account and they tried to take all the credit for the festival), the next year, in 2006, we registered as a citizen association. We have our account, our ID number, etc. (Zalet)*

*There are no benefits in that way, it's just that if you work with public money- it's more convenient for the supporting body if you are a Verein- because you are legally obliged to spend the money according to the aims of the Verein- which is public- and you are liable for your accounting- so you have to prove that all the money was spent in tune with the aims of the Verein. That makes it very easy (for supporting bodies) to have a transparent procedure in dealing with public grants. That's the only reason.. (COCO)*

As reasons for *not* registering, some ARIs name the conceptual reasons, some lack of organizational capacity.

*As much as we like to ignore it- this is in fact quite illegal, what we are doing. We are really on somebody else's property. We are all here pretending to be anonymous individuals- because if you do this as a legal entity, you take responsibility that is much more serious. This way, if somebody asks us something here- we're just hanging around, we're not organized... (INEX FILM<sup>39</sup>)*

*That's one of our established policies: we report to ourselves only. Financing is the way to exercise an intense politics of thought- that's why we chose to be totally independent... (Kosmoplovci)*

*We don't have any of that stuff- no legal status, no account, no stamp... At some point we wanted to register, but that's not for us... Even like this, organization is pulling us away from creative work- we have less time for drawing- it became a burden. Then we decided we don't need all that. And, anyway- that would all come down to me, to deal with all that. I have a*

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<sup>38</sup> another NGO organization based in Zaječar

<sup>39</sup> INEX FILM is an initiative of squatting an abandoned building and repurposing it for culture (for more information, please see the profile of the initiative in the Appendix 1)

*real job on a side from this- and then I wouldn't be able to do neither of those two things properly. (Čaj...odličan)*

In Austria, out of six ARIs, only one (*Ausstellungsstrasse*) wasn't registered as an association (*Verein*) but they said they are planning on registering in the future:

*The problem is, for me- I'd like to run this space- it's a really nice job- but I don't like to do all those bureaucratic things. This why we want to be a Verein- so we can apply for some money and hire some people to do all this stuff we don't like or don't know how to. Also- we want to do this catalogue of all the shows we had so far- and have the texts written... for us personally this is too much money- that's why we should become a Verein so we can apply for some money. (Ausstellungsstrasse)*

### **5.1.3 Capacity**

Capacity of artist-run initiatives depends to a great extent on the support from the surrounding. The one aspect that is not dependent on the environment is the human resources- the number and profile of people in the ARIs.

The size of the groups that were researched in Serbia varies from very large to very small. The size of the group is however, not directly proportional to the organizational capacities of the group, as the extent of involvement of members tends to be smaller in large groups.

Those groups that are consisted of (mainly or exclusively) artists (*Škart, Art Klinika, Treći Beograd*) have a smaller HR capacity for project management than those that include people already involved in NGO sector, skilled for project writing and fundraising (*A3-format, INEX film*). However, even initiatives of *only* artists are gaining some knowledge and experience of project management through practice- which a significant improvement compared to only 5-6 years ago.

Groups in Austria for the most part didn't express any difficulties with the administrative part of running a Verein (those that are registered as one).

When it comes to finding a space, fundraising capacity and the amount of secured support, the environment plays a significant role.

Seven of eleven initiatives in Serbia don't have any available space, while of the other four- two is secured out of the private resources (*Škart, Treći Beograd*) and only two are available thanking to the understanding of public institutions (*Art Klinika, Elektrika*). Even in those last two cases, this was possible only based on personal contacts of the artists with the

representatives of the institution- and not because of the progressive policy of the institutions that were able to recognize the possible significance of these initiatives.

In Austria, space is the biggest problem that an initiative is facing. Still, out of six interviewed initiatives, only one (*Kulturnetz Hernals*) didn't have an available space- and that because they had been active for only few months at the time. Three of the initiatives are renting the space with the public money they get in operational grants, while the other two have a special private deal with the space owner and pay no rent or very small rent.

The amount of support that is assigned to these initiatives is also very different in these two countries- while the ARIs in Austria are capable of covering operational and (much! higher) programming costs, all out of the public money in grants, initiatives in Serbia can almost never hope to get operational budget covered, but are running on project grants and personal resources. The amount of self-earned income is not limited in Austria and regulation of selling of drinks on premises is not too strict- so this is a significant additional source of income for ARIs in Austria. In Serbia, this hasn't been a practice for several reasons that have mostly to do with legislative limitations or local circumstances- but it also has to do with the fact that premises are a condition for the sales of drinks, and not many people have the space.

The ARIs in Serbia said about financing sources:

*2006 was very modest- it was all done on our personal effort- guests slept in students dorm, we were getting little food from small private sponsors- but we did it out of spite, cause they wanted us to fail. The following years we were supported by the Ministry of Culture and Pro Helvetia- but that was always very little. Already in 2008 there was fatigue- too much of running around has to make up for the constant lack of money... Enthusiasm has its limits. In 2009, we decided not to organize the festival- but then OGI<sup>40</sup> promised to help us just to do something. We had 50eur on our account that year, it was all D-I-Y.  
This year again we wanted to give up- but we got support through NKSS<sup>41</sup> 3.000eur- and 300 eur from Faculty of Management - which is great, compared to how little we had some years... (Zalet Festival)*

*We don't have a budget of our own. Festival Novo Doba got from the Municipality of Pančevo a grant of 1.500 eur for a yearly program of concerts that they will organize in this space. That's about 50 euros per concert. (Elektrika)*

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<sup>40</sup> Civil Initiatives Organization, from Niš, Serbia

<sup>41</sup> Nezavisna Kulturna Scena Srbije- Independent Culture Scene of Serbia- a union of independent culture organizations

*When we applied for grants based on projects, we got some support. So far- from the Ministry and the City, Open Society Fund and Erste Foundation (Dez.org)*

*For exhibitions we rarely got any funds. Two times, the awards for the winners were sponsored by the city. Ones we got support from Pro-Helvetia for the low-fi course. Then through project "Goldmine"<sup>42</sup> we got support for the short-video festival. Support of institutions in Niš is unreliable- they promise you one amount, then they give you a much smaller amount with the delay of six months... (Čaj...odličan)*

*We apply based on both the yearly program and the projects- whenever there's a chance. The city is helping us in covering for the costs of the space.*

*We apply for funds- but that's all small money that doesn't allow us to work seriously- it's all just based on personal effort. There is never enough to do something properly- you strive to get it done, finish it- but then the people get spent- the relationships are spent... (Art Klinika)*

In Austria- the situation is much different:

*Most spaces get support- that's the general policy that is long established. In Austria you can fairly easily get support- up to a certain point- so you can never get professional. (And there's no point in getting professional anyway, because Vienna is full of institutions). But the paradox is that it's all state money and not city money- and it's the city that benefits from it most. City gives small amounts – same to all. We get about 20.000 (EUR) from the Ministry for our yearly program (we got that from the very first year) and then about 2.000- 3.000 based on project from the city, once a year. We get some financial support from our supporting members (no voting power)- memberships starts at 20 euros. And then, of course, we have the income from the bar that fully goes back to the Verein. Of course the biggest sponsor (in-kind) is the real-estate company- because we don't have to pay for the rent of the space- just the utility bills. We also have minor sponsorship in kind from the brewery we represent here and photography studio. (COCO)*

As to the social capital, networking and lobbying power -that fully depends of personal resources of the people involved in the initiatives. Those initiatives that are started by the somewhat accomplished artists (*Elektrika, Art Klinika, Treći Beograd*), or professionals with many connections (*COCO*) have more lobbying power- and not incidentally, these are the initiatives that managed to get a free space or secure more support than the other initiatives run by young artists.

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<sup>42</sup> Zlatni Rudnik- project by OGI, *Civil Initiatives Organization*, from Niš, Serbia

**TABLE 2: Capacity**

| Initiatives (SERBIA)  | Number of people involved (core) | Project Management Skills | SPACE (office, gallery, studio) | Bank account | Supported by (mostly public money, private foundations, or even mix) | Budget (yearly program or project based) | Honorariums or Salaries for members (number) |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|--|--|--|
| A3 format             | 4 - 5                            | yes                       | -                               | yes          | foundations  | project                                  | -  |
| Elektrika             | 10 (5)                           | -                         | yes                             | yes (2011)   | (public)*  | (project)*                               | -  |
| Treći Beograd         | 8                                | yes*                      | yes                             | yes          | mix  | yearly + project                         | -  |
| Zalet                 | 4 - 6                            | yes*                      | -                               | yes          | mix  | project                                  | honorariums by the project                   |
| Kosmoplovci           | 30 - 40 (4 - 5)                  | -                         | -                               | -            | -  | -  | -  |
| Škart                 | 2                                | -                         | yes (studio)                    | -            | public   | project                                  | honorariums by the project                   |
| Art Klinika (LED ART) | 7 - 10                           | yes*                      | yes                             | yes          | public   | yearly + project                         | honorariums by the project                   |
| Dez.org               | 11                               | yes                       | -                               | yes          | mix  | project                                  | honorariums by the project                   |
| Čaj...odličan         | 4                                | -                         | -                               | -            | mix  | project                                  | -  |
| INEX FILM             | 20 - 40 (3 - 8)                  | -                         | -                               | -            | (public)*  | (project)*                               | -  |
| Ilegalni poslastičari | 4 - 6                            | -                         | -                               | -            | mix  | project                                  | -  |

yes\*- no members are professionally skilled for project management, but they gained some experience by doing it in practice

( )\* – the financial support was not granted to this particular organization- but the finances were used for the realization of program there

| Initiatives (AUSTRIA)            | Number of people involved (core) | Project Management Skills | Office (or other space) | Bank account | Supported by (mostly public money, private foundations, or even mix) | Budget           | Honorariums or Salaries for members (number) |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|--|------------------|--|
| COCO                             | 2                                | yes                       | yes                     | yes          | public   | yearly + project | -  |
| Ve.Sch                           | 3                                | yes*                      | yes                     | yes          | public   | yearly           | honorariums (2) salaries (1)                 |
| Ausstellungsstrasse              | 7 (2)                            | -                         | yes                     | -            | -  | -                | -  |
| LOVE_                            | 9                                | -                         | yes                     | yes          | public   | yearly           | -  |
| Kulturnetz Hernals (Kunst Macht) | 4                                | yes*                      | -                       | (yes)        | public   | project          | -  |
| Periscope                        | 4                                | yes                       | yes                     | yes          | public   | yearly           | salaries (4)                                 |

### 5.1.4 Development of an Initiative and Relation to the Environment

Considering the stage in the life-cycle of the initiative, the sample was quite diverse. The interviewees described their projects as either in the state of growth (expansion), stable (ongoing), turning point (critical point of transformation), dwindling (fading), or definitely over. These estimations are not in direct co-relation with the duration of the initiative activity, or even with the evaluation of the environment response.

**TABLE 3: Relation to the Environment**

| Initiatives (SERBIA)  | Founding (starting) year | Self-estimation of the development tendency | Evaluation of Response by the environment (symbolic recognition) | Evaluation of Support (financial) |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| A3 format             | 2007                     | ➡ (dwindling)                               | positive   | - +                               |
| Elektrika             | 2007                     | ➡ (stable)                                  | positive   | --                                |
| Treći Beograd         | 2010                     | ↗ (growth)                                  | very positive  | ++                                |
| Zalet                 | 2005                     | ➡ (dwindling)                               | positive   | --                                |
| Kosmopolovci          | 2001 (1990)              | ➡ (stable)                                  | inadequate   | --                                |
| Škart                 | 1990                     | ➡ (stable)                                  | positive   | /                                 |
| Art Klinika (LED ART) | 2001 (1993)              | ↖ (turning point)                           | inadequate   | - +                               |
| Dez.org               | 2005                     | ➡ (dwindling)                               | positive   | - +                               |
| Čaj...odličan         | 2001                     | ➡ (dwindling)                               | inadequate   | - +                               |
| INEX FILM             | 2011                     | ↗ (growth)                                  | very positive  | /                                 |
| Ilegalni poslastičari | 2005                     | ✚ (over)                                    | positive   | - +                               |

| Initiatives (AUSTRIA)            | Founding (starting) year | Self-estimation of the development tendency | Evaluation of Response by the Environment (symbolic recognition) | Evaluation of Support (financial) |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| COCO                             | 2008                     | ➡ (dwindling)                               | positive   | ++                                |
| Ve.Sch                           | 2008                     | ➡ (stable)                                  | positive   | ++                                |
| Ausstellungsstrasse              | 2009                     | ↗ (growth)                                  | positive   | /                                 |
| LOVE_                            | 2010                     | ↗ (growth)                                  | positive   | - +                               |
| Kulturnetz Hernals (Kunst Macht) | 2011                     | ↗ (growth)                                  | very positive  | - +                               |
| Periscope                        | 2005                     | ➡ (stable)                                  | positive   | - +                               |

Most initiatives stated that internal reasons were responsible for diminishing activity- running out of energy and enthusiasm (sometimes also caused by lack of support in the environment).

*As for me, I just wanted to support Zalet, and not to be the only one organizing it. I would like someone to take this off of me and organize it- so I can be just support and audience. Cause this is not easy- it's full of frustrations and sacrifices. Every year we think it's the last one- and then we start it again... I hope someone younger will take over- I could last for another couple of years, but I don't know how much longer. I wouldn't like to abandon it- cause I think Zaječar needs Zalet. But Zalet can't be just one person... there's about 20 of us involved in the broader circle, but nobody wants to take over the initiative. Nobody is crazy enough, I guess, to invest their time and risk their other job... (Zalet Festival)*

*Everybody just turn to themselves and their work. Which was present right from the start to certain extent.*

*I think there was just too many of us. You can't get two people to get alone- let alone eleven. On top of it- we are all artists- nobody rational there- all individuals and totally different. At a certain point we realize there are micro-groups being formed within the group- each of three to four people that were closer among each-other. And then, not even that survived. We did want it to be structured in some way- we even started an online forum as a place for discussions and information.. but somehow it just didn't live. (Dez.org)*

*Cause, it's inevitable that groups fade in time. We are all still here, but we see each-other less than before, everybody turned to their own life.*

*In time we stopped organizing open calls because we started encountering too many obstacles. The climate just changed- there was too much frustration about some trivial problems. And then I pulled back slightly, cause I get too consumed by it. I just deal with some steadier, stable organizations. I had enough of that stress. I'm not as young anymore to be able to function like then- that enthusiasm dwindles a bit around 40. With such involvement, I should be either fully employed in some cultural institution, or just turn away and stick to my free-lance job. But that recognition- that is not coming ever. (Čaj...odličan)*

*We are dwindling- the energy is bad- both inside of the organization and in the surrounding. Now we're thinking if we should bury it or transform into some new form that can survive- that is the dilemma.*

*The outside factors always influence the relationships within the initiative. When there's no support, no reaction- then comes the fatigue, the enthusiasm is spent- even the most apolitical individuals come to accept there's no other way to get things done around here but to join some party.*

*Culture policy doesn't even take us into account- what we do, what kind of experiment this is- we're constantly being neglected. The mayor is pushing EXIT<sup>43</sup> as a branding label of the city- all Art Klinikas are just annoying him- doesn't know what to do with them... The support is nonexistent- the only thing that keeps us afloat is the political provocation and the fact that media likes that- which is both good and bad for us. We are not members of any party- and that is just necessary to survive here. (Art Klinika)*

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<sup>43</sup> music festival taking place every year in Novi Sad

*In the most cases, people just run out of energy/ enthusiasm, or they start fighting- especially spaces really run by artist collectives are vulnerable to exhaustion. With the more professionally run spaces- after a while, it's just a matter of economics- because it's virtually impossible to sustain yourself with running such a space. So you either go commercial or you quit. In most cases, people just get into some job- but this is true for arts in general. (COCO)*

### **5.1.5 Future / Sustainability**

The research was aiming to predict whether artist-run initiatives are likely to evolve in the direction of more structure (conventional forms of organization), stay the same, or get more informal, with even less structure. This evolution depends on both the internal and external factors- the wishes (visions) of the members of the initiative- and on the opportunities and limitations in the environment.

When asked about their vision for the future of the initiative- the interviewees often had no clear idea of the direction in which the initiative is going. Very often, there wasn't even a clear definition of personal wishes and expectations. Projections were made according to what is possible or likely.

With those initiatives where the members did have an idea where they would like it to go- there was seldom a consensus on this topic- individual members had notably different visions of the future.

*(Vuk): I personally would like Elektrika to have two project managers who would provide the basics- for the technicians to be hired, for the program curators to get salaries or honorariums. But that is hardly possible- and I'm not sure that everyone here wants it either. (Mileta): You see- that is where you and I are disagreeing completely- I want this to be a free place, like those that exist abroad, and you want this to be some kind of an official gallery. (Elektrika)*

*Options for the future? I really don't know. The point was to have collaboration- what kind of collaboration is this, having only one person... I wouldn't like to shut this down- one needs to have endurance to continue- to try to fix things that don't work. But I think that within this group of people- it's not likely that it will transform into some NGO- because these people are obviously just not interested in project management. (Dez.org)*

*In five years? I imagine it won't exist anymore. If I had it my way- we would be a space where big names would exhibit with no shame. We would have newest equipment and would cooperate with big institutions and be able to produce art properly finally. It would be just like it is now- but on higher level. The money would come from the city- and generally from all people who are interested in this sphere that's missing- from private individuals or from*

*the art world.* (Art Klinika)

*Initially, I had a problem with being categorized as an off-space, since such initiatives are often temporary or short-lived. Ve.Sch was always conceived as a long-term project, with the aim to become institutionalized. This means, in the case of Ve.Sch, to upgrade the space to the professional standards and to gain status, public recognition and influence- and not to function as a commercial gallery or a public institution. (Ve.Sch)*

*You have to have good strategy in how you're gonna do this... Because we can't do this for no money every year. You have to have big institutions support you - and good structure. Like a good base- annual budget. We need an office, we need some money to run this- maybe some workers... You have to get professional. If you want to get bigger- you need some money to make that step. But now we did this thing and hopefully this is our visit-card. We show them- "this is what we did and now you have to pay us..." And I think it will come- because it's always like that. (Hernals)*

The actual sustainability of an initiative depends not only on internal factors, but also on the environment (legal framework for artists and civil initiatives, common practices in the local communities, standard of living, budget for contemporary culture, urban planning policies, level of education of the population).

Some (most) interviewees in Serbia were very skeptical regarding their sustainability in current circumstances. Others (mostly young initiatives) have an attitude as towards an experiment- any outcome will be an interesting experience to witness.

*The question is- what level do you want to work on... If you want to organize small spontaneous events- that you can do fast and easy. But if you overgrow that- either because the organization gets bigger, or the individuals in it get older- to some level where it gets to be serious- then, you need automatically more money. Now, whether you will find the money and the equipment, that's the question. People can't work out of enthusiasm indefinitely. (Elektrika)*

*We were collaborating with some groups from Slovenia... but that isn't anything that would keep us afloat.*

*There were some ideas (some international open calls) but I don't know how much time I have for all that. I'm a free lancer- I earn as much as I work- so I don't really have time. This doesn't have any perspective in these circumstances that someone could live off of it. I have my job- I'm an artist only in this context. I have some small sporadic honorariums- just enough to not let me quit it once and for all. But I can't remotely rely on it. I would LIKE that- but it's not realistic. It all comes down to tapping on the shoulder. (Čaj...odličan)*

In terms of sustainability, situation is not much different in Austria. Depending on level of professionalism the off-spaces are aiming for, some of them have more support, some less.

Only one initiative (*Periscope*) is capable of paying the members regular salaries. The others either don't think that far ahead (*Ausstellungsstrasse, LOVE\_*), don't think that initiatives like this should last for long (*COCO*), or would like to eventually reach a level of a professional gallery that would have a budget for salaries (*Hernals, Ve.Sch*),

*Of course we both have day-jobs. This is a full self-exploitative adventure here. We don't get any money out of this- the only personal benefit we have out of this is possibility to make shows. We are not paid- everybody else gets paid- all the hired helpers. (COCO)*

*The amount of time we put into this.. we can't do it every year without getting paid. It was thousands of working hours. It's just a problem of living if we do this- because we all have to earn money to pay the bills. I think it was a special situation this time that we decided to do it- everybody thought- "ok, it's just for the moment"- and this constellation won't happen ever again. The next if we won't to do it- it can't be for no money, or else I would have to give up my flat. (Hernals)*

*We never spoke about this because I think this is the common sense- Periscope will never become this kind of commercial gallery. There is a tacit agreement on what we all want out of this. Now we are all artists- on the side from being in Periscope- and we all had jobs that we could do as a profession, but we left them to do this, which is not that well paid, and its insecure and struggling... Now we don't have much money- we just manage- but we at least do what we really like. So we wouldn't do a professional gallery cause it would be a concept we wouldn't like. (Periscope)*

## 5.2 ADVANTAGES and DISADVANTAGES

Based on interviews that were conducted with representatives of artist-run initiatives, a list was made of most commonly mentioned features of artist-run initiatives, as stated by their members. These features are then categorized in two pairs: *internal* and *external*, *advantages* and *disadvantages*.

|                 | <b>ADVANTAGES<br/>(strengths)</b>   | <b>DISADVANTAGES<br/>(challenges)</b>   |
|-----------------|---|---|
| <b>INTERNAL</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creating space for exchange among artists: approachability, informal atmosphere</li> <li>• support from a circle of like-minded people</li> <li>• more direct, more efficient functioning (then in public institutions)</li> <li>• bigger programming freedom</li> <li>• you do a job you really like</li> <li>• room for individual creativity and spontaneous reaction</li> <li>• heterogeneity as a richness of diversity</li> <li>• no administration means more time and energy dedicated to programming and low operational costs</li> <li>• horizontal structure: stronger sense of belonging - input from all members equally important</li> <li>• open groups have always input of young energy from new members</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it's chaotic- there's no clear guidelines</li> <li>• hard to divide responsibilities evenly and even harder to impose sanctions on people who don't get their share done</li> <li>• too much program with no logistics to support it</li> <li>• self exploitation that leads to burn-out</li> <li>• the fact that the goals not clear-cut means there are often doubts, insecurities and questioning of motives for doing this</li> <li>• existential un-sustainability: people can't work on enthusiasm forever</li> <li>• heterogeneity as a source of disagreement</li> <li>• no security, no stability</li> <li>• fragility to personal conflicts</li> <li>• use of private resources leads to wear-out of personal relationships</li> </ul> |
| <b>EXTERNAL</b> | <b>SERBIA</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a group gives more visibility to each individual artist</li> <li>• local artistic scene is small - horizontal cooperation among actors is faster and easier than vertical</li> <li>• no budget means no outside pressure</li> <li>• (almost) no financial and legal liability</li> <li>• flexibility regarding production level- low space and equipment requirements</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• deals with institutions done solely in a form of oral agreement- which makes them easy to break with no consequences to the institutions</li> <li>• lack of interest from the institutions to make some spaces available to such initiatives</li> <li>• small budget for culture is distributed to the institutions of heritage preservation- almost no money for living art/ contemporary production</li> <li>• low standard of living is making self-earned income, sponsorships and philanthropy donations very hard to obtain</li> <li>• insufficient (media) visibility, limited impact</li> </ul>  |
|                 | <b>AUSTRIA</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• financial support is given to almost all initiatives who apply for it</li> <li>• no limit on self-earned income</li> <li>• big audience for programs of ARIs</li> <li>• non-commercial orientation makes ARIs more likely to get support on bases of philanthropy</li> <li>• contribution to the urban renewal and gentrification is an incentive for city structures to support such initiatives</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of available subsidized spaces for non-commercial activities</li> <li>• private deals with real-estate companies cause the ARIs to move often, and with no previous warning and no secured alternative space</li> <li>• support is just enough to keep the spaces going, but not enough for them to go professional</li> <li>• financial necessity of keeping a day job</li> </ul>  |

The above list contains the most common advantages and disadvantages of this way of organization, compared to individual work, or other ways of organizing.

When compared to solo work, ARIs give the members more support, a platform for exchange of ideas and information, opportunity to joint efforts for more impact. On the other hand- the inter-dependance can lead to uneven investment of energy -but to even distribution of benefits- which is hard to contol and sanction. Also, necessary compromise among members sometimes leads to personal discontent.

In comparison to work in a conventional organization (public institution or private gallery)- ARIs give the members more freedom in programming, more room for individual expression, less conditioning, stronger sense of contribution and belonging, more direct and faster way of working. On the other hand, ARIs have no structural and procedural stability and security of the conventional organizations. They are vulnerable to any inter-personal disbalance, to any big changes in the circumstances and have small lobbying power.

They are often short lived because they financialy unsustainable and the fuel of enthusiasm runs out as the members get older.

The characteristics of internal functioning of ARIs are very similar in Serbia and in Austria. This is true for both advantages and challenges. The aspect of environment, however, is clearly influencing ARIs in Serbia and Austria in a different way. Some problems are common- like the problem of available, subsidized space. ARIs in Vienna have more options (e.g. agreements with real estate companies) but it still remains a big issue. The differences in environmental circumstances are mainly an effect of different economic standards (bigger culture spending per capita, bigger budget for culture), culture policies (diametrically different attitudes towards contemporary creation), differences in labour and taxation laws (regulation on non-government organizations, income limits etc.).

## CHAPTER VI

# *Conclusions*

### **6.1 Interpretation of results**

This research was an attempt to look more closely into artist-run initiatives: their model of organization, reasons for their emergence and the conditions for their sustainability.

The hypothesis that was postulated in the beginning of this research was that artist-run initiatives would typically be loosely structured, non-hierarchical, with no firm procedures, relying heavily on personal social capital and other personal resources of the members.

The question that this research tried to answer was whether this model of organization is more suitable/ better adapted (then other models) to the environment in a transitional society.

The results show that the reasons for emergence of such initiatives are more-less the same in both environments, and so is, generally speaking, their sustainability.

The internal advantages and challenges of this model of organization are very similar for ARIs in Serbia and Austria, while the external factors vary significantly.

Even though external challenges are smaller for initiatives in Austria, their average life-span (in the past) has the same as anywhere else for such initiatives, i.e. 3-5 years.

The question is, how does the Transition count into this equation?

(We use here the word *Transition* to describe unstable environment with undetermined mainstream values, weak and/or obsolete public institutions and lack of consistent long-term development strategy- with an additional specific feature characteristic for Serbia-marginalization of culture, and particularly, of contemporary creation)

Transitional society with its faults gives the artists in fact more reason to self-organize. The environment can not offer almost any support for young artists and creative people, so they create support-circles that will present the kind of art that they themselves would like to enjoy, but that is not recognized by the institutions, that are slow and backward. The motivation for creation of artist collectives and initiatives is bigger in the societies in

transition, but the ways of survival are harder. This is probably why the sustainability ratio is in the end the same.

The conclusion can be made that reasons for creation *and* for end of artist-run initiatives are the **internal reasons in reaction to the environmental factors** (the lack of offered content and support, lack of response, loss of enthusiasm in confrontation with the reality in the course of the years...)

If this interpretation is true, this could bring us to conclude that:

- **artist-run initiatives do not prosper in transitional societies better than in other environments** (if anything- it is rather the other way around)
- **the internal organization model of artist-run initiatives is not (solely) a method of adaptation to the environment, but rather caused by the inside factors**
- **the way of functioning of artist-run initiatives is not the best-adapted form of organization (of all possible ways of organization) in transitional societies- their impact and visibility is rather small**
- **artist-run initiatives may, however, be the only available/ attainable form of organization for artists to get some support in creation and presentation of contemporary creation in a transitional environment.**

Another important factor must be taken into account though-the factor of local environment. The reasons for existence and primary focus of the ARIs most often is in their local environment and community. This factor of micro-logic or niche-environment makes it difficult to make any definite conclusions about artist-run initiatives on the broader level, as transition may be manifested in very different ways in local environments.

However, as artist in collectives and intiatives are relying mostly on their private social and cultural capital and their knowledge of their local environment- this allows them to bypass the dysfunctional state institutions that are most effected by the process of transition.

In this sense, it may be safe to conclude also that:

- **the fact that ARIs are relying on their local environment and using their private resources is partly neutralizing the effects of transition**  
and in this way, ARIs *are* in a way better adapted to this state of crisis, although, this adaptation is not intentionally aimed against transition, but stemms out of internal logic of functining of artist-run intiatives.

## 6.2 Outlining a theoretical concept

Artist-run initiatives are structures that are organizationally a liminal case between a sum of individuals and an organization. They are typically informal groups with no hierarchical structure, that create strong bonds between their members.

ARIs are often compared to rock-bands or non-professional football teams. Viktor Misiano has seen them as “institutionalization of friendship”. This institutionalization happens even further, even literary, when an artistic group or initiative starts defining its loose structure towards a conventional organization.

This happens because of either outside or inside pressure.

Outside pressure comes in the shape of money: either by imposing structural requirements on initiatives as a condition for obtaining support, or by pumping money into it in the shape of award. This latter has the same formalizing effect- it is hard for a loose, informal group to make a democratic decision about the use of a large sum of money. Not to mention trying to split it between the members- which then implies that a clear line should be drawn between the members and non-members.

Inside pressure comes from the need to define people who have access to privileges from the community’s activity. These privileges could include the use of space, bank account, name, stamp, etc. All these imply some level of liability and responsibility. If the group has any property or access to any privileges, the question is always- who controls this access: who has the keys to the space? who holds the stamp? who has the access to the account? This delegation of responsibility and control over privileges inevitably leads to drawing a clear line around the flux that the initiative wants to be- by which limiting it to a definite form. It also leads inevitably to first differences among the members- as control always implies power.

The problem of financing seem to be crucial for the way of functioning of artist-run initiatives. While public grants impose structural requirements, foreign foundations impose a very explicit programming influence (even if this is manifested only through auto-censorship) In order to be able to do something genuine, some ARIs deliberately want to remain informal, underground and self-financed..

These communities are, of course, also new (mini-)utopias. This attempt to create a communion of people who are all equal- as an opposition to a hierarchical society- this is a leftist, reactionary attitude. It is also anti-modern, but not entirely anti-individual. A community is a strategy of survival for the individual who needs support, human warmth and empathy- but doesn't negate it's personality.

Forming of a community among artists can also be compared to that of agricultural co-op within extended family, where a few households join in collaboration for existential reasons - more effective production and easier survival.

In the Balkans, where existence in a farm household was historically often challenging (the economy level was low) this was a typical way of functioning- family co-op gathered all members of all households for big seasonal work from one family's field to another.

This organic way of bonding into communities could be more natural way of organization than that into society, by social contract- through publicly owned, planned and controlled institutions.

In the rough environment of transition, artist collectives are also a natural way of seeking support... Founded on bases of mutual understanding, friendship, respect- and reinforced by joined enthusiasm, these collectives also gather individuals in a sort of a organic entity- a basic organizational cell.

ARIs are not the model that only appears in transitional societies. It might not even be a model that is well adapted to the hard circumstances of transition- but it might be a rare one that is capable of functioning- like the primitive one-cell organisms that are capable of living in extreme environments. They do not prefer this environment, but they are capable of surviving in it.

Looking from the outside- this is not the very best, most efficient form of organization. But for artists, on their vegetative level, this model of organization might be the only attainable form of organization to improve their chances of survival.

### **6.3 Attempt of predicting the future development**

As previously said- it is very hard to give specific predictions about artist-run initiatives on national level, since these initiatives are most affected by their local environments, which vary greatly, from one artistic community to the other.

However, we can try to take a look at some factors that might have some influence on development of ARIs in the course of transition, on a more general level.

Since funding bodies are conditioning the initiatives to have a legal status (and an administrative base) in order to be supported- this has so far urged some initiatives to register and it has pushed their level of organization towards more structure than they previously had. In the future, as individual foundations pull away from the region, and EU cultural funds become more available - the level of organization that would be required in order to apply for funds will be even higher. For initiatives that have already made a step towards a more structured organization- this will be a point where they will have to decide to either go fully professional and grow- or join with other similar initiatives into some sorts of unions and networks -that would then be big enough to be able to be competitive. For initiatives that have a very loose structure and that have so far not registered as an NGO- this would be an intimidating requirement that will ghettoize them and push them probably further into the underground. This would mean that a stratification would happen- among those initiatives that are active now on more-less same level, in the future big differences would develop. One group of initiatives would grow into becoming a professional organization of a more conventional type, while the rest of them would get further marginalized and have even less access to funding- and would then either end or be active as a guerrilla.

The problem of space is one of the important factors for survival of ARIs. In the context of Serbia, there is clearly still a great number of buildings that haven't yet made the transition from public to private property. These buildings (mostly industrial heritage) are in a state of decay, or simply unused- but it has so far been impossible to gain permission for them to be used for initiatives in culture.

The question has been made- what kind of attitude should civil society take in this case. This property is public- so it belongs to us all- should we not insist to be included in decision-making about its repurposing? One currently present attitude within civil society is that we as

a democratic society (or as a former self-managed one) definitely should! And some artist-run initiatives already function according to this principle (e.g. *Elektrika, Hernals*)

The other attitude is that all attempts of cooperation with the public institutions are futile, that they are a bureaucratic maze, a demagogic that wastes precious time. This attitude insists that skipping/by-passing the institutions is the only way to get something done. Applied to the problem of space this translates as unauthorized use of public space, including, but not limited to, squatting. There are also initiatives that work on these principles (e.g. *INEXfilm*) Which model will prove to be more successful- remains to be seen.

There is, of course, a possibility that even in Serbia, the environment would eventually change in regard to contemporary art- in which case, a situation could develop more in the direction which we now see in Austria- more funding for initiatives early on, at the very start, less strict limitations of their activity, more incentives for philanthropy... but at this moment, this just sheer speculation.

## *Appendices*

## APPENDIX 1

### Artist-Run Initiatives in Serbia

#### ŠKART



ŠKART<sup>44</sup> collective was founded in 1990 in Belgrade at the Faculty of Architecture where the initiators of the group studied together and where they discovered basic printing techniques. Even though the original intention was to include more people, Škart are, in fact, just Dragan Protić and Đorđe Balmazović.

Their work as group Škart is born out of the dialog of the two individuals, of which one is a draftsman, and the other poet. Their work varies in medium, but is always socially aware. The initial motivation for activism came from the disturbing socio-political situation in this region in the 1990-ies, and the frustration of being helpless.

Their activities range from visual arts (print, collage, installation art, photomontage, text) to performing arts (happening, installation, interactive performance). They describe it as “unpredictable permanent conflict-dialogue armed with poetry/ design/ music/ social activism”.

Even though they exist as a group for over twenty years now, Škart is not a legal entity. They are an informal group: they have no bank account, no stamp, no ownership of goods as the

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<sup>44</sup> the name “Škart” means rejects/ scraps

group *Škart*. As both Dragan and Đorđe have the status of free artist, all transactions go through the account of the Artist Union (ULUS).

As they are only two people, decisions and division of responsibility is not a big issue. All of their joint projects are created in constant dialog of the two different positions. They rent a studio together, and they have moved dozens of times- so they have a nomadic spirit and this has somewhat influenced their work.

They consider the disadvantages of this way of working/life to be: no private property to speak of, zero credit score (no bank loans would be possible), incapability of supporting a family (if there were any), no safety net, doing things the hard way...

The advantages would be: the job they love, opportunity to travel, freedom to choose the work they will do, to work as much as they want/need to, freedom to do things your way...

The environment they work in, they see as a constant inspiration for work- as there are so many things that are unfinished, stories that are untold, untangled conflicts. They don't complain about the reception of their work, as they are fairly visible, their work is recognized as a brand- they were even national representatives on Venice Biennial of Architecture in 2010.

They applied for subsidized studio space to Ministry of Culture and City Assembly, but to no avail.

Projection of the future evolution is not clear for *Škart*. The possibility of dying-out is not out of the question, nor is the possibility of transformation into another form of collaboration: a more formal organization, transformation, bigger group, symbiosis with other groups, or joining a union- are all possible options. They are thinking about these options because that would make their life a bit easier.

## ELEKTRIKA



*Elektrika* is a space for alternative culture in Pančevo that started with its activities in 2007. It all started when Aleksandar Zogra<sup>45</sup>, a well-known comics author, made an agreement with Pančevo Cultural Center to get one room within the Center as a space for free cultural program. He himself held a regular program of comics workshops named *Grrr*, but he also invited a few other people to contribute with organizing their own program within this space that was named *Elektrika*. Cultural Center didn't ask for any rent payment, and offered to cover all the costs of electricity, heating and water, and allowed them to use Center's equipment.

The idea was to create a free zone protected by the institution, where it would be possible to gather people and produce and present culture without any institutional limitations. There would be as much content, as there are people interested to present and organize it- and they are left to do it in their way, with no overall program editor or chief curator of any kind.

*Elektrika* existed as an informal group for about four years (they only very recently registered as a group of citizens, non-government organization). The program was consisted of exhibitions, workshops and concerts – all in the realm of alternative culture and “living art”. *Elektrika* is focused on the artists that are not yet recognized as a brand, whose art is not yet repackaged by mediation- biggest part of their program is artists who have barely had chance

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<sup>45</sup> artistic alias of Saša Rakezić

to present themselves and who don't yet have any audience. What is considered important is the exchange of information among authors- the possibility of local authors to witness all that which is possible- to get motivated and inspired to do something - and the turnout of the audience is considered less important. Furthermore, several events that attracted somewhat larger audience proved to be beyond *Elektrika*'s organizational capacities and they had to intentionally make a step back, away from recognized artists.

The programs are organized with virtually no budget. The artists get no honorariums- and they are usually “stolen” for a quick show while in the region for other reasons, or brought on their own travel money. *Elektrika* could, until recently, offer artists free accommodation in a couple of rooms within the building of Cultural Center (this is no longer possible because the roof is leaking) – which was a kind of a DIY artist residency program.

The whole organization within *Elektrika* is in a way “taking a shortcut” -as opposed to going the regular way through institutional administration. Everything is self-organized, based on personal contacts, informal and unofficial- but this allows for the much more efficient organization- quicker and spontaneous in reacting to a situation. This approach made possible that, what would have otherwise been impossible to organize in given environment.

This is a response to the situation in the country where there is no consistent regulation- the former socialist culture system is in ruins, but still present in its relicts (such as Cultural Center)- and on the other hand the new conditions are making place only for programs that are commercial and pay off. As Zograf points out- it is a time of shift between the systems- the only way to work in that situation is to “just jump in and swim- and see where you can grab onto something”. There is no “regular” way.

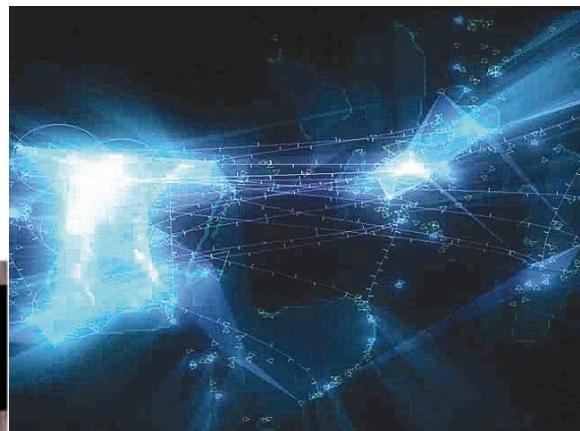
The program of *Elektrika* was built up spontaneously by several people who each organized events of their own interest. The group was gradually growing as some of the people, who were initially just audience, started contributing to the program. There isn't really a team- in the sense of many people working for the same idea. It is more of a sum of different approaches that coexist in the same space. The conflicts are not being resolved- they are allowed to exist. People contributing to the program also have different visions of how *Elektrika* should develop in the future- towards better organization and higher profile, towards deeper underground, or towards becoming just a network of collaborators working in many spaces...

In the meantime- because of the complaints from the neighbors about the crowds and noise- the space that *Elektrika* was occupying was restricted to only quiet activities by the Cultural Center. Therefore, there is an attempt to take the program out into other spaces (of other cultural institutions and unused commercial spaces). *Elektrika* is now not just space anymore, but rather a circle of people with a certain program orientation. The organization *Elektrika* that was recently founded is not identical to the group of people and programs they organize around this name. It is rather meant to be an additional resource- as an opportunity to apply for funds for individual programs, for anyone to use. There is no intention to realize all program through this organization because this would again slow down and regulate the process too much.

Other organizations that are connected to this initiative through program (*Novo Doba*, *Refract*, *Artefact...*) can also provide budget for part of program by applying for projects. However, the majority of the content will, for now, remain to be organized ad hoc and with no budget.



## KOSMOPLOVCI



*Kosmoplovci* is an informal group of authors that is focusing on multimedial experiment and low-fi production.

They are active as a group with this name since 2001, but a similar concept existed in predecessor groups that the same people formed as early as 1990.

*Corrosion* was a group of high-school friends that shared an interest in exploring the creative possibilities of computers as a means of expression. They were active in the mid-nineties and were focusing mainly on electronic music and event organization.

This group, joined by two others- *Striper* (focusing on local comics scene) and *Low-fi* (focusing on video production)- made up a new group named *Zadruga*<sup>46</sup> in 1999. They toured Serbia and international festivals promoting the underground and alternative multimedial production.

Parts of this group, with addition of some new authors, active in versatile media, formed the group *Kosmoplovci*.

The group functions on basis of firm value system.

One of the basic principles is anonymity. All people in the group create either under collective name, or under an alias. The group believes that anonymity protects from self-censorship, and creates room for freedom of experimentation, without pressure to live up to the professional standards of ones day-job.

Anonymity of the group is so cherished, that the public is not familiar with neither the size of the group, nor who their leader is.

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<sup>46</sup> *zadruga* – union, co-op

The number of members is, in fact, in constant flux. People leave the group and new people join all the time. The core group is 4-5 members who have been there for the longest time.

The outer circle of membership would include 30-40 people. The group functions as a network- everybody is involved to the extent they feel suits them.

There is no one most important person in the group- the core members evaluate the quality of joint production and act as editors in chief, based on consensus. However, the person that has been involved with this initiative from the start, as part of one or the other successor group, Igor Đorđević, is somewhat of a group's spiritual leader.

He is also in charge of group's internet page and social profiles- and overall communication with collaborators through these channels.

All people in the group are individual authors, that are specialized in their creative field.

*Kosmoplovci* then acts as a platform for free experimentation with other media and media hybrids- for exchange and communication with other authors. The creative process starts with input in one medium that is then circulated and open for other people to react on it, add to it, alter it, or finish it in any other medium. The finished work is evaluated by the core group and either published online or returned for adjustments.

The programming orientation is not strict, but in general, interest is focused on universal human content that transgresses the cultural differences and is understood on subconscious level. "We explore the universe- both on micro and macro level"<sup>47</sup>.

Another principle from the value system of the group is that quality production is possible regardless of money investment. They are fighting to prove that money is not a necessary condition for quality work- nor is it a legitimate excuse for the lack of quality. Being avant-garde or experimental is no reason not to have high standards of production. This is why some of their work is in process for years before it is released.

The group ideals are near to those of DEMO scene- global phenomenon started in the eighties that promotes the lo-fi production of digital content. This is a global network of individual authors and groups that occasionally share content and compete in fair-like event around the globe. *Kosmoplovci* group is part of this network.

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<sup>47</sup> quotation from interview with Igor Đorđević

Another group policy is financial independence. This allows the group to be free of the politics of thought that is clearly, intensely and obviously imposed through financing bodies. This results in variation in intensity of activity- depending on the period, sometimes there is a lot going on, sometimes less- according to the financial possibilities.

They insist on being independent with space use as well- they don't want to depend on charity of some cultural institution but rather use rented space they pay for.

Kosmoplovci collaborated with almost every space for culture in the city and beyond. Yet, they stress they don't work *for* anyone and don't make compromises, but collaborate only to the point that allows them to accomplish their action.

Lately, they have given up the culture institutions (they regard them as obsolete and harmless ghettos) and promote their videos and music as parts of entertainment parties. This is part of their mission to, not only always find new ways of expression in art, but also new ways of communication with people.

They have been focusing on young people- finding a way to approach them and offer support and opportunity to those who have a need to express themselves. They offer to share their knowledge, experience and connections.

Spontaneously , the group has started to stand for as an example that “not everything has to be done for Coca-Cola or M-TV”<sup>48</sup>.

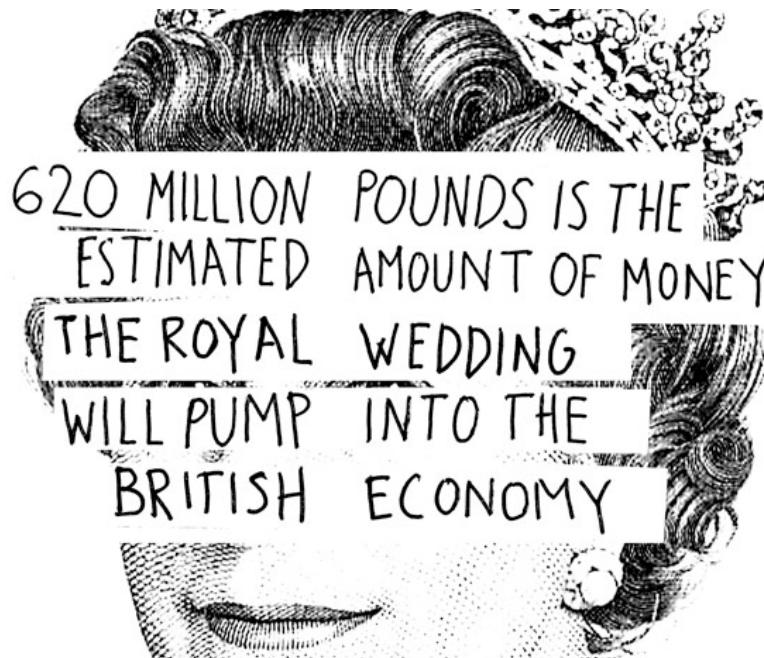
For the future, the group is planning a space of their own- a club or a cultural center- where they would make up a program. This would be a completely open institution that would allow all to participate and not condition them with their narrow profiling (as existing institutions do, according to Igor Đorđević). People need more free space where they can find their own expression, without being forced into somebody else's.

According to the principles of informality, anonymity and independence, this space would have to be a private property of one of the members that would take up the responsibility to run it in front of the group.

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<sup>48</sup> ibid.

### A3 FORMAT



*A3 format* is a group promoting graphic design as an artistic discipline. It was initiated in 2007 in Novi Sad by two friends Filip Bojović and Vladimir Radinović as a platform for experiment and free expression in design- as an escape from client-driven commercial side of design.

Filip Bojović and Vladimir Radinović knew each other from study at art academy. After graduation in 2007, they started the project A3 which right away had a clear concept of a publication for free design. It was their reaction to the lack of young energy and new, vital initiatives in design at that time. Due to the lack of money, the project only existed as an online platform- a blog and a profile where the works were displayed.

In the beginning, it was only their work that the two artists displayed, but then, after some time, they started expanding this circle, first to the friends and colleagues, then to the new contacts that they made through this online profile. They were asking people to send them the works that fit into this concept- and then they would show them online. This web page turned into a collection of a kind at this point.

Two more people joined the project in 2008- two old childhood friends- Marko Rakić (sociologist of culture and Igor Zarou (economist with experience in working in non-profit sector). The two new members of the group gave a real push towards realization of this project- they applied to foreign foundations for funding with a written project and this made

it possible for the first three editions of the magazines to appear in print. They were all thematic issues, with works from the collections, that were printed in circulation of 1000, and were given out for free to the interested people.

These editions were made primarily with the aim to promote young authors and also to make up for the lack of similar publications in this environment.

Since the works were of many authors, the authorship of A3 was actually editorial, or, rather curatorial work. The fact that they didn't know how to handle authors' rights, they decided not to charge anything for the publication copies. This also made it easier to justify the grants that were obtained for printing.

At this time, A3 was still just a informal artistic collective, or just a group of people. Since, after this first publications, their visibility grew, they started to work more towards articulating the ideology of design. This is where they decided to register as a non-profit organization (so as to be able to handle all the paperwork by themselves and not through organizations of friends and acquaintances). A few activist publications followed- including ecological edition of shopping bags, first Roma alphabet book, do-it-yourself workshop results, and most recent publication "False Idols from the Balkans".

The decision making in A3 was never a problem, since the members know each other really well, share a lot in terms of vision of the project and trust each other's judgment. Division of responsibilities worked amazingly well, as their abilities and skills differ- but are complementing each-other. Everybody found an aspect of the project where they can contribute with what they do best- and there is no overlap. Filip was always an art-director and ideological leader, Marko and Igor are in charge of project writing, and fundraising, Vladimir in charge of PR, event organizing, communication with partner institutions.

Even though A3 functions really well, they admit they have slowed down significantly with production, as each of their full-time jobs leave ever less energy for project that is done just for fun. On the other hand- turning this project into something that would bring profit would defeat the purpose of freedom an experiment.

Support from state institutions so far has been random, when it comes to partnership and negative when it comes to financial support.

However, they would not like to completely give up this initiative, as they think it would be sad that yet another thing would dye out, because people get tired of working just out of enthusiasm.

For now, they would like to keep it afloat- and as their publications are not issued in any regular intervals, this doesn't impose some kind of pressure.

They consider that on the side of public funding- it would be helpful to divide the budget into different categories, so that small projects don't have to compete with film lobby and big institutions. They are however not interested in lobbying and are skeptical towards the possibility to influence cultural politics. They prefer to take initiative and make things themselves, in stead of wait for policy to change.



## **DEZ.ORG**



*Dez.org* is an artistic group that was founded in Belgrade in 2005. It was consisted of eleven artists of younger generation that were (then) fresh graduates of Faculty of Fine Arts. The motive behind this initiative was an attempt to make up for the lack of institutional support for young artists. The groups primary goal was promotion of the artists in the group – and through them- promotion of the whole generation of artists that entered the scene in mid-zero years. The vacuum that students of visual arts feel after graduation is a situation these artists were trying to fight against. Total absence of support structure, guidance, quality reference, feedback... - is a debilitating environment for a young artist. This group was an attempt to create a bubble with an artificial atmosphere (support system and values reference, as well as peer pressure) amidst of vacuum.

The group was formed according to the common personal and artistic views- it was artists that recognized their peers as being of similar quality and views about art. Not all people are technically the same generation- but they belong to a certain circle, that was previously undefined but now found a form of an artistic group. All members are, however, strong individual artists that have very different specific artistic focus. This is a reason why a joint production of artistic work was never possible for this group, even though attempts were made in this direction.

Very early on, the group registered with a legal status of artistic association, non-government organization *Dez.org*. They opened a bank account to this name as well. In the beginning, there was an attempt to create a structured way of operation- these procedures were formally agreed upon, but never practiced de facto.

The joint work of the group was mostly group shows of the members and people surrounding them –artists of the same generation. In 2005-2006 their joint activity was most intense- they had a few shows in Belgrade and other towns in Serbia, as well as abroad. However, since all members are artists that actively develop their individual artistic carrier – very soon became apparent this lack of interest for joint action and focusing on individual ventures. The communication within the group remained- but most activities that were signed by the group as an author, were in fact done by one or two people. As the initiative for action would come from one of members- the rest of the group usually wasn't interested in this activity, but didn't really mind if this individual were still doing it in the name of the group. The division of responsibilities followed this pattern- those that suggest the activity- they do the work as well- with neither help, nor interference from the others. It became clear in time that the group is not really functioning as a team, but rather as a sum of individuals with different interests and paths.

This only became even more pronounced, as some people moved out of town and some stopped practicing art altogether. All that kept the group in existence (at least technically) was the bank account and the legal status that the individuals used as a way to receive their private honorariums that have nothing to do with the rest of the group. At the moment, the group is dysfunctional- only one member is working on activities that are connected to the group name. The initiative will be either transformed or completely terminated.

Contemplating the reasons for dysfunction, one sees that members had different visions of the group purpose. While some insisted on friendship and dialog as a support in artistic practice, others had a more practical goal of creating a market for the sales of the works, while others saw the group as a NGO that would manage cultural projects (including the administration that this entails). These very different expectations are a result of the fact that *Dez.org* wasn't defined close enough – in its identity and its mission. The fact that the group was large only increased the chances of misunderstanding. Also- the group size was fluctuating without any plan and control- and at some point there was no way of knowing who was part of the group

and who wasn't. This also triggered the question of who has the right to use the name of the organization, its stamp and bank-account. As there was no one who was hierarchically superimposed above the others- no one could impose the limit and control of this.

The future of the organization is questionable as there cannot be really a collaboration if there is only one person interested in the organization's survival. The most part of the initial group is not interested in project-management, and further development in that direction wouldn't be the path for this particular group. If the name should survive, the members would be different.

In retrospect, the forming of the group was nevertheless a smart move, even if nothing else comes out of it. The visibility and the attention were higher for the group, then for any individual on their own- so the purpose of promotion was achieved. Group also makes the institutional support much more likely. Also, a group has a bigger joint energy than any artist individually, to cope with the ignoring attitude in the environment and to fight it with more success.

## ILEGALNI POSLASTIČARI /KORNET



*Ilegalni Poslastičari* (Illegal Confectioners) are an informal multidisciplinary group founded in Belgrade in 2005. They are today no longer active as a group- they abandoned their group activity gradually since 2008. The members of the group are for the most part still active individually, or have started new initiatives.

*Ilegalni Poslastičari*, although they began expressing themselves through theatre and street performances, became famous for launching false news that upset Serbia, and the region, by using that unstable media situation. They depended on a free space – The Internet by taking the unprepared media by surprise and playing on the account of "the sanctity of liberal thinking". Other activities include initiatives of naming of the street corners, making music, writing poetry, satirical web-sites and blogs publishing, hosting performance and concert nights, etc. The group used to perform on many art festivals and they were often exercising provocation of power centers.

Membership was very informal- number of involved people varied in each action. Some of the most steady names were: Ivan Tobić, Goran Bogunović, Pavle Ćosić, Boris Starešina, Miloš Trajković, Saša Marković Mikrob... Professional background of the people involved is versatile- one linguist, an economist, an artist...

The group started working together spontaneously, as a natural result of a friendship. After a few joint actions, they started being invited to participate at festivals as a group- and so they started identifying with this group identity. The group never registered as an organization- when they received support, that was done through other organizations that offered to help them.

There was no clear program, or ideology, or artistic direction that held the group together - members had many ideas for joint actions, but they were quite diverse, and all people could hardly ever agree about all aspects of action. This wasn't necessarily a big problem, but when the disagreements about division of responsibilities came about- there was not enough motivation to keep the group afloat.

The unequal load of responsibilities is the main problem that Pavle Ćosić brings up as reason for leaving the group. The lack of coordinated action and uneven member contribution have lead him to feel he is pulling the whole load, of both ideas and logistics, by himself. Other members apparently have a different view of the development and break-up of the group, but were not willing to talk about it.

In 2008 *Ilegalni Poslastičari* started their own publishing house named *Kornet*, which, by 2008, published around fifteen books (novels, collections of stories, poems and scientific publications) and music editions. This was a registered organization (a limited liability company- with an accountant, tax ID number and other required administrative prerequisites) and was taken over as a solo project by Pavle Ćosić after the group stopped existing. *Kornet* has partly continued some of the activities that *Ilegalni Poslastičari* used to involve in- and it is (maybe unjustly) broadly considered the continuation of the group *Ilegalni Poslastičari*.

Pavle Ćosić doesn't see that there are any advantages to informal way of organizing- the formal framework keeps the things together, according to him, when the enthusiasm fails. He compares the situation of informal groups to rock bands- the disagreements lead often to a break-up before the group even comes out of anonymity. The bands that stay together are actually an exception to the rule.

## ČAJ...ODLIČAN



*Čaj...odličan* is an informal group of authors focusing on promotion of subcultural art forms-fanzines, comics, low-fi video and animation. The initiative started in town of Niš in 2001-the idea was to form a group with a name in order to join forces of individual artists for a common cause.

The initial group was consisted of three authors: Toni Radoja, Dušan Cvetković and Vladimir Pavlović. Later, the group also joins Predrag Stamenković as the fourth author, as well as two friends of the group who provide logistic support and help with labor intensive tasks.

In the beginning, as an attempt to promote the “other” (alternative) comics scene in town of Niš, they simply rented out a booth at the book fair. This was a way to make first contacts with the cultural scene and it resulted in collaboration with the gallery of Cultural Center in Niš. Within several months, they organized the first open call competition in alternative comics. The prize budget was made up of personal money contribution of the members of the group.

Several other exhibitions with this focus followed. The activity spread also to organizing workshops in low-fi film and comics workshops for children, festival participation and publication issuing. The group had also a joint artistic production of video works (while in drawing medium, they remain individual authors).

Dušan Cvetković describes this first period in group activity as extremely favorable for independent initiatives- many doors were open with no guarantees required, people in institutions were willing to give the beginners a chance. This somehow changed by 2005/06, when suddenly there were too many obstacles for small initiatives.

The support from public institutions they describe as unreliable and sporadic, depending solely on good will of individuals that either personally have understanding for the activity of the group- or not. The general impression is that there is no systematic support and that public cultural strategies (if any) disregard completely individual initiatives.

Since, as an informal group, *Čaj...odličan* doesn't have their own stamp or bank-account, they always had to handle money transactions through friendly organizations. They admit they were thinking of registering, but in the end decided not to, because they realized organizational part of running a group already takes up too much of their time for art production. They made a conscious decision not to pursue a higher level of organization.

The burden of organization was not evenly divided among the members of the group. Dušan Cvetković was doing most of the paperwork and networking- contacting the partners, applying for grants, documenting the previous work... This in time lead to a burnout. All members have their separate activities and jobs on the side from this artistic initiatives. Since this was never bringing much revenue to the group, in time, as the members became older- they had to focus on securing a living. This pulled the members apart- as there was not as much time to meet and work together. The group never had any conflicts, but with time, the enthusiasm to do something just for the fun of it, was less present.

They now have the idea of making one joint exhibition a year, in their home town, just as an incentive to keep on working- even if separately. They want to keep the group alive just to the extent that doesn't require much energy investment.

*Čaj...odličan* suggests that the groups should either have a person in charge of managing and organization, or that there should be an umbrella organization that would exist for this sole purpose of providing logistic support in legal matters- that would gather many individual artists and artistic groups that need such support.

There was even an initiative in Niš to form a body of this kind (*ARTin*)- however, as it usually happens, not enough people wanted to get involved with running of such organization. All work was left to one person to do- so the organization failed.

A big general obstacle for professionalization of this activity is the underdeveloped economy, and in particular, absolute lack of art-market.

## ART KLINIKA



*ART Klinika* (Art Clinic) is an initiative started in 2001 in Novi Sad as a project of a one group of artists previously gathered around name LED ART.

LED ART was an informal group of artists that organized public actions and happenings during the 1990s, warning about the state of the society and art in Serbia. This group functioned as an ad-hoc group with no clear membership- it was only in 2001 that it was registered as an NGO – to an initiative of Nikola Džafo, one of the LED ART founders- and this allowed it to start the project *Art Klinika*.

*Art Klinika* was conceptually intended as a utopian project of healing of the (sick) society through art. Thanking to his artistic reputation and his connections, Nikola Džafo managed to get a space in downtown Novi Sad which would be used as an independent center for contemporary culture- “art clinic” with a “reception room” (screening room), “pharmacy” (library and bookshop), and “intensive care” (so called *Shock gallery*) and “ER team”(artists organizing programs).

The motivation came from the need to show that there are different expressions that exist, other then amateurism, folk, and trash that was the prevailing “esthetics” of the time. In its decade long activity, *Art Klinika* was socially reactive- many public actions were performed as a response to political situation on the local, national or regional level. Regular program at the center included avant-garde film screenings, drawing workshops, lectures and discussions, performance and theater and exhibitions at the *Shock gallery* (smallest gallery in the world).

This space was very active in the last ten years, with almost daily program, gathering new art scene and giving support to the youngest generation of artists- fresh graduates from art academies.

*Art Klinika* established a connection to students of art academies from Novi Sad- every year there is an award given to the most promising students graduating in that generation- the exhibit in *Art Klinika* and some of them stay as part of the team. In the ten years of its activity, about 60 young artists worked with the center for some time- they come, stay for about 2-4 years and move on. *Art Klinika* has given them support in the most precarious period of their artistic carrier.

At any given moment there was about 7-10 people (average age 27- with the exception of Nikola Džafo, 60) in the team that are more seriously involved with the center activity, with many more available as help when needed. The team agrees on responsibilities and operational decisions in meetings that are held regularly. This is also where new ideas for programming are opened for discussion. However, most program initiative comes still from Nikola Džafo, the oldest and most influential person in the center. He is also the person that is responsible for the connections of *Art Klinika* to other culture institutions and individuals, nation-wide and abroad.

The visibility of the center has grown in time by the sheer amount of activities and also by the grace of constant documentation- the center produces serious publications after every few years that give a detailed overview of past activities. Recently, the center has been receiving some of the symbolic acknowledgements, by inclusion in some prestigious shows.

*Art Klinika* applies for funding from public funds on the bases of its yearly program, although increasingly also considering regional cooperation on projects that would bring in funding from foreign foundations. On domestic level, the city of Novi Sad was the most loyal supporter- both with ensuring the operational costs for the space on yearly bases, and in providing *Art Klinika* with a long term contract on the use of space, on special, subsidized terms.

None of the artists involved in the activities of *Art Klinika* can make a living out of it- the honorariums (when available) are minimal. They do get an opportunity to use the centers space and equipment for their own production, with no restrictions.

*Art Klinika* is in a way intended as (with irony, but also true) a “help center for homeless artists”- those that find a (professional or existential) path in life usually leave by themselves. The new people come in every year and this provides for the new energy.

However, there is a notable slowing down in center’s activities. Certain fatigue appeared (mostly with the older part of the team) from being able to survive only by the power of enthusiasm and on minimizing the activity. The support has, according to Nikola Džafo, not ever been sufficient for some serious activity. There has been a dilemma whether *Art Klinika* should be ended as a project- or should it transform into something else that is sustainable. Within the team currently there are several diverging opinions.

Even though there are few friends of the center who theoretically articulate the activities around *Art Klinika*, there has never been a founding act or a mission statement that would set the course for the future. This has been part of the process of action- thinking the direction which to take.

The older members of the team would like to see the center develop into a serious art venue, allowing for world-class program- or would rather discontinue the activities altogether. There is also an option of popularization – there are art actions taking place at the green market. The attempts have been made to connect with the art academies and to the Museum of Contemporary Art into one system- a proposition for which there was interest, but that was never realized due to the administrative procedures. The strategy of networking is also being attempted- by creating a chain-gallery system where one show would travel from one town to another.

The path that *Art Klinika* will take in the future has not been decided yet. It seems there is will to grow and reach a new level of organization that has been so far not possible only because of the lack of interest in the environment. There is a big complaint about insufficient support which makes it impossible for the production to be serious. On the other hand, there is also an attitude that institutionalization of ad-hoc groups makes their activity irrelevant. How compromise between these two attitudes is to be found- it remains to be seen.

## TREĆI BEOGRAD



*Treći Beograd* is an artistic initiative started in 2010 by eight artist that formed an artistic union. Just like with farmer's unions, the goal was to join the material and immaterial resources of many individuals in order to make the production more efficient for all. In artistic and social terms, the union was an attempt to overcome the solitary position that the Postmodern imposed on artists.

This initiative comes from individual, human need to connect with others in a dialog and in a human union- but it also comes from strategic need: "the old structures in old SFRY republic have fallen apart- galleries don't work any more, museums are closed- we can sit and weep – or do something ourselves..."<sup>49</sup>

Benefits of a group for an individual are multiple. Every individual, by joining this group, gets an opportunity to overcome their personal limitations. There is no imposition on the individual integrity- but there is the chance to expand one's views by the power of eight (or more). Also, the group has gathered around some values that they all intuitively are attracted to : warmth, altruism, humanity, compassion, help, contributing to the community... Concerning visibility- the group with a certain program is much more interesting to the professional public, than individual positions of unknown artists- individual benefits from the "brand" of the group.

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<sup>49</sup> quotation from an interview with Selman Trtovac

The artistic union *Treći Beograd* has its own gallery space- in fact a private building investment by one of the founders of the union –Selman Trtovac- built for this particular purpose on the bank of the river Danube, in a rural part of Belgrade. This space is intended to be multifunctional- production, presentation and space for hosting artist residences. It is intended for high profile art (in the best sense of expression) and is meant to speak primarily to the professional audience- the artistic community. The fact that this part of the city doesn't even have a movie theater, let alone contemporary art center, is not seen as a challenge, but rather as an opportunity to finally give this part of the city some visibility- and allow for some sensitization of the population to other kinds of content, than that of TV program.

The union of artists was made up of individuals according to the artistic sensibility. They were not friends previously- they belong to different generations – but they mutually recognized each-other as a similar creative energy. The group is consisted of equal number of artists of both sexes- so as to keep the balance of female and male energies- and this balance will be kept even as the group expands. New members are admitted when everybody agrees that proposed person fits into the union by their creative potential and energy.

In the sense of creation- since group gathers strong individuals of different personal expression- all artists continue their own artistic work individually- but, at the same time, they create new works together as a group author. So far, their actions and videos have been about the performative conceptualizing of a collective as a phenomenon. The themes have been collective living and collective creativity. Their activity is exploration of one possible model of artistic strategy- a model for an artist to continue practicing art/ thinking about art and abide the challenges and doubts.

“Energy of the collective is a powerful situation”<sup>50</sup>.

There isn't a hierarchical structure – the joint effort is based upon a principle of inner responsibility and discipline. This is a micro-utopia which, by connecting into a network of similar utopias, is hoping to outlive the challenges of the historical macro-utopias.

This process of “thinking the utopia” is the focus of the program of the group- the idea is to do this in artistic means. All the structuring and organizational decisions about the functioning of the group will be done in the form of artistic thinking- with artistic means. There was an idea of making up a union constitution- in order to establish some principles

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<sup>50</sup> ibid.

around which the group could function in a way that is fair and beneficial to all- but this has to be done in the form of artistic thinking, by the concept of the group. Theoretically, this initiative is based on the notion of Social Plastic introduced by Joseph Beuys.

The disadvantage of functioning as an artistic group might be the fact that there is no standard conventional model to follow and no clear and simple goals (like profit) that would give you information on how you are doing. this way one always has to question everything.

So far, the functioning of the group has been happening rather with no plans or regulations- this has led to the disbalance of the energies invested by all members.

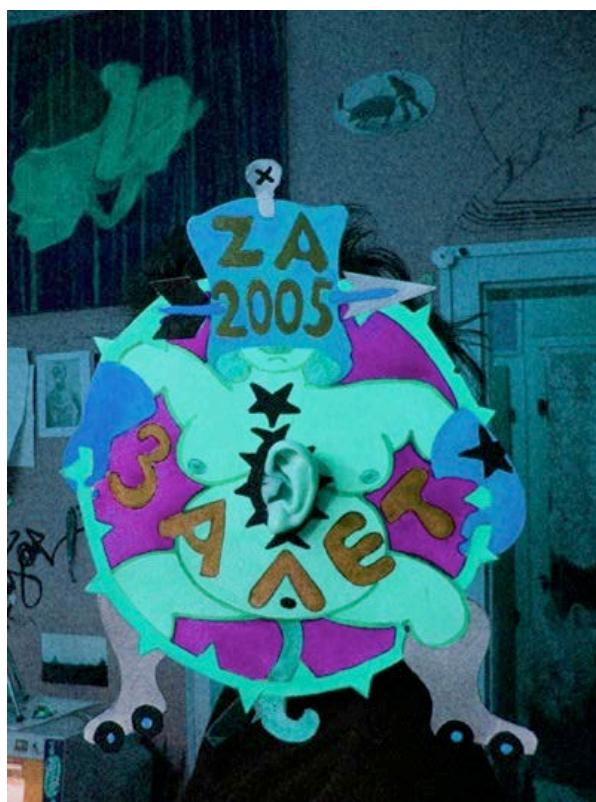
The initiative for new action comes from one of the members- then it is absorbed and altered by the whole group and then process of energy shift happens in one direction- until the final product comes out. This has been, reportedly, a very long and energy-consuming process. If the union becomes bigger- there will probably develop smaller teams within the union and not all members would have to participate on each project together.

The legal status of the group is Independent Artists' Association (NGO). So far it has had a rather generous support from both public funds and private donors- which is a very rare situation in civil sector in Serbia in general, let alone for an artist-initiative.

*Treći Beograd* exist for only one year and has already been recognized by the ministry as well as foreign foundations. The plans for the future are to create joint projects together with a regional network of similar centers and apply for funds based on that. The other form of positive future development would be creation of connections with theoreticians who would articulate the position of *Treći Beograd* and establish connections horizontally and vertically to similar phenomena in the history and the region. This would be a creation of the logic that would give the initiative credibility in international context.

Since this is an utopia- the experiment is the question of how long it would survive The plan is to make a publication every year, documenting the work of the group. The result of the experiment is the very process of posing the question.

ZALET



*Zalet* is a festival of alternative culture, taking place in town of Zaječar since 2005.

The initiative for this festival came from a group of people – artists and art lovers- who shared the interest in alternative culture, and were feeling the lack of such programs in Zaječar.

The first idea was born as early as 2001, when a loose group of people first talked about creating a circle that would organize events and also have joint artist production in the realm of contemporary alternative culture. However, no action was taken until 2004, when a more specific idea of the festival came up. Predrag Milošević, one of the core members of the initial group, graduated from Belgrade Academy of Applied Arts and moved back to Zaječar. Having gotten used to Belgrade cultural life, he felt the absence of cultural offer in Zaječar even more than before. This is when he initiated the organization of the festival that was to take place in 2005 for the first time.

The group of people who was organizing it was versatile: an applied artist, a lawyer, an engineer, a librarian, an actress, and a musician. They were gathered as an informal group-not registered as an organization. The municipality of Zaječar promised a generous financial support. As one of the people involved in the organization was employed in a local NGO, the account of this organization was used for all money transactions.

That, first year, *Zalet* festival lasted for nine days. The enthusiasm was felt all around- the program was exciting and the reaction of audience was very positive.

However, the different visions among the initial organizers' group grew into a conflict- primarily about the budget use and the influence that the NGO (whose account *Zalet* was using) was imposing. Other problems arose when the municipality refused to give the second half of the promised budget- with no explanation given.

This all led to the break-up of the initial group who was organizing *Zalet*.

In spite of that and many other problems- this festival survived until today.

Learning through their mistakes, in 2006, *Zalet* was registered as a civil initiative- and got a legal status, bank account and all the papers necessary for an organization to be able to apply for funds and process them.

The budget of the festival varied from virtually nonexistent to decent- with support from the Ministry of Culture, Pro-Helvetia Fund, and small private sponsors.

The core group of organizers (five or six people) is changing somewhat every year- with the exception of Predrag Milošević, that remains as a constant. He has been responsible for the program planning and has had a task of an art-director of the festival the whole time. Other tasks are not clearly divided to positions or people and the whole organizational part is done - as the tasks come along- by who ever is available. This has often led to a burn-out of the core team, as there is no clear focus and no overview of the tasks that lie ahead. The team is formed organically- every year there are more people that start to run the organization, but some of them give up, or are unreliable. Sometimes people come back into the organization after having been out for a few years.

There is no clear line to separate the people who are officially part of the organization and those who are not- but, as Predrag says- "We know ourselves. Those of us who work on it- we know who contributed the most".

If there is any honorarium for the organizers left at the end of the festival- the core team (5-6 people) shares it on equal parts. The rest of the crew- the helpers (about 20-30 people) get a symbolic reward- a T-shirt, or small amount of money.

Programming orientation of the festival was not officially stated in the beginning but in became recognizable in time that the festival is focusing mostly on art of comics, alternative and low-fi video, alternative forms of music –and generally on art that is innovative and

provocative. There is a group of artists with a certain way of expression in common, that was gathered around *Zalet* festival, and became synonymous for it.

In 2011, for the first time, there was an open call made for participation in the festival- and it was successful. This way many authors were admitted that would have otherwise been unknown to the festival organizers.

“In general, there are no many rules- everything is pretty much changing all the time”- says Predrag Milošević about the festival organization.

The organization doesn’t own an office space – it is registered to a private apartment of Predrag Milošević, and the phone number it uses is his private number. Most of the spaces used for the festival are used on the principle of good will. In only few cases a space rent had to be paid. Most of the time, people are willing to do a favor to the festival (that is now already known), or to the organizers personally (since Zaječar is a small town, people are connected). The premises of the museum and of the fortress (part of the museum) are also given to the festival for free use- partly because they themselves have a lack of program.

The future of *Zalet* festival depends on new generations joining the team and on support it can get. A sense of fatigue has been present more than once and there was a question whether they should continue or not. Predrag Milošević says he is not interested in doing it all by himself. Only if somebody would get seriously involved to lead it- it could have a future. But it would have to be another enthusiast, as nobody can make a living out of this.

The organizers don’t think that it is likely that the festival could become self-sustainable based on ticket-sales and bar income. The economy of the whole region is very bad, and especially for young people that are the audience of the festival. Besides, the alternative art that the festival promotes cannot be at the same time commercial. This is why they are hoping for the better support from the state and city institutions.

They admit they haven’t been serious at applying for private sponsorships, as their goal was not to make money. They expanded the program on account on their own honorarium almost every year.

As part of the Independent Cultural Scene of Serbia organization, they think this is a good model to protect the small organizations that would otherwise be incapable of applying for big international grants. This where they got the major part of their budget this year.

## **INEX FILM Expedition**



*INEX FILM Expedition* is an initiative that was started in Belgrade in April 2011, as an action of fight for autonomous space. It is an effort of a group of people to claim a public building that is not being used and repurpose it for independent culture production.

When a publicly owned film production house *Inex Film* went under, the building was left to deteriorate and was subject to thorough plunder that turned the inside of the building into a pile of rubble and debris, until even the cables in the walls were ripped out. After that, it became a shady spot of drug-abuse and prostitution, the signs of which were abundant all over the building ruins and the courtyard.

The group of people that came together in this initiative was primarily moved by the problem of the lack of spaces for independent culture on one side, and the multitude of spaces that are unused and left to decay on the other. This is a rather large group of people (exact numbers are hard to give- they are anywhere from 30 to 150) that come from different backgrounds and are there for different reasons. One part of the group are people that are involved with NGOs in this region –they are interested in the experiment of a civil initiative and problematization of (the process of economic) transition. Other part of the group are artists, artistic groups and cultural workers –they are interested either in possibility of getting a working space (studio, office, gallery...) in the building, or just in participation in the artistic actions taking place at *Inex Film*. There is another section of the group consisted mainly of young urbanite types - they are interested in anything new and different going on in the city.

These are fans and followers of the initiative -they are present at events as a potential core audience, but are not participating in the initiative on a deeper level.

What has happened in *INEX FILM* so far, is several actions of joint labor<sup>51</sup> that were conducted to make the space half-way safe and usable. Also a few events took place at *INEX*: parties that included graffiti tags and mural painting actions, live music, seminars and talks about civil initiative, exhibitions of comics and photograph...

When it comes to programming, *INEX FILM* initiative hasn't set any clear goals or boundaries as to what kind of content should be featured at the venue. Clearly, the motivation wasn't a lack of certain kind of art or form of culture. Most people are not directly interested in getting a space for themselves either, but are participating out of sheer curiosity in this social experiment and/or are interested in socializing with others that think alike. Finally, with a number of people, there seems also to be a vision that Belgrade (like other urban metropolises) needs a space like this, and that they would like to be the audience of such a venue.

*INEX FILM* initiative is not registered as a legal entity, or a project of an existing organization- partly to avoid responsibility for squatting, which is still illegal by Serbian law. It maintains a status of group of individuals- in purpose and in form.

Organizational structure of *INEX FILM* initiative is still very unclear. The people involved in the initiative claim it is completely open, absolutely horizontal structure without any membership border-line (just presence and participation qualify anyone for input in programming), and with no leadership. However, there seem to be a small group (3-8 people) within the group that stands out as a hard-core of the initiative. These people are more involved than the others, they are always present at any activity taking place in and around the initiative, they invest the most time, energy and personal resources, and they have been the initiators of all the events so far. These people gain certain authority within the group and apparently form a kind of a leadership.

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<sup>51</sup> they were called *radna akcija*- interestingly, the term (although used with humor and irony) is that of socialist self-management: joint efforts of people to rebuild the infrastructure, that everybody will then own and run together.

It remains to be seen how will the organizational structure evolve. Even though the participant insist they should not conform with existing models of hierarchical structures, the sustainability of the current model already seem uncertain as the first challenges arise.

Utopian cooperative is based on ethics of each individual. Everybody contributes as much as they can, and use the benefits as much as they need. There are no universal criteria to estimate how much is each individual capable of contributing, other then their own judgment. This leads to a situation where a small number of people that invest a lot of time, energy and resources, but enjoy the same rights as anyone else, might get burned out, or feel the lack of motivation to continue doing so.

On the other hand, if the contribution should be proportional to the rights and benefits, there must be a system of evaluation and procedures of promotion.

Right of access for all and absence of centralized control were some of the principles this initiative was grounded on. However, as soon as the space was cleared of trash and first furniture and mural appeared- so did the first vandalism. It soon became clear that if you want to upkeep the space that was won-over, you have to lock it up.

The door had to be custom-made and only three people were willing to finance this and help install them. They are the ones who then held the keys as well. The question arose- who should be given the copies of the keys? No one else? All? Who is all? Since there is no clear membership- the group of people is always fluctuating...

The people who hold the keys are the people who have complete insight and control of what is going on in Inex Film- and thus are in position that is not equal to others that don't have the key and have to ask permission to enter.

The third issue is, of course, the question of money. So far all the investments made in the infrastructure were based on voluntary contribution from participants. Part of the money for the bigger investments was then reimbursed from the profit made on sales of beer during the events in the venue. The question is- who buys the beer, and, more importantly, who has the right to sell it (justifying the higher price as a contribution to the initiative). Is there a person in charge (and responsible) of keeping track of the investment and profit, and afterwards- reinvestment? How are they chosen and who do they report to?

This is a minor issue at this point, but in the case of a bigger sum of money coming in- a grant, financial help, or private support- decisions would have to be made considering

purpose and procedure of spending. There would either have to be an absolute consensus (which is had to achieve if there is no clear membership and no idea of the number of participants), or there would be a group of representatives that would decide upon it. Either way, the processing would require a division of responsibilities, which would already suggest segregation of absolutely horizontal structure.

Although the majority of participants agree on trying to maintain this spirit of openness as far and long as possible, there have also been individuals that try to introduce and impose limitations and exclusivity in terms of program planning and participation. Since this is not the idea that the majority supports, there seem to be a need for a mechanism that would assure that individual standpoints don't jeopardize and betray the mission of the majority. Since no one is in charge, no one has the authority to suppress these individual extravagances. In the future this might present a great challenge for the initiative. However, if the mechanisms to do so are introduced- this is a function of the executive power and it would imply a whole representative system behind it to support it.

Whether this attempt of absolute equality and openness in a cooperative can be sustainable- that remains to be seen. Unlike the familiar utopias of socialist and hippy movements, this project is much smaller in scale and that might be a significant difference. And if this model fails, or evolves into something else- it will be interesting to see how this happens and why.



## APPENDIX 2

### Artist-Run Initiatives in Austria

#### **Ve.Sch**

1040 Wien, Schikanedergasse 11



Ve.Sch was one of the first of the so-called off-spaces, or independent gallery spaces, that started to open with great frequency in Vienna in the last three years.

Ve.Sch stands for the "Association for promoting new approaches to space and form in the visual arts". It was originally founded as an initiative from artist Martin Vesely, together with a collector Alois Bernsteiner and a photographer Marcel Schnellinger, in a legal form of *Verein* (co-op/ association/ union) in fall of 2008.

Instead of the curatorial, the emphasis here is on the artistic perspective, and Ve.Sch has very soon become a hot-spot where the young art scene meets.

Vesely describes his initial motives as a reaction to the state of the scene in Vienna: "There is an extremely high artistic density, but the market is too small" -the galleries can't manage to reflect this diversity anymore. Out of this situation comes "the need for autonomous, independently-run spaces".

Strictly speaking, there is an inconspicuous door in the Schikanedergasse 11, which, down five steps, leads into a former warehouse space. Two rooms are there connected in communication with each other: a glistening brightly lit white cube and a bar area with subdued light.

Right now there are two parallel program lines in the space, and they are presented on two separate week nights. One is run by Vesely (Thursday night) - it is a tightly planned yearly program of month-long shows. This a program base with which Ve.Sch applies for public funding one year in advance. Program line is constructed by Vesely, but artists are left to self-curate the shows. The focus of this program-line have been young and emerging artists, including students and fresh graduates of Viennese art academies. The other line (Tuesday night) is run/ curated by a cooperation of two artists, Ludwig Kittinger and Fernando Mesquita, and is in turn not planned out in advance, but left to spontaneous invitations and interventions. The shows are set new every week- which translates into only 5 hours of the show duration, given this program line runs on Tuesday nights only. The focus here is not on local young scene, but rather on international and/or outsider and underground art. The emphasis is also on the ephemeral and the process, and not on art product.

This program is accompanied by music events, as the idea was to merge art and music together, as an additional impetus "to participate actively and to position oneself in the art structure of the city."

This is a concept that works: on opening nights, or at concerts and performances, Ve.Sch is packed full- and not only with artists. The relaxed atmosphere of communication is important- and bar is here quite useful- besides from being a great way to finance the space.

Ve.Sch has no interest in commercial function of the gallery, because that would defeat its original purpose . Sales of art pieces is not the way the space is meant to be financed. However, initially, Vesely had a problem with being categorized as an off-space, since such initiatives are often temporary or short-lived. Ve.Sch was always conceived as a long-term project, with the aim to become institutionalized. This means, in the case of Ve.Sch, to upgrade the space to the professional standards and to gain status, public recognition and influence- and not to function as a commercial gallery or a public institution.

In the beginning, the initiative demanded for investment of personal finances (mostly provided by the collector Alois Bernsteiner), but by now, the space is already well-recognized and financially self-sufficient. Ve.Sch gets public funding support, but is also sustained by the income from the bar- which amounts to a sum sufficient to cover operational and programming costs, including honorariums for the curators and the artists (which is more than many established galleries elsewhere can afford).

However, since Ve.sch is legally a non-profit civil initiative (*Verein*), all profit needs to be reinvested back into the organization. This means that no actors involved in functioning of Ve.Sch are earning a living out of this activity (although they do get some honorariums and/or Per Diems), but they all have to keep a full-time job in another place.

Since the two other co-founders dropped out of the initiative, all organizational responsibilities (fundraising, accounting, space upgrade, annual reports, etc.) are down to Martin Vesely alone, with the exception of part of the activity related to Tuesday evening, done by the Tuesday team. As some members dropped out, two other collaborators will become members, so to maintain the status of a co-op.

Meetings within the team are held as needed, which is not often, since the Tuesday night program is given something of a *carte blanche* to act according to feeling, instinct and personal taste. Ve.Sch is an interesting double model in this sense: on one side there is a organizational structure that is very firm (with the ambition of being institutionalized even further), but then this serious institution offers space for initiatives that are free and open and defy any institutional conditioning. In a way, the first one gives legitimacy to the other, and provides the framework that fits in the rules of bureaucratic procedures, while on the other hand making room for organic artistic processuality.

## COCO

Bauernmarkt 9, 1010 Wien



Contemporary Concerns - Coco for short – is an off-space situated in three small, formerly commercial premises in downtown Vienna. Founded in May 2009 by a curator (Dünser) and an artist (Kobald), it was a reaction to the shortage of young and especially more experimental galleries in Vienna.

Coco was also "an act of protest against hierarchical strategies" that allow too little. There are no institutions in Vienna that would allow for independent curators to make a big thematic show there. The lack of hierarchy is crucial for Kobald: "Here, there is no need for 'project rooms', out of which one has to work their way up into the 'large exhibition space'." Dismiss of hierarchy is also reflected in the fact that biographies of the artists are not relevant- whether a prestigious biennial artists or newcomers - all are equally important.

Coco was conceived so to oppose and dismiss the high-brow rituals that are associated with visual arts. While no compromise is being made when it comes to shows, the atmosphere surrounding the space was meant to be as casual and informal as possible. Part of this concept was the idea that the two men (Kobald, Dünser) will do everything themselves- from choosing the artists, to organizing the shipping and insurance, doing an exhibition tour, to running a bar, to physical work and cleaning.

As both Kobald and Dünser have a professional background in arts, it was not too difficult to get public support. Coco is financed by a generous grant from the ministry of culture (on bases of yearly program), small city support (project based), private sponsorship (by a real-estate company and art collector Lenikus) in rent-free space, in-kind sponsorship by printing company and breweries, income from the bar and supporting memberships by private

individuals (no right of vote, just financial support of the project). As Coco is legally a *Verein*, that is non-profit organization, all money goes into programming and logistics only. The fees are paid to the hired helpers, but the two men consisting the co-op are not paid for any work in Coco- they both have day jobs to earn a living.

About pros and cons of this model, Kobald says that art co-op (*Kunstverein*) is easy to start and easy to keep alive, but they are not sustainable in the long run- because they are conceptually not meant to be that- and that fits into the way Coco sees things.

Coco was meant to be a temporary project from the very start. When the initial momentum is lost, and the aims are achieved, the two men are planning to move onto something else-together or apart. One possible model is to keep the organization afloat, but do project-based work and give up the gallery space. In any case- there is no interest in getting more institutionalized (“that is boring!”) –which would be inevitable after some time. The proposal of Kobald and Dünser for the future of the three-part space in Bauernmarkt 9, is that it should be given to the next generation of curators based on open call.



## AUSSTELLUNGSSTRASSE

Ausstellungsstrasse 53, 1020 Wien



Ausstellungsstrasse is an independent gallery space run by two artists –Simon Veres and Michael Niemetz, since 2009. It is due to a "chain of coincidences" that this off-space came into existence. The original idea was born spontaneously at a party and was completely different –it was to organize a one-time exhibition that would take advantage of the visibility of the Vienna Art Fair to show and promote the work of seven friends (art school mates) – young, emerging artists. They named the event JennyFair, and for this purpose, they looked for an available space to rent that is in the nearest proximity of Vienna fairground. They found an empty store space right across the street from the fair, and luckily got it from the owner for free use. The positive energy of the seven artists turned within five weeks a desolate commercial premises into an alternative gallery space.

Nora Friedel: "We see ourselves (ironically, but still) as an idealistic syndicate"

Already the first JennyFair was successful and brought a lot of positive feedback. Since the shop owner offered this space to the group for free use the entire year round, they (just Veres and Niemetz) decided to use it, at first, as a studio space. After this, another idea for a group show came up, inspired by the death of a pop-star Michael Jackson. The open call was made to a great turn-out, and a show resulted in good audience feed-back again. This is when, slowly, it became a practice to ever more often feature shows of friends and fellow-artists. This started to happen at a two-week pace, at which point the studios were moved out and this became a strictly gallery space, named Ausstellungsstrasse.

This gallery has been running for two years now, without being registered in any way. Legally, they don't exist. Nothing is being officially processed through a bank account, invoice, tax sheet, etc. Everything is done on bases of friendship and mutual trust. The gallery doesn't apply for any funding, because, as Veres says, their expenses are minimal. The space rent is not completely free this year - but it is still very cheap, they don't co-finance the production of the show (except for printing of the flyers and posters, for which they get a special discount at a printing shop owned by another friend). The two men behind the organization don't expect to get paid –they both have another job to earn a living.

Still, the gallery does cover a part of the expenses through the sale of drinks at the opening nights (completely illegal) and by keeping a small percentage of all sales made by the gallery (illegal too).

The two artists were considering registering as a co-op (Verein), but didn't get to do it out of sheer laziness and lack of interest to deal with bureaucratic procedures. This would be probably a better model, as Veres admits, because it would be possible to apply for grants and that way "we could hire someone to do all the things we are not skilled to do". Right now, the two of them are doing all the work behind the organization- writing the texts for the catalogues, doing the graphic design, show setup and walls retouching, drinks purchase and sales, newsletter, website, facebook account... And this all on top of their personal artistic work and another regular job.

If Ausstellungsstrasse wanted to go legal (become a co-op) and apply for funding, they would have to change the way they do things. Right now, they make no annual program, they just "play it by ear".

JennyFair as a project (ran still by the original seven) is now repeated annually and actually gets some support from private sponsors (mostly in-kind). The rooms of the "Ausstellungsstrasse" were no longer enough this year.

## KULTURNETZ HERNALS/ Kunst Macht/ TATORT Hernals 2011

Hernals, 1170 Wien



*Kulturnetz Hernals* is a very new initiative from Vienna's district of Hernals, that had its first appearance in summer of 2011, with a festival *TATORT Hernals*.

In fact, the initiative started in 2010, when a group of artists and cultural workers came together with the District Urban Development office and started thinking of various possibilities for cultural action in the district.

Hernals is a part of the town that is away from the centers of culture and art, that has significantly different population income and education average than that of some more central districts. Also, the real estate and economy of the district are facing hard times, as the main street features ever more empty store fronts.

This, however made the district a part of the town that is affordable enough for artists to have their studios there. In spite of many artists working and living there, there was no sense of artistic community, as there was no communication and exchange among individuals.

*Kulturnetz Hernals* was an initiative to map out the artistic potential of the district and create a network where the dialog can be made possible. The idea of the festival was an excuse to gather all stakeholders and get connected and start collaboration. When the dialog with the district office started, four individuals stood out as most interested and serious about this project. Visual artist Christoph Schwarz, gallerist Roman Lechner, musicians Tobias Leibetseder, and Gernot Manhart weren't acquainted with each other before this, but they shared the interest and the enthusiasm about this project that brought them together. These four artists formed a core group that would lead and coordinate the project. They founded a legal body- an association called *Kunst Macht*- so that they would be able to apply for public

funding. These four artists then coordinated dialog with all of the other interested parties, in order to get as many inputs for the establishing of the artistic network of Hernals, as well as for the project of the festival. They managed to assure some minor private sponsorships, but their biggest partner was the district, from which they got the biggest support – not in finances, but mainly in logistics and in-kind (free use of space, mediation with shop owners, working hours, etc.).

The festival took place in July 2011 and was a big success. Everybody was surprised with the positive feed back and audience participation. It included all forms of art and was happening in public space, as well as in artists' studios, and in unexpected places, such as commercial shop windows. The most important thing was the establishing of the artist network and its virtual platform, that will serve as a place of communication and exchange.

Many things about running this first festival were not planned out in advance and weren't thought through. The lack of time and of the experience made this an ad-hoc improvisation, that had the atmosphere of an experiment. The excitement of the novelty and the enthusiasm were the only motivation for the enormous amount of personal resources, energy and time that the core group put in, without any expectations for compensation. However, now that the first project is over, they are starting to discuss the possible ways of doing something similar in a sustainable way. Everybody agrees that they wouldn't be able to once again invest so much that their artistic and personal life would suffer.

They hope to be able to get more support for the continuation of the project- this time they would apply to city culture office and to the ministry. However, this still doesn't assure honorariums for the organizers. They are also hoping to be able to get a permanent space they could use as a base for the organization, that would also be a communication center and an event place.

The plans for the future of the project are not clear yet and it remains to be seen in which way it will develop. There are however, two different, maybe opposite currencies that are evident among the core group. One is a tendency toward professionalization – making the project more efficient and sustainable; and the other is decentralization- insisting on keeping the project open for as many new people joining with their input, and cherishing the diversity of visions and ideas. These two tendencies have to be carefully balanced, as one could easily negate the other.

## **PERISCOPE Kulturinitiative**

Sterneckstraße 10, Salzburg



An alternative gallery space, Periscope, was founded in Salzburg in 2006 by a group of four artists who knew each other from art school, and who had a need to create a circle with a warm, supportive atmosphere.

Periscope as an idea is a lot about communalism and about creating a network – it wants to reverse to some extent the effect of the art market that pulls the artists into singular positions, to fight for themselves against the others. This is why Periscope is conceptually opposed to the model of commercial gallery where the focus is not on the artist, or on the community around the project, but on the customer.

It started as a very informal project, where the Periscope four would show their work and work of their friends- the events were organized irregularly, spontaneously, and according to interest and need. There was no public support in the form of funding what so ever, for the first two years. Today, Periscope has a yearly program and is supported by public grants (they organize several major exhibitions that are tightly planned in advance, and in between they organize numerous shows and events that are more open to spontaneous reactions). The four artists have given up their regular jobs in order to be able to commit time to the project (on top of their artistic work, which is primary)- and even though they are struggling, they are glad they are doing something they really enjoy. They feel that the evolution towards a model that is more official and regular was a natural process. However, they wouldn't like to function as culture institutions because they would like to avoid the narrow focus and narrow, specialized audience. Also, they would like to keep the project close to their personal needs

and instincts, and maintain the budget fairly small in order to keep the level of flexibility they have now.

In the co-op, the division of work happened spontaneously, according to each person's skills and ability. Decisions are made always together, in an absolute consensus. Periscope tries to stay as open as possible for the input and involvement of other people- other artists, friends and collaborators. The focus is on the process- and so, the growth, evolving and development of the co-op is somewhat of an art-project for the four artists, and is being observed and contemplated a lot among them.

Their attitude is that the future development will organically follow out of the state in which the co-op is now, and will be a reaction on the changes in the environment and changes in their lives and carriers. Nothing is impossible, but it can't be predicted in advance.



## **LOVE\_ project**

Altmüttergasse 5 / 3, 1090 Wien



Off-space LOVE\_ was started in January 2010 and it is situated in Vienna's ninth district (a bit away from the artistic hot-spots). This is a studio space, gallery, project room and a concert venue in one. It is a joint project of as much as nine young artists (Clemens Denk, Martin Sturm, Karin Mayr, Philipp Hanich, Andrea Lüth, Kathi Reidel Höfer, Gerlinde Wallner, Bernhard Weber, Thomas Weinberger), and this was also the difference to other off-spaces.

“Two or three people can do everything much clearer - as a collective we come to completely different conclusions. That is exciting”.

The collective describes the project as a personal space- to show their art, art of the artists that they like and find interesting, and discuss things the way they like it. “When one takes things into their own hands, one has much more freedom. Otherwise, the possibilities are very limited. There was actually never too many good spaces for art”. Project LOVE\_ is also somewhat of a reaction to the general situation considering exhibition possibilities for emerging artists.

The project is located in a rented flat of an apartment building. Thanks to tolerant neighbors, there were no complaints so far. (More than one off-space moved or was closed for these reasons)

There was 16 exhibitions in this space, in the first year of the project. Also, other innovative forms take place:

"Drawing hour" is a re-occurring event where the collective gathers to draw together- and everybody is invited to join- no matter how good they are. So, it's a place of production and a social installation, at the same time.

"Jukebox" is a completely new concept : LOVE\_ invites people of different backgrounds to organize an evening event around their favorite music record.

There is also an established collaboration and exchange with other off-spaces from Vienna, Linz and Innsbruck.

Criteria for choice of the artists is personal taste in arts and people. This is the freedom one is free to admit to when they are independent. All decisions are made by the whole collective- and, since there are sometimes different views- this is done very carefully, with a lot of discussion.

The space is financed for the most part by the collective. They also get a small support from the city office for culture and they have two sponsors for drinks.

The budget is very limited - so there are no honorariums for the artists (having a show). On the other hand- the lack of money produces some interesting solutions- for instance there's a possibility to financially support the project in a form of a membership.

The first-year evaluation resulted in the decision to go further.

“The whole ordeal is exhausting, time-consuming, and high-maintenance... but it's worth it.”

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **Questionnaire for Artist-Run Initiatives**

#### **1. Describe your organization/group shortly:**

How would you describe shortly the activities of your organization/ group?

How did you start this initiative? How did it develop?

How did you meet/ get together with the rest of the team?

What is it that you would like to do/ to change?

Who benefits from what you do?

Who is your audience?

How long do you think this initiative will last/ will be needed?

#### **2. What kind of organization/ group are you?**

What is your legal status?

Why did you choose this model? What where your other options?

What is the existing legal framework for such organizations?

What are the limitations and what are the opportunities?

Do you have offices?

(Do you pay the rent or you have some kind of agreement with the building-owner?  
If yes, what kind of deal is it?)

Do you have a bank account?

Do you have salaried employees?

do you have a clear division of responsibilities?

Do you have clear procedures of operation: the way decisions are being made, the way you communicate among each-other, the way you admit new members, the way you choose a representative, the way you resolve a conflict... ?

Do you have a yearly calendar of activities or do you take action when needed, or when there is a possibility..?

Your social capital (contacts and connections)- where does it come from and how do you expand it?

Who do you (hope to) collaborate with?

Who would be your ideal partner(s) /supporter(s) in an initiative like this?

How would you like this to develop in the future?

What is your vision- how does this thing you are running look in 5 years? 10?

What if you get tired?

### **3. Describe your vision of the current state of the independent scene in your town**

Are artist-run-initiatives started more often nowadays, or less often than 10-20-30 years ago (in your opinion)?

What do you think has changed (or not) in cultural climate that has caused this?

What are the possible models of organization/ of operation that artists use (that you have heard of)?

Do you know your rights and obligations as an organization of this kind?

Do you know where to get legal advice if you need it?

(Why) Do you think such initiatives are needed by the society other than the artists?

How do you think the environment for such initiatives is different in Austria/ Serbia and elsewhere?

What do you think can be made better/ more efficient/ more helpful?

Projections of future in this respect?

## APPENDIX 4

### Excerpts from Legislation of Republic of Austria<sup>52</sup> concerning Status of the Artist and Support for the Arts

#### Austria- Historical perspective: cultural policies and instruments

The post war-attitude toward culture changed with the general European politicisation and radicalisation of the 1960s and 1970s. The cultural vanguard became a political factor and was employed as a tool to prepare for the upcoming political changes in Austria, i.e. the Social Democratic government of Bruno Kreisky, which promised modernisation and reform in all areas including a concept of culture embracing all expressions of life. Moreover, cultural policy was regarded as a variation of social policy.

A package of cultural policy measures of the Federal Ministry of Education and the Arts was adopted in 1975. Its main goals were to improve the cultural habits and education levels of the public and to reduce the educational gap between city-dwellers and the rural population. A culture service (Öks) operated by the Ministry was established to create contact between artists and culture workers on the one hand and schools, adult education establishments, companies and cultural centres on the other. This marked a turning point insofar as it launched a dialogue between governing bodies and artists and art mediators.

The decisive step towards the current system of arts promotion was taken up at this time, and was gradually extended and refined over the next 25 years, including the establishment of various advisory bodies (incl. boards, juries and commissions and specialised curators). Such bodies were given some decision-making powers in an effort to make the arts support-system more democratic. Intermediary bodies were also established, supervised by the government and to some extent anchored in private business.

In the 1980s, the country was seized by a veritable culture boom in the sense that more and more events were organised and cultural spending increased approximately seven times the annual amount of the past 25 years. In general, the reason for the increase was due to the support for large-scale events, numerous festivals and major exhibitions.

Towards the end of the 1980s, cultural policy priorities shifted and discussions became focused on issues of cultural sponsorship and privatisation. This was at a time when there was a renewed grand coalition between the Christian Democratic People's Party (ÖVP) and the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and against the background of the major political changes of 1989. In 1988, public support for the arts was enshrined in a federal law: the *Federal Arts Promotion Act*. While public discussion on privatisation was initially of marginal significance in the 1980s, it became a hot topic in the latter years of the 1990s, especially in fields such as musicals, popular operas and museums which - judged by international standards - were able to raise a greater share of funds in the market than the more avant-garde art forms.

Between 1998 and 2006 all cultural-policy agendas were in the hands of the State Secretary for Art and Culture, who was part of the office of the Federal Chancellor.

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<sup>52</sup> based on the country profile in the Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe; Austria  
<http://www.culturalpolicies.net>

In 1998, a discussion on the re-structuring of cultural policy was initiated. The Chancellor and the Secretary of State for arts affairs commissioned a working group of experts to analyse Austria's federal cultural policies and administration. Proposals were elaborated to modernise and improve public cultural administration / cultural management (*Weissbuch*, 1998). Although these proposals were widely discussed in the press and among cultural policy makers and artists, they were not implemented.

Another major political shift was brought about in 2000 with the building of a coalition between the People's Party (ÖVP) and the right-wing Freedom Party. This political shift encountered fundamental criticism from many social, political and cultural forces, nationally and internationally. In general, the cultural policy objectives of the coalition, re-elected in 2002, have been focussed on restructuring public support for culture (outsourcing of public cultural institutions and reduction of the cultural budget). Greater emphasis has been placed on prestige culture, the creative industries and the promotion of economically oriented projects (such as festivals to increase tourism). Only with the next government in 2007, which was formed by a grand coalition (ÖVP / SPÖ), was a separate ministry for art and culture created again - the Ministry for Education, Art and Culture (BMUKK). Apart from responsibility for the media (BKA) and international culture (BmeiA), all art and cultural agendas are now re-united under one roof. After the new elections in 2008, the Social Democrat Minister of Culture placed emphasis on the themes of cultural provision, internationalisation, promotion of the new generation of artists, promotion of contemporary art, new media and film and the promotion of participation to the arts and culture (e.g. through the reduction of admission prices among other things).

## Austria -General legislation

### Allocation of public funds

The *Federal Arts Promotion Act*, adopted in 1988 (amended in 1997 and 2000), includes the provision that the federal budget must include the requisite funds for public arts promotion and that the social situation of artists and the framework for private sponsoring need to be improved. The law stipulates that promotion has to be directed mainly at "contemporary art, its spiritual changes and its variety" and lists the fields to be supported by way of production, presentation, dissemination and preservation of works and documents. Facilities that serve this purpose have to be similarly supported. The law also lists individual measures that may be taken (e.g. funds, grants, acquisitions, loans, commissions, prizes awarded).

An advisory system has been operating since 1973 and includes specialised bodies such as juries to make decisions on the granting of funds. Mention was also made in the Act of the potential conflicts of responsibility that needed to be avoided between the federal and state governments, stating that the principle of "subsidiarity" must be employed. The federal government, nevertheless, supports activities and projects at regional or local levels that are "of supra-regional interest or suitable to be exemplary, of an innovative character or which are promoted within the scope of a single promotion programme".

With the exception of Vienna, every *Bundesland* has its own *Cultural Promotion Act*, most of which were implemented during the 1980s.

The *Arts Support Act (1981)* states that in addition to the monthly radio and television fees, an appropriate contribution (monthly EUR 0.48) to support contemporary arts is to be raised and distributed between the state and the *Bundesländer* (provinces) on a 70:30 ratio. 85 per cent of the state share is given to the Arts Department of the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture; the rest is spent on heritage protection and museums.

Since 2000, further contributions have been dedicated to the social security insurance fund.

### **Labour laws**

Alongside the growing rate of unemployment, the structure of employment in Austria has changed considerably in recent years. For example, the number of people working under a *freier Dienstvertrag* (self-employed contract of service) has risen by more than 150% since 1997. At the end of 2008, the figure was approximately 25 900. It is similar for people working under a *Werkvertrag* (contract for work) - or "new" self-employed: here the number almost quadrupled between 1998 and 2002, from 7 700 people to 30 300; at the end of 2008, there were 44 000. Generally, all freelancers fall outside the system providing entitlements and protective measures envisaged by the general *Austrian Labour Law*. Since 1 January 2008, however, *freier Dienstnehmer* have had unemployment insurance.

### **Social security frameworks**

For a long time there were no specific regulations to ensure that social security provisions for artists reached across all professional fields.

The *Employment and Social Security Law Amendment Act* (1997) produced an initial change: up until 1997, artists had widely differing social security coverage, depending on their professional status, nature of labour relations and field of work. This amendment generally regulated labour conditions and required contracts for all freelance workers in the form of either a *Werkvertrag* (contract for work) - also called the "new" self-employed, a term that describes one person enterprises without a trade licence - or a *freier Dienstvertrag* (self-employed contract of service), depending on the nature of the work (people who work under the *freier Dienstvertrag* have more social protection than the self employed, but less than the employed).

Following this amendment, anyone earning over 6 453 EUR per year was forced to pay social security insurance (24% of annual *Werkvertrag* profit, 17.5% of *Dienstvertrag* income). Artists were exempt from this law until the end of 2000 and were not obliged to pay social security insurance. Those who chose to pay the insurance could apply to the above mentioned funds, like *Künstlerhilfe Fonds* to help cover the costs of their social security fees.

Since January 2001, freelance artists have been given the same treatment as other self-employed professionals. Under certain conditions, a pension supplement is paid within the framework of the Social Security Insurance Fund for Artists. Based on the study "On the social situation of artists in Austria", which the Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture commissioned in 2008, and on a working conference following publication in 2009, an inter-ministerial working group has drafted further amendments to the law and proposed measures to improve the situation of artists, which should be implemented in the near future.

### **Tax laws**

In Austria, only an estimated 1.94% of the overall cultural funding is supplied by the private sector despite the existence of a "Sponsors' Ordinance" regulation adopted by the Federal Ministry of Finance in 1987. Under this regulation, an enterprise / entrepreneur is granted a tax break on expenses for sponsoring cultural events. The ordinance lists various criteria that must be fulfilled in order to qualify for the tax break (sponsoring must, for example, be in the form of an advertisement). This regulation only allows for a very small amount of

expenditure to be tax deductible; however, plans for the introduction of new legislation, which has long been discussed, have been announced.

A study commissioned by the Arts Department of the Federal Chancellery was concerned with the effects of these planned tax breaks on the purchase of art objects (*Österreichisches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (Wifo), 2002*). Regarding the benefits of these tax breaks, the study estimated that the market potential of private households and enterprises is between 50 and 70 million EUR.

On the basis of an amendment to the *Federal Arts Promotion Act* (1988) in 1997, certain public subsidies are now tax free, retrospectively to 1991.

*Amendments to the Tax Law in 2000* provide that an estimated 12 per cent (not more than 8 725 EUR per annum) of artists' / authors' income is tax-deductible. Furthermore, their (often irregular) incomes can be spread over three years (income averaging). Also in 2000, tax privileges for foreign artists taking up residence in Austria were introduced: foreign creative artists can now apply for the partial or full cancellation of tax liabilities in Austria that are in excess of tax liabilities in their country of origin if their establishment of residence serves to advance art in Austria and if there is public interest in their work.

A new legal incentive was introduced in October 2002 which stipulates that donations made to museums (to important country-wide private museums, as well as to federal museums) are tax deductible. There are two tax rates under the *Austrian VAT Law (1994)*, one at 20% and a reduced rate at 10%. The reduced rate applies to turnover related to artistic activities, cinema, theatre and concert tickets, museums.

### **Austria -Legislation on culture**

Specific federal regulations or Acts include:

*Allocation of State Subsidies Act (1977);*

*Federal Arts Promotion Act (1988, amended in 2000);*

*Laws on the Promotion of Culture* have also been adopted by the federal *Bundesländer*, with the exception of Vienna.

In addition to direct public support for the arts and culture, Austrian legislation provides for a number of important instruments of indirect support for the arts. This refers to various legal provisions of social policy and fiscal policy, the system of social insurance for artists, measures taken in the field of labour market management, copyright legislation (both direct and indirect payments such as library royalties), the encouragement of private sector support for the arts by means of tax exemptions, tax deductions for private donations and for arts sponsorship, as well as promotion of art-works for buildings financed with public money.

### **Visual and applied arts**

Generally, the *Federal Arts Promotion Act* stipulates that promotion has to be directed mainly at "contemporary art, its spiritual changes and its variety" in the fields of literature, performing arts, music, visual arts, photography, film, video and experimental art forms Under the *Federal Arts Promotion Act*, the government purchases works by contemporary fine artists as a support measure. The administration of this collection - Federal Artothek - which contains more than 33 000 objects was contracted out in 2002; the federal government remains the owner of the collection itself.

## APPENDIX 5

NIN Magazine review of INEX Film initiative

СКВОТОВАЊЕ



КОНТЕКСТ КОЛЛЕКТИВ

МЕТА СКВОТЕРА: НАПУШТЕНИ И ЗАПУШТЕНИ ЈАВНИ ПРОСТОРИ ГРАДА

# Уметничка герила

Да је потреба за простором слободним за деловање и изражавање још актуелна и реална, показује недавно покренута "Експедиција Инекс филм", самоорганизована колективна акција употребе друштвене својине

АНА КАЛАБА

**X**иљаде демонстраната су почетком године покушале да одбране један од последњих и најпознатијих сквотова у Берлину, Фридрихштајн. Није им додуше успело, било јој и повређених и ухапшених, а светске агенције су из сата у сат преносиле детаље овог уличног рата наводећи да је сукоб око 2.500 полицијаца са демонстрантима оживео сећања на немире из 1990. године који су

довели до пада локалне власти. У Амстердаму је донедавно сквотирање дуго било легално, као на крају и све остало, а када је донет закон којим је уселењавање у напуштене зграде постало незаконито, крајем прошле године избио је хаос на улицама, тако да је полиција "решавала ствар" сузавцима, воденим топовима и булдожерима. Паралелно, из Италије стијку вести да сквотирање потпуно губи своју супкултурну ноту и да се све више "нормалних" породица опредељује за овај животни стил због преви-

соких цена станова, док Барселона још на овај начин одржава репутацију истинског центра урбане културе – наводно има више од 200 сквотова у граду.

У међувремену, Београд још чека свој први прави сквот. Упркос свом инсистирању на отворености, креативности и узбудљивом културном животу, ниједан јавни простор није заиста препуштен младима.

Није да није било покушаја, али сваки се релативно брзо завршавао обесхрабрујућим



**АКЦИЈА: ЧИШЋЕЊЕ КАО ПОЧЕТАК ДРУШТВЕНОГ АКТИВИЗМА ...**

потезима надлежних органа и прелазио у легенду.

Но, да је потреба за простором слободним за деловање и изражавање још актуелна и реална, показује недавно покренута *Експедиција Инекс филм*, самоорганизована колективна акција употребе друштвене својине.

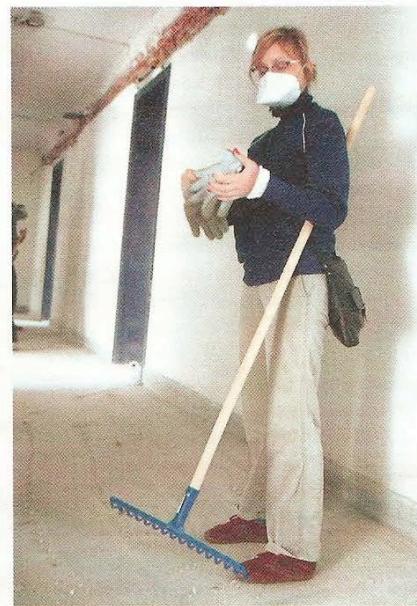
Мета је некадашња зграда Инекс филма која се годинама распада у Вишњичкој улици, а идеја "употреба заједничке инфраструктуре за потребе савремене колективне производње и размене знања, културних и активистичких садржаја".

"*Експедиција Инекс филм*" је покренута као одговор на велику потребу за аутономним просторима деловања за велики број уметничких, али и других, што формалних удружења грађана - организација, тако и неформалних група. Сведоци смо да као последица лоших политика у нашим градовима постоји значан потенцијал у облику неискоришћених, напуштених простора и идеја нам је била да један такав простор приведемо намени. Како се ова некада моћна фирма и сама бавила културном продукцијом и кинематографијом и како је део некадашње друштвене својине,

сматрамо да имамо морално право да овај захтев истакнемо. Што се формалног права тиче, предлажемо држави дијалог са циљем изналажења решења за многе уметничке групе које имају потребе за простором, а могле би их намирити коришћењем ових жртви транзиције", каже за НИН Добриваја Веселиновић из "Грађанских иницијатива".

**Од зграде Инекс филма** још се назире само костур и гомиле отпада, иако су одржане већ две акције чишћења. Успут, у целу причу укључило се много екипа спремних да се ангажују на овом пројекту, па је тако ходницима Инекс филма после дужег времена одјекнула музика, а никле су и прве зидне слике. Иначе, удружење КУРС покренуло је пројекат осликања и трансформације ходника на првом спрату у галерију зидних слика. Како је најављено, поставка на зидовима ће се мењати, а сваки пут ће се презентовати осам уметника на осам зидова.

У складу са "задатом темом", Контекст колектив је у склопу пројекта Борба за аутономни простор овде организовао изложбу и презентацију кампање Светско комунално наслеђе коју су покренули Рена Ридл и Владан



**... И УМЕТНИЧКО ПРЕРУШАВАЊЕ ПРОСТОРА**

КОНТЕКСТ КОЛЛЕКТИВ

Јеремић у циљу афирмишења архитектуре модернизма и квалитета становаша какав су пружали простори из тог периода.

Једна просторија је "адаптирана" у алтернативни биоскоп и ту је, на пример, могла да се види пројекција филмова с прошлог издања Микро фестивала аматерског филма у организацији Микроарта, као и видео-рад Глутин Владимира Ђеличића о затвореној фабрици коштаног брашна у Падинској Скели, која је постала неконтролисана депонија животињских лешева.

Централна "сала" послужила је као изложбени простор, мада су сви констатовали да би била идеална и за свирке.

Изгледа да ће бити и тога, пошто има и даљих планова, а зграда је огромна, запуштена и потпуно отворена за различите интервенције.

„Догађајима које планирамо да изведемо у овом простору циљ нам је да почнемо да свакодневно користимо ову зграду. Свака заинтересована група предлаже независне пројекте који у тренутку извођења бивају подређени заједничком циљу - поновном оживљавању Инекс филма. У наредном периоду фокус ће бити на даљем оспособљавању самог објекта кроз радне акције чишћења. Како је сам простор јако руиниран велика „битка“ нам тек престоји око увођења струје и воде, али и на „фронту“ поправки столарије - истиче Веселиновић.

Иначе, у оквиру кампање „Отворено о јавним просторима“ покренута је веб мапа која омогућава свим заинтересованима да мапирају неискоришћене и напуштене

## ШТА ЈЕ СКВОТ?

Сквотирање је запоседање простора без дозволе власника. Идеја сквотирања подразумева ревизију концепта приватне својине, која не значи њено укидање, али подразумева укидање њене свемоћи и уводи обавезе власника својине у односу на заједницу... Сквотови се најчешће користе за становаша или као јавни простори тј. друштвени центри, а неретко се њихови садржаји преклапају – они су и места за живот и простори за испољавање друштвености. Некада безимене зграде, сквотирањем постају култна места за омладину

Дамјан Павлица, Сквотерски покрет

просторе који би могли да послуже за сличне пројекте ([www.javniprostori.org](http://www.javniprostori.org)).

Како је истакнуто, кампања се одвија у два правца - "један представља директну сарадњу са организацијама цивилног друштва и локалним омладинским групама са циљем подизања свести о овој теми и добијању конкретних простора на коришћење, а други јесте развијање дијалога и сарадње са институцијама у вези са прикупљањем информација, процедура и примера добре праксе".

Ова институционализована кампања могла би да буде добар корак, пошто примера добре праксе, а још мање дијалога, баш и нема у релативно краткој историји београдских сквотова.

**Сквотирање се код нас** као вид активизма појавило почетком новог миленијума, са уобичајеним кашњењем од пар деценија у односу на "златно доба" европских сквотова, када се у њима скупљала енергија за велике друштвене покрете и промене. Тада нам то с једне стране изгледа и није било толико потребно, а с друге, били смо вероватно и довољно изоловани у односу на целу ту причу.

Ипак, као резултат искуства младих који су се по Европи сусретали са оваквим формама удрживања, у Београду је од 2003. никло неколико оваквих пунктоva који су више претендовали на статус културног центра него свратишта за бескућнике.

Ребел Хаус важи за први београдски сквот. Добио је име по надимку Саше Пре-дића, Ребел Мауса, који се први уселио, ту су се организовале акције и журке, водила се кампања за бесплатно образовање, "понуда" за стране туристе и подршку је избачена и на највећем светском сајту [www.squat.com](http://www.squat.com), али сквот је опстао свега неколико месеци - с доласком зиме станаре су "изгорули" наркомани, а њих полиција, да би 2007. кућа изгорела у пожару. Симболично, репер Марчело је управо у Ребел Хаусу снимио спот за свој хит *"Кућа на промаји"*.

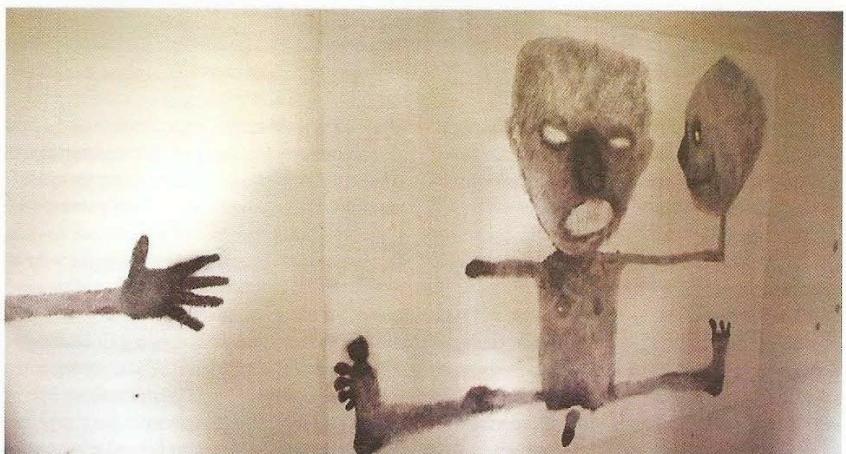
Још једна кућа нашла се "на промаји" - испод Бранковог моста као седиште АКЦ Акције. Ова екипа је оптимистично покушала да оде корак даље и, након акција сређивања и чишћења, иступи са пројектом легалног прерастања у алтернативни културни центар. У општини Стари град су их љубазно дочекали, а већ сутрадан им одговорили у виду печаћења простора и претње затвором.

Сквотери који су за своју базу били изабрали "кућу у Пролетерски бригада", једноставно су се нашли на погрешном месту у погрешно време - у згради преко пута Демократске странке уочи убиства премијера. С проглашењем ванредног стања овај простор напуштен је као ризичан.



БУЂЕЊЕ ЗИДОВА: ОЖИВЉАВАЊЕ ЗГРАДЕ ИНЕКС ФИЛМА

ТОРАН СРДАЧЕВ



СКВОТ: КУЛТНО МЕСТО МЛАДИХ

### ТРЕЋА РАДНА АКЦИЈА

Трећа радна акција у оквиру Експедиције Инекс филм одржаваће се 11. јуна. "Циљ нам је да очистимо све преостале просторије, ослободимо се гомиле шута у дворишту, направимо дил са комшијама и попијемо које пиво", истичу организатори. Планирано је да се тим "Фукушима" концентрише на чишћење просторије са песком ("пешчана сала"), тим "Чернобиљ" ће чистити преостале горње просторије, а тим "Three mile island" преостале сале у приземљу. Како је најављено, истог дана доћи ће и мајстори да наместе стакла и врата на "пешчаној сали".

**КУДРУЦ** (Културно друштвени центар) у Краља Милутина је можда најдуже функционисао и на више од годину дана "помирио" панкере, рокере, растамане, хип-хопере, музичаре и циркусанте, кловнове и радикалне активисте. Спонтано је испунио све услове правог, европског сквота - била је реализована "бесплатна радња" у којој се разменjuју старе ствари, делила се "храна солидарности" - бесплатна вегетаријанска кухиња, организовале су се музичке радионице и журке, покренута је кампања за легализацију мари-

хуане, обезбеђиван смештај за авантурите из иностранства... Зграда је срушена 2007. године, заједно са легендарним ЦКЦ-ом (Цепни културни центар), сквотираним кафићем, и ромским дечјим сквотом који су се налазили у истом дворишту.

Данас, можда би евентуално још зграда БИГЗ-а могла да се провуче као сквот, да није реч о приватном власништву и згради у којој "станари" дебело плаћају закуп просторија.

А то никако није поента приче о сквотовима.

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## *Vita of the Author*

MARIJA SKOKO was born in 1979 in Smederevska Palanka, Serbia.

She graduated from High School for Design in Belgrade in 1998.

In 2003 she finished her Diploma study graduating from Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade, Painting department.

In 2003 she got a scholarship for a study in International School of Arts in Umbria, Italy- where she then was invited to come back in 2004 and 2005 to work as an assistant.

In 2004/05 she completed one year of Magister study in *Art and Media Theory* at the University of Arts in Belgrade.

In 2006/07 she completed several art courses at the School of Visual Arts in New York, USA. In 2008-2010 she attended sculpture course *3-D Workshop* at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade, supervised by professor Mrđan Bajić.

In 2010-11 she enrolled a Master Course in *Culture Management and Culture Policy* at the University of Arts in Belgrade.

Since 2008, Marija is active at presenting and exhibiting her work on the local artistic scene. She showed her work in Dom Omladine Gallery, KC Grad Gallery, Mixer Festival, ULUPUDS Gallery, among others. She is a member of artist union ULUS since 2011.

So far, Marija has worked as an assistant for sculpture at the International School of Arts in Italy, as a drawing teacher in High School for Design in Belgrade, and in High School for Arts and Crafts in Šabac.

She was also active writing texts, reviews and critiques, that were published in magazine Likovni Život and on SeeCult portal. As an associate of TKH Center for Performing Arts, her reviews were featured in TKH magazine and on Radio Beograd, Treći Program.

As a part of her Master course in Culture Management, Marija spent two months in Vienna, Austria, on a KulturKontakt scholarship, doing an internship at WUK (Werkstätten und Kulturhaus, Wien) in order to get some professional experience in management of independent art centres.

Her language expertise includes advanced knowledge of English, written and spoken, and intermediate knowledge of Italian and German languages.