



# Imagining the Public

The Status and challenges  
of the Independent Cultural  
Actors in Armenia, Georgia,  
Moldova and Ukraine

A publication by the SPACES project  
Edited by Nataša Bodrožić  
with Kateryna Botanova, Nora Galfayan,  
Nini Palavandishvili and Vladimir Us



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**SPACES - From Art  
in Public Spaces  
to Participative  
Cultural Policies**

## Heidi Dumreicher, Ina Ivanceanu

Enhancing civil society processes and revitalizing public spaces as places for free expression, social encounter and shared responsibilities: between 2011 and 2014, the SPACES project with its team of curators invited international and local artists to develop projects in urban public spaces in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The project explores the concept of the “cultural public sphere”<sup>1</sup> as a critical tool for communicating messages that goes beyond cognition and combines the notion of public debate and democratic representation in terms of politics and policy with aesthetics and emotion, that is, affective matters. This stands in contrast to the prevailing “economist cultural policy” – the reduction of cultural policy to economics.

The cultural policy paper that you have in your hands is the result of three years of policy research carried out under the leadership of the Croatian SPACES partner Slobodne veze/Loose Associations, of Zagreb. It traces and maps independent cultural actors and emerging contemporary cultural and artistic practices in Chişinău, Kyiv, Tbilisi and Yerevan, and invites the reader to explore this new, dynamic cultural field. The SPACES partners proceed to present collectively-drafted policy recommendations for the four project countries and the region.

The SPACES partners developed this paper as a contribution to improved cultural governance in Eastern Central Europe, paying special attention to the issue of the shrinkage of public spaces and ways to resist it.

The authors hope to inspire both independent cultural actors and political decision makers, and to call attention to the need towards reforming cultural policies – in terms of strategic orientation, the transparency of activities, and the recognition and valorisation of the contribution made by independent artists and cultural workers in shaping the future of their countries and the whole region.

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1 Jim McGuigan in Nataša Bodrožić: *Injecting Self-Knowledge into Aesthetics: Two Decades of Reinventing Cultural Practice through Institutionalized Friendship, SPACES Cultural Public Sphere in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine*, ed. by Bodrožić/Palavandishvili, Verlag Bibliothek der Provinz, 2014.

# Emerging Cultural Landscapes



This paper arises from the need to study the phenomenon of emerging cultural initiatives that have shaped the cultural scenery of the so-called “post-Socialist Europe” in recent decades. In opposition to prevailing market models of cultural exchange, as well as to the notion of culture as a carrier of (national) identity politics, collaborative platforms are emerging. These are carriers of cultural values which transcend commerce and national cultural agendas. They can also be seen as a civic response to the process of globalization in the field of culture.<sup>1</sup> They have been developing in parallel with state cultural institutions, as a sort of institutional critique. These cultural initiatives, which usually gather cultural workers, artists, urban youth and activists, often expand the existing field of the local cultural offerings, introducing socially engaged, experimental, collective (though also individual), progressive cultural practices that go beyond the official cultural repertory.

Cultural policies in the countries covered by the SPACES project (Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) have not stimulated the development of such local initiatives, but the initiatives have developed, over time, into important cultural players, producing relevant cultural discourses that are recognized internationally. They are transformative factors in the presence of a cultural system monopolized by the state’s national identity narratives. The state’s cultural institutions are directly ruled by those currently in power,<sup>2</sup> structurally unchanged since the times before the fall of Communism: highly centralized bureaucratic units with top-down decision-making mechanisms. Although the independent cultural actors have developed a high level of knowledge and expertise in the field of culture, local governmental agencies do not recognize them, as they express different values and often quite critical towards the cultural establishment.<sup>3</sup>

- 1 This refers to technological transformations based on information technology which began in the 1970s in the USA. These transformations greatly influenced the socio-economic processes in the 1980s and 1990s, bringing management flexibility, decentralization, expansion of networks and companies, more flexibility in workplaces, new and cheaper labour forces, etc. The changes affected the field of culture as well, bringing standardisation, within which American culture took the leading position globally and started dominating local cultures. The response to this has been a growing concern for local and the regional counter-expressions. As Dea Vidović wrote in *CLUBTURE, Culture as the Process of Exchange 2002-2007* (Zagreb 2007), the collectives represent a political answer and a point of resistance to globalisation.
- 2 The usual practice is that the ruling party nominates the directors of the cultural institutions, outside of democratic procedures and with no public tender or transparency.
- 3 They are active in a decentralized environment, and they demand the decentralization of all the state’s cultural instruments (planning, legislation, financing) and its measures (tenders, awards, grants).

As a result, individuals and NGOs in the art and culture field suffer from lack of physical spaces and funding, which increases the art scene's fragility and often rendering it invisible to the public. The aim of this paper is to analyze the status and the current challenges that local and newly emerging cultural communities face today, and to detect crucial problem areas that should be addressed in order to improve their positions. The paper is also intended as a tool for negotiation with the respective governments and as an additional argument for recognizing the communities as important subjects in the contemporary socio-cultural dynamics, thus helping to gain support for their activities.

This paper has been conceived within the project Sustainable Public Areas for Culture in Eastern Countries (SPACES), which is supported by the Eastern Partnership Culture Program, which in turn is funded by the EU. The paper has been created in collaboration between four independent cultural organizations from the Eastern partnership countries along with one from the EU: Utopiana.am (Armenia), GeoAIR (Georgia), Oberliht Association (Moldova), and CSM (Ukraine), plus - Slobodne Veze/Loose Associations (Croatia).<sup>4</sup> The project was coordinated by OIKODROM, The Vienna Institute for Urban Sustainability (Austria). Most of the information and findings in this paper are linked to the four capital cities where the vast majority of the independent cultural activities under consideration take place: Chişinău, Kyiv, Tbilisi and Yerevan.

The experiences of the independent cultural sector development in Croatia, its innovative bottom-up approach to policy making, its new institutional models and its theoretical reflections on the topic of newly emerging cultural practices, have served as relevant points of reference and reflection in this paper.

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4 On 1 July 2013, as the SPACES project was underway, Croatia became the 28th member of the EU.

## Methodology / Approach

*Every attempt to create a cultural policy usually faces a twofold challenge: if it strives to articulate itself in response to a demand coming from its political outside, it will betray its cultural task; if it tries to create itself exclusively following a demand from (its cultural) within, it will fail politically. Isn't the only possible way out of this dilemma for a clever cultural policy to carefully navigate between the Scylla of pure politics and the Charybdis of pure culture, concretely, to occupy a middle ground and act as an intermediary between both politics and culture connecting their particular interests and thereby bridging the gap between those two originally separated spheres of social life?*<sup>5</sup>

Since the subject discussed in this paper is a new phenomenon in the cultural field that has neither been fully established, nor recognized sufficiently by the governmental agencies in their respective countries, a standard policy analysis cannot be applied here.<sup>6</sup> In other words, there is no relevant cultural policy document adopted in the aforementioned four countries that addresses the topic of independent culture, neither recognizing its needs nor its contributions to general cultural, social and economic development.<sup>7</sup> This policy area has not been regulated yet, and this paper is one of the attempts to try to put it on the agenda.

This paper uses the existing sources, including research accomplished up until this point, in the area of civil society development (NGOs in culture)

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5 Boris Buden, Birgit Mennel, Stefan Nowotny: *European Cultural Policies: The Perspective of Heterolinguality* (12/2011). Quotation from: <http://eipcp.net/policies/buden-mennel-nowotny/en>, accessed March 2014.

6 According to political scientist A.J. Heidenheimer, the chief goal of the policy analysis is to understand what governments do, how they do it, and what they achieve from it. He suggests four tasks important for such research. First, analyze the scope of the government's intervention. Second, ask why the government does certain things. Answers often include historical reasons and the particular features of the individual states, which are very difficult to analyze and explain objectively. Third, analyze the consequences of governments' actions; this is usually the most obvious one, and it is what counts for the voters, who will, in the end, decide if they will renew their government's mandate. Fourth, judge whether a certain policy area will be regulated at all; in other words, analyze a government's action or inaction in a specific policy field. (In Nina Obuljen: *Why do we need European cultural policies - the impact of EU enlargement on cultural policies in transition countries*, CPRA editions, 2004. The publication is available at [http://www.encatc.org/pages/uploads/media/2004\\_cpri\\_publication.pdf](http://www.encatc.org/pages/uploads/media/2004_cpri_publication.pdf), accessed November 2013.

7 In public speeches by high ranking officials, civil society has always been spoken highly of, for example in the framework of the EaP Ministerial Conference in Tbilisi (July 2013), but there is not enough real commitment or dialogue between the EaP countries' governments and their civil society.

and contemporary art, referring to the four countries in question: Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. However, the main field of interest, the independent cultural sector, is currently involved in creating itself.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, there is a parallel need to support the current processes of self-determination of the field. It is necessary to empower the independent cultural actors, in order for them to achieve higher levels of visibility and stability, and to support dialogues with their governments. At the moment, the independent cultural actors are perceived only partially by their respective governments, and financed only sporadically from the public funds, with no obvious regulations and without the funding procedures being transparent.<sup>9</sup> This paper addresses what the governments do in the field of cultural policy in general, and what the consequences of their actions are on local cultural landscapes, through several interviews with protagonists of the independent culture scene of the four countries in question.

### **In short, this paper has two aims:**

It seeks to contribute to the self-determination, self-conceptualization, self-organization, and visibility of the independent cultural sector.

It seeks to serve as an additional argument for negotiations with the governmental agencies in order to improve the position of the independent culture within the overall cultural field and wider society.

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8 It is important to note that the situation in the four countries in question varies, and hence their cultural scenes are differently developed. For example, Ukraine has the most highly-developed art market, the highest level of professionalization in the art management field, and the highest involvement of private investment in arts and culture, along with the lowest governmental expenditures on culture. For more details, please consult pages referring to the country reports, further on.

9 In Armenia, there is a Contemporary Art Department within the Ministry of Culture, but the term “contemporary” is contested. While for the Ministry, it refers only to the temporal aspect, i.e., including all art that is being produced nowadays, ranging from folk art to fine arts such as painting, sculpture, and the like, for independent cultural actors it implies something broader, indicating a field that stretches across boundaries and disciplines, including conceptual and post-conceptual art practices in the continuous dialogue with (or intervention in) the local context, history, politics. However, recently, there has been a growing interest within the Ministry of Culture of Armenia in the Venice Bienniales – the Contemporary Art Biennial starting in 2011, and the Architecture Biennale starting in 2014. In 2014, for the first time, the Armenian Ministry of Culture assumed the role of Commissioner, and the Minister of Culture officially attended the opening ceremony of the Armenian pavilion. Local cultural actors note the paradox that the Ministry does not support the local contemporary art scene (though they hire independent curators for the Biennial, aware of their competence) but still wants to be properly represented in highly visible contemporary art and architecture showcases (by curators and artists whose work they usually neglect locally).

It contains definitions, contextual descriptions, recommendations for policy makers, and possible scenarios for the development of the third sector in culture. The independent culture sector should be considered as a relevant social actor, a potential partner to the government, in the process of creating more progressive cultural policies.

Finally, it is important to address one more significant fact at this point. While this research was in process, Ukraine underwent major civil unrest, leading to political and governmental change, on the one hand, and a war in the eastern regions and a diplomatic deadlock with Russia, on the other. According to the Ukrainian partner, Kateryna Botanova (CSM Kyiv), all governmental policies are currently going through major reviews and changes, but for the moment it is hard to tell whether the push for reforms and harmonization of national legislation with that of the EU will last and bring real transformation. Nevertheless, at the time of publishing this paper (Autumn 2014), the independent sector is actively claiming its role in the agenda-forming activities of the governmental bodies, including the Ministry of Culture.

## **Reflecting the Role of Culture in EU External Relations**

Before starting to deal with the contextual analysis in the countries gathered within the SPACES project and to develop recommendations for the improvement of the status of the local independent cultural actors, we have to look into the very subject of our task – cultural policy, and what it means in the context of the EU and its neighborhood.

In one of the internal SPACES curatorial team discussions about the formulation of a common concept for the next stage of the SPACES project, one of the curators described the position of a cultural worker from a non-EU country (Georgia) operating within the EU project framework, and the tensions between the local situation and foreign (“European”) expectations. The story she presented through a personal report tackles the problem area of contemporary European cultural policies, which, as Gerald Rauning has written, “in great extent embraced the concept of culturalism and cultural

essentialism of the past, by which culture is seen as a suitable instrument for forming identity, in this case ‘European identity’”.<sup>10</sup>

We should continue exactly along this path, and not criticize the political functionalization of arts and culture, as it is more or less clear that cultural politics always pursues political aims. When analyzing the SPACES project, the intention is to examine how these goals are being attained, and what the processes are that form them. In other words, we can pose the following question: Is the EU exporting cultural articles to the EU neighborhood countries, in which case, the situation is one of verticality, or is culture treated more as a means of trans-cultural exchange, in which case there is the possibility of horizontality?

The table below <sup>11</sup> schematically depicts the two ways the EU manages its external cultural policy, connecting each of the two policy modes with the relevant policy instruments and policy carriers:

**External cultural policies of the EU**

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Logic of Culture Exclusive Club</b>	<b>Logic of Culture Transcultural Exchange</b>
Policy Mode	Differentiation	Trans-territorial
Policy Instruments	Inter-cultural dialogue initiatives, public diplomacy	Trans-cultural network building
Policy Carriers	Institutions	Network organizations

10 Gerald Raunig in *European Cultural Policies 2015 – A Report with Scenarios on the Future of Public Funding for Contemporary Art in Europe*, edited by Maria Lind, Raimund Minichbauer; published by IASPIS and the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (London, Stockholm, Vienna, 2005).

11 Source: <http://eipcp.net/policies/batoramokre/en> accessed February 2014.

1) According to the scientists Jozef Batora and Monika Mokre, the first policy mode, “the logic of the exclusive club,” is based on a historical pattern of differentiating the European self from other entities based on a perceived commonality of culture as the bearer of shared principles and values. “In various guises,” they write, “the logic of an exclusive club continues to be present in the EU’s territorial differentiation from others until today, above all through essentialist accounts and myth building about Europe as a historical cultural unit. This idea also plays with the principle of ‘the temporal Other’ – a political entity which has not yet reached the EU’s stage of political development.”<sup>12</sup> The aforementioned colleague detected this situation in her own experience of dealing with the EU demands through the projects she was involved in, and this claim can be supported by the fact that where she lives, a country outside the EU but in its neighborhood, there is a somewhat asymmetric relationship, including a top-down transfer of EU norms. In short, the role of culture in the EU’s external relations, from this perspective of the exclusive club, “is to generate or maintain the EU’s attractiveness (soft power) as a community with a unique institutional set-up enabling the peaceful and thriving co-existence of diverse national communities.”<sup>13</sup>

2) Batora and Mokre assert that a second policy mode of culture as a means of trans-cultural exchange focuses on its cross-community integrative aspects, as it contributes to the inner-outer dynamic of identity formation through trans-cultural relations. “This basically means that in the relations built on this principle, between the EU and some other territory, the explicit references to ‘EU norms’ are avoided and various interpretations of the directions are allowed. This mode goes in favor of co-evolution between the two entities.”<sup>14</sup> Culture has always been a way to attain certain political goals. The EU is not innocent of this. Moreover, culture plays a significant role in the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), softening it in order to make the EU more attractive to other countries. However, the cultural dimension of CFSP seems to be a field of ambiguous political action and ambivalent political outcomes.

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12 Jozef Batora / Monika Mokre: *Culture in EUropean External Relation; Export Article or Means of Transcultural Exchange?* From <http://eijpcp.net/policies/batoramokre/en>, accessed June 2014.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

In this relation, and in relation to the topic of this paper, it is important to mention one recent phenomenon in the cultural field on the global scale. The development of the networks of the non-governmental culture political actors, especially from the 1990s onwards, dramatically changed the landscape of international collaboration. It involved a large number of transnational organizations, challenging the older modes of cooperation (such as the bilateral logic of cooperation among nation states and their cultural institutes abroad, for example, with its hierarchical flat structures of cooperation). Recently, networks have arisen in such areas as art education, artist in residency programs, contemporary art centers, cultural administration training and others, gathering around questions of common or public space, and forming an important infrastructure for reflection, participation, and political self-organization. Transversal cooperation connecting the field of art with the political movements, i.e., politicizing art and culture as an answer to aggressive economization policies and their attempts of sweeping away the remains of the social state, brings about a wider potential for emancipation. In this direction it is possible to empower local cultural actors, to develop a more emancipated reflection on the EU policies, and to critically examine those policies and how they are “translated” according to the real needs of local non-EU contexts.

It is important to mention that there are many critical voices coming from inside the EU as well, questioning the concept of cultural identity as the only possible way to identify oneself, and noting the significance of such things as gender and class. An emphasis on the cultural differences tends to neglect the social and economic differences that are of crucial importance on the life of the individual. As Monika Mokre has written, “Neither individual nor collective identities are without ambiguities and clearly defined. Quite on the contrary, they consist of different overlapping and conflicting identities that are in constant flux.”<sup>15</sup>

Mokre states that an open and dynamic concept of “cultural democracy” is better adapted to the requirements of the democracy in the European Union than an essentialist understanding of a pre-existing culture as the basis for a

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15 Monika Mokre: *European Cultural Policies and European Democracy* (2006) available at <http://eipcp.net/policies/dpie/mokre/en> accessed June 2014.



European *demos*. According to her, such a concept requires highly ambitious cultural policies that do not have much in common with traditional way of preserving the cultural heritage and warranting a certain amount of freedom for the arts. “Cultural Policy in this sense would mean to lay open existing forms of hegemony, to pave the way for new claims for hegemony, to give those groups and individuals a voice who – due to economic and political domination – have not had one up to now. In short, it means to enable democratic struggle on culture”.<sup>16</sup>

## The Future of Public Funding?

*European cultural policies foster two goals that produce conflicting effects: through state interventions in the name of “democratization” they want to broaden access to cultural goods, but through liberalization, once again in the name of “democratization” they destroy the effects of their own measures and impose limits on the access to culture (Breznik 2004)<sup>17</sup>.*

It is interesting to observe this statement, written long before the financial crisis and its predominantly negative effects on public arts funding. It is a rather good description of the permanent paradox in the EU approach to culture. The recent cuts in the public funding for culture are neither simply the result of the financial crisis, nor are they one of its logical outcomes. Instead, they are a consequence of clear political choices, of the ideological preferences of the political and economic elites who determine the EU’s general political direction. Using the financial crisis to justify a pure free-market system without interference from government,<sup>18</sup> is a way of putting another nail in the lid of the coffin of the social state, which used to be Europe’s pride. The question of the diminishing cultural funding is just another symptom of this broad tendency.

If we look back to the common policies within the EU that impacted culture in the previous decade, including both policies that refer specifically to culture and those that have a more indirect impact on it, a number of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> In Nina Obuljen: Why we need European cultural policies – the impact of EU enlargement on cultural policies in transition countries, CPRA editions, 2004, at [http://www.encatc.org/pages/uploads/media/2004\\_cpri\\_publication.pdf](http://www.encatc.org/pages/uploads/media/2004_cpri_publication.pdf) accessed May/2013.

<sup>18</sup> A standpoint of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and many others.

published studies would show that cultural policies depended on and were influenced by provisions and rules arising from the other spheres of public policy. Topics in this category include:

- Obstacles to the mobility of artists
- Cultural industries
- Analysis of employment opportunities across Europe
- Tax systems
- Copyright
- Liberalization of marketplaces<sup>19</sup>

Even a brief look at the categories above shows that the principle of the economic liberalization prevailed in EU attitudes towards its cultural affairs some time ago, at the expense of the access to culture. This fact is not so surprising if one keeps in mind the general economic and political development in Europe today: the common framework of "liberal democracy" is splitting more and more into liberalism on the one side (promoting rule of law, freedom of market, personal freedoms, human rights, etc.), and the democratic tradition on the other (standing for equality, identity between governing and governed, and popular sovereignty).<sup>20</sup> It seems today that the liberal tradition has completely prevailed over the democratic one, in the present environment of economic neoliberalism<sup>21</sup>.

So the question of public funding is a question of reclaiming the right of access to the arts and of participation in social and cultural life, as a fundamental right of every human being. In the relation to the EU policies, there are beliefs, supported by some campaigns on the European territory that public investment into culture and the arts contributes to the development of a sustainable and a more cohesive Europe.<sup>22</sup>

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19 Nina Obuljen, op. cit.

20 Radical Thinkers Question 10: CHANTAL MOUFFE 'The Democratic Paradox' Verso UK blog, July 17, 2009

21 A current EU culture funding program called "Creative Europe" provides evidence for this claim. If we take a look back at the previous EU culture funding programs, such as "Culture 2000," which was in effect till the end of 2006, and "Culture 2007-2013," we can observe a gradual reduction of objectives such as increasing access to culture for disadvantaged groups in society, educating artists, and the use of the new media, which practically vanished in "Culture 2007-2013" never to return. Today we are witnessing a situation in which cultural support is increasingly under pressure for justification with predictable results. There is more emphasis on functionality, on visibility, on flagship projects etc. Cultural policy based on cultural commons has been completely abandoned in favor of economization and cultural industrialization.

22 <http://www.wearemore.eu/campaign/> accessed May 2013.

The future of public funding is one of the key questions when researching the independent cultural sector in the four post-Soviet countries of the SPACES project. Although the independent cultural sector can be viewed as a “third sector” in culture, the one that stands between the public and the private sphere and the one that depends to a great degree on the enthusiasm (and often self-exploitation) of its actors, who see their role as filling the gaps left open by the public sector. When this sector is in its formative stage, it must be supported by public funds, both local and international ones. Diversification of funding channels cannot by any means replace public funding. Whatever the source of the additional funding for arts and culture can be, public funding is necessary.

In this matter, another type of institution and its funding mechanisms should be considered on the national level, the type very much informed by the concrete context and the recently emerged cultural practitioners and their input from below. In this sense, the independent cultural actors as carriers of new cultural competences and expertise, should be able to work closely with governmental agencies.

The topic of the creation of the new types of hybrid institutions is informed by the best-practice example of Croatia, and is discussed later in this paper.

# **Independent Culture: Definitions**

## What are we Talking about when we Speak of Independent Culture?

The independent cultural scene is a new cultural entity that only started to form in roughly the last two and a half decades, depending on the particular context.<sup>23</sup> It is a formation of non profit, civil associations (NGOs), informal, interdisciplinary groups, artist collectives, and individuals involved in the contemporary cultural production.

The independent cultural scene is inseparable from the context in which it emerges. To understand the scene, we must analyse the local socio-political environment to which it reacts, as well as the crisis of the cultural institutions within the new global conditions that gave rise to the new social and cultural formations.<sup>24</sup>

The independent scene exists parallel to the public, state-supported official culture, represented by the state institutions embodying a structure inherited from the previous period, which underwent little significant transformation in order to meet the demands of a new, changed political, social, economic and technological environment.

**In its broadest sense, the term “independent culture” can refer to all those formations that:**

Are neither set up nor owned by the state, city or third entity;  
they are self-established organizations;<sup>25</sup>

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23 In this paper we address the development of the independent cultural scenes in the post-socialist or post-Soviet countries. Although we may assume that the so-called (informal) civic organizing in culture has its roots in “the underground,” the alternative art scenes of socialist times (from the mid-1970s on), we locate the beginnings of the independent scenes in the post-socialist 1990s, due to the newly-formed economic, socio-political and technological environment. This will be discussed further in the following chapters.

24 As stated earlier, the technological transformations and the formation of the new social conditions affected the manners of production, communication and living. In general, management flexibility, decentralization, the appearance of networks and “flexible” working places instigated numerous re-organizations in the companies, but also engendered numerous dramatic effects in the technological, political, economic, social and cultural life. Although both the positive and negative aspects of these changes can be discussed, their appearance remains a historical fact.

25 While CSM Kyiv developed out of the former Soros Center for Contemporary Art Kyiv, it was revived as an independent citizens’ initiative.

Independently decide upon and manage their own organization;

Financially do not rely on a single source of funding and that make their own decisions on how to allocate available funds within their project activities;

Are non-commercial, driven to conduct experiments and develop society rather than motivated by profit.

These structures are mostly characterized as being dynamic and flexible, and by a direct community approach and a readiness to react quickly with a mixture of professionalism, enthusiasm and voluntary work (which has its negative side as well, reflected in unpaid work and self-exploitation). They are also characterized by the activities developed in the very diverse fields of arts and culture as well by a process of cross-pollination between contemporary arts in all fields, popular culture, contemporary theory, new media and new technologies, and youth culture. They imply a broad social consciousness and are activist in orientation.

## **Why is Independent Culture Important?**

In the words of a 2005 declaration by Independent Culture and Youth in the Development of the City of Zagreb, “the overall development potential of the modern city of today cannot be separated from the human and social capital generated by different practices of self-organized actions of its citizens. Along with the increasingly present consumerist orientation of the urban population, the contemporary city is characterized by the growing space of articulation of different grassroots practices and forms of urban life. Contemporary city life becomes a place of diversity and interpenetration, meeting the multiplicity of interests. Independent culture and a broad range of young people represent the potential for spontaneous urban innovation, which possesses exceptional value not only in terms of improving the quality of urban life, but also as an element of social cohesion and of transformative potential that comes from below. Independent culture and youth usually show high degree of complementarity of interests and synergy effects.”<sup>26</sup>

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26 Independent Culture and Youth in the Development of the City of Zagreb (2005), at <http://www.jedinstvo.info/pozadina/Deklaracija/> accessed January 2014.

This declaration came about after a wide coalition of independent organizations was made and formed a common agenda. It marked the beginning of negotiations with the city of Zagreb for the new organization's recognition. What is interesting here is the merging of the two interconnected sectors, that of the new emerging cultural practices and that of the youth, thus making a wide range of the urban population potentially involved in the activities produced by independent culture, as producers and as audience.

**According to Dea Vidović, the independent cultural practices and the bottom-up initiatives form a dynamic and a heterogeneous field that:**

Shapes the contemporary character of the city

Plays a key role in the transformation of the existing cultural system

Integrates slowly within the dominant cultural matrix by applying the new models of self-organization and tactical networking<sup>27</sup>

Both the independent culture and the youth play a crucial role in the city's development, by producing critical culture and by enriching the cultural landscape of the city. Spontaneous urban innovation, which is the key aspect that contributes to the improvement of the quality of the urban life, should be recognized and supported by the local authorities and policy makers in order for it to stabilize and its practices to proliferate.

Independent culture is marked by the diversity of its content, the development of new organizational models, and the continuing emergence of new actors. When organized sufficiently and taken into account by the governmental agencies, as the Zagreb experience showed, it can be one of the major forces behind innovation in the cultural policy field today.

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27 Dea Vidović in "Razvoj novonastajućih kultura u gradu Zagrebu od 1990. do 2010," PhD thesis (forthcoming)

# **The Position and Challenges of the Independent Cultural Actors: Local Reports**



**Independent cultural scenes, Yerevan / Tbilisi / Kyiv / Chişinău.  
SWOT analysis according to joined findings,  
SPACES Policy Workshop, Tbilisi, 2012.**

**STRENGTHS**

Able to survive  
International and internal networking  
Reputation – established position  
Fundraising capacity /  
experience /access  
Open environment  
Non-hierarchical /  
horizontal communication  
Expertise  
Flexibility  
Innovation  
Collaborative practices  
Social engagement  
Enthusiasm  
Interdisciplinarity  
Professionalism

**OPPORTUNITIES**

Unexplored possibilities  
EU opportunities  
Civic emancipation  
Constant change /  
instability of environment  
New technologies  
Interdisciplinary collaboration  
New generation as future actors  
Inconsistent cultural policy  
Possibilities of social influence

**WEAKNESSES**

Limited operational capacity  
Lack of stability  
Impossibility of long term planning  
Discontinuity of activities  
Lack of spaces  
Inability to earn money or bring in funding  
Absence of common language /  
understanding with the government  
Difficulty reaching other stakeholders  
Lack of visibility  
Lack of strategy in fundraising

**THREATS**

Constant change /  
instability of environment  
Social / economical precariousness  
New technologies  
Inconsistent cultural policy  
Global capitalism  
Personal / professional /  
institutional corruption  
Passivity of cultural scene /  
lack of desire to collaborate  
Lack of understanding / knowledge of  
contemporary art (contemporary art  
is not among cultural priorities)  
Monopolization of cultural funds  
by the Ministry of Culture

During the first SPACES meeting in Tbilisi in June 2012, representatives from all of the four countries in question participated a policy workshop, thus contributing to the joint SWOT analysis of the position of the independent cultural scenes in their own countries. The table on the previous page illustrates the common results of their joint findings:

It is important to note that the independent cultural scenes of the four capital cities involved in this policy research vary in size, level of organization, and degree of professionalism. The four countries share a common cultural history in the USSR which is partially reflected in similar inherited cultural infrastructure. Although we cannot speak of the identical political, social or cultural contexts, the independent cultural actors from Yerevan, Tbilisi, Chişinău and Kyiv report similar challenges in relation to their situations. They say that their greatest strength is their ability to survive turbulent circumstances characterized by lack of local funding, lack of recognition from the local policy makers, and opaque, undefined, or non-implemented cultural policy. They manage to resist the unfavorable climate due to their networking and fundraising capacities, their non-hierarchical operating principles, and their collective working methods. They are motivated primarily by social engagement and a great deal of enthusiasm.

They state that their greatest challenge is the inconsistency of local support, including their governments' lack of cultural strategies, as well as the absence of clearly-defined procedures within their national Ministries of Culture. These factors make it impossible to create long-term plans. It is hard to find spaces for projects, which impairs the continuity of their activities, which in turn makes it hard to reach out to new stakeholders or partnerships.

As part of the cultural policy research within the SPACES project, in the second half of 2013 a questionnaire was launched targeting the cultural operators in the four countries. The aim was to obtain a more precise vision of who constitutes the independent cultural scene at the present moment, and what their concerns are.

**The questionnaire included the following questions:**

How would you define the independent cultural actors (individuals and/or institutions)?

In your opinion, what is their (potential) role in the country's cultural and political development?

Are the independent cultural actors visible in the country's cultural policy?

What are the main five cultural policy characteristics in your country?  
Do you see problems in the current (national) cultural policy priorities?  
What would it be necessary to change?

What cultural policy recommendations can you propose regarding independent culture?

The answers were obtained from nine cultural operators from Ukraine, sixteen from Moldova, and five from Georgia. The Armenian partner conducted 28 interviews and developed a context-based method of mapping respondents' needs. The answers are included in the national reports, on the following pages.

# **The Georgian Report**

## Georgia

Population:	4,497,617 (2012)
Official language:	Georgian (and Abkhazian in the disputed territory of Abkhazia)
Ethnic groups:	83.8% Georgian, 6.5% Azerbaijani, 5.7% Armenian, 1.5% Russian, 2.5% other (2002)
Political system:	Unitary semi-presidential republic
EU relation:	A partner country within the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) since 2004
GDP:	EUR 123 bn (2012)
GDP per capita:	EUR 2,729.3 (2012) <sup>28</sup>
Capital:	Tbilisi

## CULTURAL DATA<sup>29</sup>

### Funding (2010)

Culture as share of total central government spending: 0.50 %

Government expenditure on culture: EUR 40,951,489

Government expenditure on culture per capita: EUR 8.70

Share of spending on culture by central government: 99.50 %

## A selection of national cultural policy objectives

The priorities of the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia for 2011-2014 are:

- Promotion of the art education system
- Building of a positive image of Georgia worldwide
- Promotion of the cultural heritage and improvement of the museum system
- Promotion of various art fields<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> According to [http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc\\_111507.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_111507.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> According to <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/countries.php?pcid=1180>.

<sup>30</sup> According to <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/georgia.php?aid=23&curln=103>.

## The position of the Non-Institutional Cultural Actors in Georgia:

It is rather difficult to trace the beginnings of “civic organizing in the cultural field” of Georgia for several reasons.<sup>31</sup> The first reason lies in the fact that an extensive research on this subject has not yet been undertaken or approached from the proposed point of view. The second reason might be that, according to several local cultural operators,<sup>32</sup> the majority of the local art community currently does not position itself politically, in the sense that they do not publicly manifest their opinions related to the areas of civic or labor organizing, and tend not to question their own status as cultural producers.

There is a general opinion that many within the art community of Tbilisi consider art as a relatively isolated field of individual expression, and thus do not openly join in political debate, at least not from the position of so-called civic engagement.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, there is a community of the art organizations, activists, artists, curators and other individuals whose presence has been visible in the public domain in relation to the recent events pertaining to the preservation of public goods and public space; we refer to activism focusing on the National Scientific Library, Vake Park, Gudiashvili Square, the Sakdrisi-Kachagiani gold mine, and the Khudon Hydro-Electro power station. These groups, who are attempting to influence the governmental policies in relation to public goods issues as well as with the topic of the improvement of the status of the independent cultural operators, constitute the other part of the cultural

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31 In this paper, we use the expression “civic organizing in the cultural field” provisionally, to refer to any voluntary initiative of individuals or a group of citizens, artists or cultural practitioners, which happens outside of the system of the official cultural institutions. This outsider status is an implicit critique of those institutions, very often related to the critique of the larger ideological framework which they inhabit. However, the beginning of the 1990s saw the phenomenon of so-called “confidential communities” of artists, basically groups of friends and colleagues who created temporary structures as a reaction to the collapse of the system of cultural institutions that followed the collapse of the Soviet state. That is why we decided to start our research in the 1980s, tracking the first artistic practices that appeared in parallel to the cultural establishment of that time. For this occasion we can speculate whether all of the artistic actions presented here were inherently, consciously political. However, by placing them in the specific historical and socio-political context when they first appeared, we can address them as such. Unfortunately, due to the profile of this paper and limited resources, we cannot engage in deeper research of the phenomenon, but we hope that the thesis presented here will be tested, challenged, and taken further by local researchers.

32 This opinion is shared by several interviewees.

33 According to the opinion of Nini Palavandishvili.

spectrum. Their activities shape the territory of the new types of the civic engagement, emphasizing the overlapping of culture and politics in its widest sense, i.e., artists and cultural workers being directly involved in questions of broad social relevance.

## History

According to recent research,<sup>34</sup> the first documented attempts of artistic-cultural activities that happened beyond the state's cultural institutions were those related to the members of the art community in Tbilisi at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s.<sup>35</sup> According to Moldovan activist Stefan Rusu, while the society was driven into the democratization campaign promoted by the Soviet Union's media in Georgian society (as in the entire Soviet Union), the most active part of the creative community shifted their interest to the alternative aspects of art production and display. "In fact," Rusu writes, "the artists went outside their spatial intimacy/working spaces and began exploration of urban space beyond conventionality that eventually turned into urban interventions: on the street, abandoned shops and unfinished buildings."<sup>36</sup> This was a beginning of a new agenda in dealing with cultural production in public spaces, developed by the key members of the Georgian art community at the time, including Niko Tsetskhladze, Mamuka Japaridze, Koka Ramishvili, Mamuka Tsetskhladze, Oleg Timchenko, Irakli Charkviani (a musician, composer, and poet), Kote Kubaneishvili (a poet), and Karlo Kacharava.<sup>37</sup>

From today's perspective, one could attribute a political meaning to this artistic "break out" into the urban environment, perceiving the artists as forerunners of public space problematics<sup>38</sup> as proposed by Stefan Rusu.

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34 Stefan Rusu in his text "Tbilisi Guided Tour" (abstract) commissioned for SPACES (2013).

35 Groups like 10th Floor and Marjanishvili Studio started their activities around 1986 (N. Palavandishvili)

36 According to Stefan Rusu's research.

37 Ibid.

38 When describing the Soviet context, the public space concept needs to be re-examined. "The notion of the public sphere, as elaborated in western European and Anglo-American academic discourses, has been largely associated with the emergence of liberalism and civil society. Even those theories that critique Jürgen Habermas's notion of the public sphere for its ignorance of the politics of exclusion and inclusion, nevertheless rely on the notion of the public sphere as an arena in which identity finds representation: the public sphere here is constituted as a battleground for recognition and representation of identities within the already established structures of legitimization. Developed in radically different circumstances from those of Western Europe and North America, in countries where state socialism prevailed, the

Alternately, one could see their work simply as an attempt to create a temporary structure for collective artistic activities during the slow dissolution of the official art system and the Soviet state. One thing is certain: a group of artist-friends joined together to try out some new possibilities.

When speaking of the time of the breakup of the former socialist regimes followed by the collapse of institutions, several theoreticians<sup>39</sup> mention communities of friends, confidential communities, as something quite characteristic of the transitional period in Eastern Europe. Viktor Misiano writes, “In an institutional, ideological, and moral vacuum, friendship becomes the last shelter for culture. The direct result of the institutional and symbolic collapse in Eastern Europe is the crisis of any objective justification for artistic practice.... The confidential community is a direct reaction to the mad dynamics of social transformation.”<sup>40</sup>

The transition from relatively disorganized groups of friends to more formalized organizations happened gradually. On the one hand, there were no funds for the support of cultural projects other than for those produced by the state institutions. The local art market was relatively undeveloped, “mainly representing fine artists and artworks that from the formal perspective especially feature commercial qualities (like line, color, surface drawing, etc.).”<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, the appearance of foreign funding in the region, along with the civil society’s development agenda, inspired the local cultural actors to organize into NGOs. However, the beginning of the structural transformation in the cultural sphere has to be seen in light of the wider social changes and the appearance of the first citizens’ initiatives organized around various socio-political issues, which would gradually form the present civil society in Georgia.<sup>42</sup>

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notion of the public sphere calls for a different conception and identification with the state.” Angela Harutyunyan: “Rethinking the public sphere: The constitutional state and the ACT group’s political aesthetics of affirmation in Armenia” (2011), available at <http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-Article?id=15050/>, accessed April/2014.

39 Taguhi Torosyan, Viktor Misiano, et al.

40 Viktor Misiano, “Institutionalization of Friendship,” published at <http://irwin.si/texts/institutionalisation/>, accessed March 2014.

41 Taguhi Torosyan, in “Mapping Friendship – Challenges of the Art and Cultural Scene in Contemporary Armenia” (2014). According to N. Palavandishvili, the same applies to the Georgian context of the same period.

42 Political issues that emerged along with the loss of trust in the state system in general triggered the appearance of the civil society. The presence of the foreign funds allowed its protagonists to organize by



At the end of the 1980s, civil society in Georgia was rather green, in the sense of being involved in ecological issues. It came together to stop the construction of the Khudoni Hydro Power Plant. (The project of its construction has recently been restarted.) One of the first NGOs, called Nakresi, was born there, as was the Green Party. According to some,<sup>43</sup> this was the time of intensified organized action by the citizens, which resulted in the formation of political parties and the formation of NGOs.<sup>44</sup>

Around the year 1993, the grant system for the support of NGOs was starting up. The funds were almost exclusively provided by The Open Society-Georgia Foundation (OSGF), at first at its Moscow office and afterwards at its Tbilisi office, which was established in 1994.<sup>45</sup> One of the first non-governmental organizations that appeared back then was the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD) founded in 1992 in Tbilisi. It continues to function to this date. In 1994, the “Caucasian House Center for Cultural Relations” was established as an institution working in the field of education and culture, designed as a space for dialogue between North Caucasian and Georgian cultures. At the time of the opening of the Tbilisi-based office of the Soros Foundation (today known as the OSGF), it was the main grant providing body in the country, and many NGOs were formed that lasted only short periods of time.<sup>46</sup> According to some sources,<sup>47</sup> 14,000 national NGOs have been registered in Georgia since the beginning of the 1990’s, but according to the official figures, most are no longer functioning today. A database run by the Civic Development Institute finds 1500 NGOs active by 2014, though the database is incomplete. It is estimated that organizations active in the field of culture make up a relatively small part of the entire NGO sector.<sup>48</sup>

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establishing NGO structures (Palavandishvili).

43 According to the e-mail interview with the Tbilisi-based sociologist Mikheil Svanidze.

44 The Civil Code of Georgia is a core basis for the creation, registration, and operation of CSOs in the country.

45 For more information, see [http://www.osgf.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=ENG&sec\\_id=124](http://www.osgf.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=124) , accessed March/2014.

46 Ibid.

47 Please consult <http://dfwatch.net/in-georgia-ngos-are-looking-for-peoples-trust-34213> , accessed March/2014.

48 The exact figures are missing and the estimation is made by the local independent cultural operators involved in this research.

The independent cultural sector has been developing in parallel with the existent dominant institutional (mainstream) culture as an agent of change and a potential carrier of structural transformation. Those new cultural practices brought new insights into the impact of technology on artistic creativity (new media) in which the social and the cultural fields permeate the contemporary cultural context (including interdisciplinary events and actions taking place in non-profit spaces), presenting new forms of networking and cultural organizing. Independent cultural actors are increasingly participating in the struggles for public space and raising awareness of the importance of culture in public life.

There is a small but significant number of such initiatives in Georgia, mainly concentrated around the capital, Tbilisi. They sporadically receive public funding, mostly through the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia, and the Tbilisi Center of Cultural Events, which is part of the city government.<sup>49</sup>

These independent initiatives mostly rely on international funding for their collaborative projects, or else they receive some funding through foreign institutions with a local presence, including OSGF and various foreign cultural institutes such as the Goethe Institute, the British Council, occasionally the French Institute, the Swiss Development Fund, the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, the various embassies, et cetera. The independent cultural actors in Georgia cover a wide range of fields, from visual arts, theory, architecture and urbanism to documentation and archives related to the local contemporary cultural production.<sup>50</sup>

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49 Only recently, an independent board of experts was established within the Ministry of Culture. However, there is no publicly accessible information regarding the members of the board for applications' review or the criteria based on which they have been elected. The board meets irregularly and their operation seems to lack transparency (according to S. Lapiashvili) As a consequence of this lack of transparency, more individual approaches to the Ministry (based on personal connections or contacts) have been prevailing thus far.

50 Some of these initiatives are Urban Reactor, GeoAIR, TRAM, Public Art Platform, New Knowledge Design Laboratory, Culture and Management Lab, CCA Tbilisi, Tiflis Hamqari, SOVLAB, Artistarium, AIRL & Tbilisi studio, Active for Culture, Guerilla Gardening Tbilisi, Social Photography Caucasus Foundation, Green Feast, Caucasian House, Safe Space Tbilisi, Human Rights House Tbilisi, Green Alternative, Gallery Nectar, Bouillon Group, DontheC and others.

## Recent Developments

Some of these actors came together several times and formed a common platform in order to examine their position and jointly address the decision makers (primarily the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection), asking to be taken into account within the national cultural agenda. They pleaded mostly for the establishment of priorities in the financing of cultural activities and for transparent procedures for applying for public funds. The attempts did not succeed for several reasons. Among them were the conceptual disagreements of the actors in question, the already-functioning practices of individual (out-of-procedure) approaches to the officials, and the change of the political regime at the end of 2012 and the resulting shake-up within the Ministry.

In May and June of 2012, there was another attempt to gather the majority of the cultural actors, initiated by the local NGO, GeoAIR, together with the SPACES project. The meeting drew about ten cultural initiatives from Tbilisi (GeoAIR, New Knowledge Design Laboratory, Culture and Management Lab, Tram, ICOMOS, The Platform of Public Art, Urban Reactor, and others) and several foreign independent organizations, along with some students of the Tbilisi State Academy of Arts who showed significant interest in the subject.

### **Several problems and needs were identified immediately:**

**The lack of dialogue** between the independent actors/civil society and state representatives.

**The lack of transparency** in the governmental policy towards culture.

**The lack of an expert board for contemporary culture**, an independent committee that would be in charge of evaluating project proposals and whose decisions the Ministry would need to carry out; a lack of intermediary structures which would bridge the gap between the independent groups and the Ministry.

**The shortage of funding**, the lack of workspaces, the lack of educational programs (theory) and trainings for cultural managers (practice). Considering

the publicly-owned, vacant spaces that currently exist within the city tissue and that could be used for hosting the activities of the new cultural actors, the need for a broader governmental strategy for administrating those spaces was recognized.

**The need for collaboration within the independent scene:** for the establishment of an independent working group that would deal with the organization of the independent scene and that would work on policy related to the independents (participants imagined a three-year strategy that would be participatory and invite the people to join in and develop a common vision); this is a process in which the involvement of governmental agencies is necessary.

**The need to learn from good practices** and to connect both regionally and internationally.

**The reconsideration of the taxation system** in order to promote the involvement of private enterprise in alternative funding.

As one of the immediate goals (following the need for the working spaces), the participants agreed upon the idea of a “cultural incubator,” a physical space owned by the government to be given to the coalition of independent organizations as a one-year experiment. It would be a self-organized, horizontal initiative, a hub where all of the protagonists would contribute their own knowledge and expertise, from architecture and urbanism to art theory and cultural management and cultural policy training, fundraising, and networking strategies. It would be shared through various public programs with the wider public. It would be open to students and everyone else interested, and would include volunteers. As a result of this meeting, a joint letter of intention was written and addressed to the Minister of Culture, containing the aforementioned issues. Soon after, a meeting was held at the Ministry with the Minister of Culture, but due to the political change that occurred soon after (in October 2012), the negotiations were halted for the time being.<sup>51</sup>

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51 However, the Incubator group continued working on developing different models for improving the cultural funding system which would give the independent cultural scene a more favorable position.

After the change in government, several new attempts were made to continue the dialogue between the independent cultural organizations and the governmental agencies. In 2013, the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection opened its doors to the non-governmental cultural sector and independent specialists, initiating the development of sectorial committees with members from the NGO field, as well as announcing competitions for artistic projects. In July 2013, the Committee for the Creation of Cultural Policy was established. The committee consisted of the Ministry's representatives and the NGO organizations' members. The committee operated for six months and created the Cultural Policy Concept of Georgia. However, since December 2013, due to the dramatic changes at the Ministry of Culture, further discussions and implementation of the concept of cultural policy have been delayed.<sup>52</sup>

At the time of this writing, the situation in Georgia has been quite dramatic, in relation to the defense of public goods. Some of the cultural organizations have been involved. The main focus of the current civic activism is laid on cultural heritage issues, such as the ancient gold mine and archaeological site called Sakdrisi-Kachagiani. The Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection abolished its protected status and handed it over to a private company, which plans to re-activate the gold mine, destroying the historical layers of the site.<sup>53</sup> Further, the new management of the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection dissolved the Urban Development Board. This act was interpreted by the civic sector as a potential endangerment of the overall cultural heritage in Tbilisi; it implied a total loss of the public control over it. After some high ranking officials at the Ministry resigned due to these developments and joined the protests,<sup>54</sup> the citizens and cultural

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52 As an illustration of the lack of transparency in decision making within the Georgian Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection, it is worth mentioning another controversial event from February/March 2014 related to the participation of Georgia in the 14th Architecture Biennale in Venice. The independent jury composed of international and Georgian professionals selected two proposals submitted by an independent, interdisciplinary group, Tbilisi In/Sights(1) with the addendum of a mirror façade (part of the Transforming Georgia project) by Khatuna Khabuliani (2). The projects were selected as 2014 Georgian participants in the Architecture Biennale in Venice. However, soon after, a series of non-transparent, controversial moves were made by the Ministry, against the wishes of the jury, causing significant damage to both of the project teams. It all ended with the final decision by the Georgian Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection to withdraw from the Biennale. For more details, please see <http://art-leaks.org/2014/03/23/tbilisi-insights-collective-statement/> accessed June 2014.

53 According to an e-mail interview with Lali Pertenava, spring 2014.

54 There are serious indications that Marine Mizandari, former deputy Minister of Culture, was dismissed from her position for reasons related to Sakdrisi. See the article <http://www.dw.de/ancient-site-pits-locals-against-big-business-in-georgia/a-17566583>, accessed May 2014.

professionals demanded the official dismissal of the management of the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection, as a result of the public distrust following their actions which seem not to be in the best interest of the citizens of Georgia.

## **Urban Struggles<sup>55</sup>**

Over the years, unregulated urban planning and construction and an aggressive privatization and commercialization policy have caused a drastic reduction of the public spaces in Tbilisi. Large parks and squares have become targets of private enterprises, and sidewalks and pedestrian areas have been blocked by the unsystematic constructions and turned into informal parking areas. Public buildings in the central parts of the city have been replaced by private luxury hotels, shopping zones and other commercial facilities.

The indifferent attitude of the society towards the public spaces and the destruction of the cultural heritage is not surprising when one keeps in mind the socio economic problems. However, during the last few years, citizen interest and participation have been on the rise. The number of self-organized, engaged groups of citizens and the number of protests against the accumulated problems of the city have been slowly growing. A campaign for the protection of Gudiashvili Square is one of the most significant examples.

In 2011, the city government, with the support of an international investment company, started the reconstruction of the square and its surroundings in the historical center of Tbilisi. The goal of these actions was to replace the residential and historical public buildings with a new, multi-functional shopping and commercial complex. This decision spurred the citizens to react and mount a formal protest. The main demand of this civic campaign was to protect and preserve historic buildings in their original form and to keep the public function of the square. The protest campaign developed a good organization and creative forms of protest, which lasted for three months. Through this initiative, the Gudiashvili Square became a center for diverse cultural events. Protest actions marked by an unusual carnival atmosphere, and the coziness of the square, attracted and united

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55 This chapter is a July 2014 contribution by Tbilisi-based urban activist Nano Zazanashvili.

many people of different ages, opinions and preferences. It also gave an impetus to the wider recognition of the public space issue and incited discussions on the characteristics of the current processes shaping the urban space.

As a result of the citizens' actions, followed by the political changes that occurred in Georgia at the end of 2012, investment projects have been suspended, but the empty buildings surrounding the square have not yet been preserved. Some activists are campaigning to preserve them, but the results are yet to be seen.

Another example of fighting for public space began in 2013: the campaign for the protection of the green area of one of the biggest parks in Tbilisi, Vake Park. Guerrilla gardeners and green activists launched the campaign, still ongoing as of this writing, against the construction of a hotel in Vake Park. This movement is one of the most diverse of its kind. At the beginning of the campaign, a group of volunteers set up a camp near the construction site and began a sit in. Along with demonstrations in the different public areas of the city, cultural events, educational programs and public discussions were held regularly at the park. Volunteers even planted trees in the city, trying to raise awareness of the accumulated environmental problems. The camp is located in one of the nicest places in the park and attracts many tourists. As a result of these activities, the construction of the hotel has been suspended, but the activists continue to fight with the aim of influencing the final decision of the city government through the legal channels.

It should be noted that the character of the protests in both the Gudiashvili Square and Vake Park movements have changed through time. Increasingly, organizers seek to transform the public spaces through extensive citizen participation.

Neither Gudiashvili Square nor Vake Park is a coarse-scale intervention in the historical and green zones. Thus, at this stage it is important to analyze the roots of the problem. As long as unbalanced city planning and privatization policies co-exist, and as long as there is no long-term strategy for city development, public spaces and cultural heritage will be in danger of being destroyed.

# **The Armenian Report**



## Armenia

Population:	3,274,285 (2012)
Official language:	Armenian
Political system:	Presidential republic
Cultural minorities:	Azeri, Kurd, Yezidi, Russian, Ukrainian, Assyrian, Greek
EU relation:	A partner country within the European Neighborhood Policy since 2004
GDP:	EUR 7.7 bn (2012)
GDP per capita:	EUR 2,608.5 (2012) <sup>56</sup>
Capital:	Yerevan

## CULTURAL DATA

### Funding (2011)

Culture as share of total central government spending: 1 %

Government expenditure on culture: EUR 14,958,093

Government expenditure on culture per capita: EUR 4.57

Share of spending on culture by central government: 100 %

## A selection of national cultural policy objectives<sup>57</sup>

At present, the cultural policy of the Republic of Armenia is guided by the following principles:

- The state, public and democratic character of management in the field of culture
- The freedom of cultural and creative activities
- The possibility to encounter cultural values
- Preference for national cultural values of international significance
- The self-dependence of cultural organizations

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<sup>56</sup> According [http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc\\_111471.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_111471.pdf), accessed June 2014.

<sup>57</sup> The *Law on the Principles of Cultural Legislation*, adopted in 2002, stipulates that the main objectives of the state cultural policy are: to make society realise that culture is a means of development, to seek new values and new ideas, to create conditions for the recreation and development of the society's creative potential, and to form a civil society. From <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/armenia.php?aid=23>, accessed June 2014.

# The position of the Non-Institutional Cultural Actors in Armenia

## General overview<sup>58</sup>

In the last 20 years of Armenian independence, the country's art scene has experienced complicated conditions. This is partially due to the economic collapse common to many post-Soviet countries, but also to the specific challenges that emerged in the late 1980s: the war with Azerbaijan, the economic blockade, the consequent crisis, and the large-scale migration. Many arts and cultural workers fled the country. Those who remained had to focus on surviving the difficult period.

Paradoxically, this situation served as a kind of impetus for the development of independent groups that circumvented the state censorship and the ideological agenda. In a sense, those conditions provided fruitful ground for the emergence of such initiatives as private galleries and magazines founded and run by those cultural actors who had great expectations for the neo-liberal system and its freedom of expression.

A lot of context-shaping exhibitions were held, and the artists enjoyed the possibility to experiment with new media tools that had previously been considered illegitimate under the Soviet cultural establishment. Various forms of art, including performances, action paintings, video arts, photography, and installations, all flourished. The works reflected on issues of gender, identity, urbanism, the Soviet modernism project, the rupture between the imagined and the real, the expectations and the failed reality of the much-awaited independence. Unlike nowadays, the production of the context was also triggered by the outward interest of the international art market (basically, the curators) in the new media art coming from young “democratic” post-Soviet countries.

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<sup>58</sup> This chapter comprises parts of a larger text written by Taguhi Torosyan, *Mapping Friendship – The Challenges of the Art and Cultural Scene in Contemporary Armenia*, commissioned by the SPACES project in 2013. It is reproduced here with the consent of the author. The entire text is published in SPACES, *Cultural Public Sphere in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine* (Ed. Bodrožić/Palavandishvili), Verlag Bibliothek der Provinz, 2014.

In attempting to legitimize “perverse” topics that were alien to the traditional society of the post-Soviet Armenia and its system of values, some artists attempted to create a relationship between national and global narratives in order to develop a legitimate “glocal” (global and local) context in order for a better, freer and a more open-minded Armenia to come into being. Prominent among these artists were the members of the Perestroika-era Third Floor group, which largely defined independence and its agenda from the artistic perspective in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. It is important to note that the agenda generally coincided with the cultural policy of the first government of the post-Soviet Armenia, and thus the state was relatively supportive.

From the perspective of the relationship between artistic strategies and public space, it is important to mention the Act artist group, which “acted” between 1993 and 2000, originally as a criticism to the strategies of the Third Floor group. The historical rethinking of bodily appearance after action painting and its social aspects, the notions of the body’s utilization in political processes, and the body becoming a tool in politics became central and were further exhibited through the forms of such political actions as public demonstrations, agitations, and referenda. Especially interesting was a 1995 performance / public action called “Art Demonstration” that took place just a week after the introduction of the constitution of the Republic of Armenia. The group marched from the Martiros Saryan monument to the Museum of Modern Art, carrying bilingual posters saying things like “Intervention in the Systems,” “World Integration,” “New State, New Art, New Culture,” and “Polit-art realization.” The “Art of Resistance,” a term coined by David Kareyan, one of Act’s co-founders, was considered to be a process of artistic revolution fitting the paradigm of 1990s identity politics and civil society development. The geography of the demonstration is also quite notable, since its start and end points marked the two pillars of Soviet Armenian art.<sup>59</sup> Other expositions of the group’s works took place in various informal environments such as abandoned or badly-functioning industrial

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59 Martiros Saryan was a member of the Blue Rose symbolist artist group and the founder of the Armenian national school of painting. In a way, he symbolized the nationalist agenda of contemporary Armenian culture. Meanwhile, the Museum of Modern Art in Yerevan endearingly fostered nationalism by the promotion of mainly painterly artworks that combined the tactics of modern art with nationalist narratives. It is somewhat ironic that the demonstration moved along a path that formed a closed circle of nationalist agendas in which the cultural politics of the country found itself trapped during the subsequent decades. (Torosyan, 2013)

plants. This questioned the relation between art, space and production in the conditions of a collapsed post-Soviet economy.

The art scene also experienced freedom of movement by traveling to Europe and North America, being showcased at art events large and small, national and transnational. From Documenta in Kassel to La Biennale di Venezia, different artist-in-residency programs and special projects focused on Armenian contemporary art, such as *Adieu Parajanov*<sup>60</sup> and *D'Arménie*<sup>61</sup>. The works of conceptual artists reflecting on Soviet legacy and identity politics had the greatest resonance.

A few experiments of collaboration between the state establishments and the contemporary art scene that seem unrealistic today also took place in 90s, where exhibitions were held at government locations including the National Parliament and the Constitutional Court.

## **The Shift Towards NGOs in Culture**<sup>62</sup>

However, with the shift of the political winds in the early 2000s, the situation started to change dramatically. The post-Soviet thaw was over and the hegemony of ideology politics dressed in national costumes came to displace the relatively 'liberal' (regardless of how ironic it sounds) paradigm.

The lack of structured economic conditions and legal frameworks impaired the development of the internal art market. The few contemporary art galleries and initiatives that were striving to operate in the arena started to close down. Nonetheless, it is important to mention that the number of those galleries was not commensurate to the scale of Yerevan. The remaining galleries in the market mainly represent fine artists and artworks that from the formal perspective especially embody features that are marketable, in their use of line, color, and surface.

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60 The 2003 exhibition *Adieu Parajanov* was a retrospective of Armenian contemporary art organized by the Austrian curators Hedwig Saxenhuber and George Schöllhammer at the Kunsthalle Vienna.

61 The 2007 exhibition *D'Arménie* was curated by Nazareth Karoyan and Dominique Abensour, at Le Quartier Contemporaray Art Center in Quimper, France.

62 According to Taguhi Torosyan (2013).

With the privatization of cultural venues like houses of culture, cinemas, and the like, it became almost impossible to produce low-budget events and exhibitions. We cultural actors started working in the NGO sector, and slowly we arrived at the point where most of our projects were brought into existence in collaboration with European funding bodies, or Open Society Foundations, which imposed a head-on civil society development manifestation agenda with heavy bureaucratic canons that strongly affect the artistic value of the works and events produced. The content of the artistic activity now tends to address institutionalization, community development, sustainability, and the promotion of human rights and democratic values (this is also a paradox since all of these issues have already been addressed or rethought through critical meditations on the aforementioned problems). Going for quantitative richness in terms of partners, venues, participants and visibility aspects, the administrative dominance of the EU countries as the major partners and the unfair budget distributions often negatively affect its qualitative aspects.

The same problems were also encountered by the art scene in its several attempts to collaborate with the state structures such as the Ministry of Culture. In these institutions, there are no clear rules apart from a mandate to promote Armenian cultural heritage (basically, the traditional arts, crafts, folk music and dance, and religious architecture), forms of mass entertainment (cinema, theater, dance) and the increasing nationalist agenda (works and events connected to the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide and the emphasis on the national narratives). The independent cultural actors had a hard time dealing with hierarchical decision-making (which goes up to the president's apparatus,<sup>63</sup> and in which no decisions about the financial distribution even on the smallest scale can be taken without the consent of the head of the apparatus), corruption and lack of knowledge and skills needed to develop a decent, merit-based cultural policy.

Taking into consideration the geopolitical context of the Armenian economy, where most of the private businesses are owned and run by the oligarchs supporting the regime, it is not at all surprising that these companies are

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63 Apparatus: "A technical term for a body of the Soviet and post-Soviet governments" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apparatus>, accessed October 2014).

not interested in investing in critical and/or political art that questions the existing order. Similarly unsurprisingly, no serious research on the independent sector has been undertaken by state establishments dealing with culture.

## Recent Developments<sup>64</sup>

Formally, cultural policies in Armenia are defined by the Ministry of Culture. Despite the fact that the ministry has a Department of Contemporary Art, according to independent cultural operators, the state has little interest in this area. The ministry supports a very limited number of contemporary art projects, with a very small budget, while folk and traditional and fine arts get a larger share of public funding. These state priorities are reflected in art education, too – the Academy of Fine Arts, art colleges and schools have not updated their programs, bibliography and media in the last twenty years. It is widely thought that, at this point, art organizations, artist collectives and individuals are not powerful and organized enough to affect policy making.

If we identify “independent” cultural organizations as NGOs and informal groups working in the contemporary art field, at present, there is a small but significant community of these in Armenia.<sup>65</sup> These organizations have different focuses: residency, education, theory, exhibition space, et cetera. They mainly work very well together. The activity of most of these organizations is radically critical towards the existing political and cultural policies, and they always have difficulties with sustainability, due to constant problems with funding, state support, the availability of spaces, as well as the sufficiency of their capacities. During the last few years, the independent art scene has opened up again and is in contact and exchange with European actors, because of geographical vicinity, and because funding and support most often comes from Europe.

It seems that independent art organizations are not keen on collaborating with governmental agencies. This is because of the negative experience of such collaborations. For example, many projects were approved by the

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<sup>64</sup> Based on an interview with Nora Galfayan, cultural operator, current president of the NGO Utopiana.am.

<sup>65</sup> Some of the more visible independent scene organizations in Armenia are the Institute for Contemporary Art, Utopiana.am, Arts and Studies Cultural Laboratory, AJZ Space, Art Laboratory, Queering Yerevan art collective, Suburb Cultural Center, and Arteria cultural critique online magazine.

Ministry of Culture, contracts with art organizations were signed, and then the ministry failed to provide project funding, even when the NGOs had already done substantial work on the projects. Another problem is that the Ministry of Culture has a strategy to support all the projects only partially, so they never provide 100% funding, but usually only 10 or 20%, and very rarely 50%.

In the year 2011, Utopiana initiated a kind of a dialogic process between the Ministry of Culture and the independent cultural scene. They organized a meeting with the head of the Contemporary Art Department of the Ministry of Culture, with the aim of calling the Ministry to public account for its activities, as well as clarifying certain questions regarding their policies and procedures.

The competency (or lack thereof) of cultural workers in the ministry was discussed, and questions were asked, such as:

How are contemporary art projects initiated?

How can a project be selected for support from the Ministry funds?

How much/what percentage of the cultural budget is reserved for contemporary art?

What kinds of projects have been supported by the Ministry so far?

Although such transparency was and is stipulated by law, the activities of the Ministry of Culture were not at all visible on their website. Utopiana never got answers to its questions. However, the website was improved and is much better today. After this meeting, Utopiana organized a workshop with relevant organizations in order to come up with recommendations for improving the ministry's cultural policies, or, at least, its methods of operation, in terms of things like efficiency, transparency, and accountability. The next step was to present these recommends to the Ministry. However, unfortunately, the independent art organizations lacked interest in this kind of activity and refused to get involved in it.

There is probably another reason why many artists and art organizations refrained from getting involved in dialogs with the government. The majority of the active representatives of the independent cultural sector were at the time involved in an oppositional political organization, a

coalition of political parties called the Armenian National Congress (ANC). The ANC's approach is to refuse collaboration with the authorities, believing that no improvement is possible without a change of the political regime in the country, and therefore, for them, all dialogue is useless and a waste of time. Many Armenian artists took part in the ANC's culture council, through which the cultural policy of the ANC was designed.

There is an ongoing discussion within the independent scene about defining a position towards the governmental agencies. There is a range of attitudes. Most people agree on the need to collaborate and the need for physical space as steps towards sustainability, but there are differences in opinions about how to attain those things.

In its evolution, the Armenian independent scene is currently facing the need to create more sustainable and self-reproducing mechanisms that will provide new resources, both financial and human, for the existing independent institutions. This includes developing multiple competences such as art/curatorial/theoretical education, art production, cultural events production, and organization. This leads to a tendency to restructure NGOs into foundations, for the purpose of generating other financial resources other than those coming from fundraising.<sup>66</sup>

## Coming Challenges<sup>67</sup>

A coming challenge to independent culture in general became apparent during a recent announcement by the president of the republic, Serzh Sargsyan. He announced his intention to make Armenia a member of the Eurasian Customs Union. This is a structure aimed at economically

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66 According to the legislation of the Republic of Armenia, both foundations and NGOs are non-profit organizations: they cannot create profit and distribute it among their members. However, the foundation, a type of organization which is not based on membership, unlike the NGO, has the right to be directly engaged in commercial/economic activities, including receiving financial remuneration for the services it provides. The profit in this case should be directed towards the fulfilment of the organization's aims, as defined by the organization's charter. Meanwhile, the foundation is allowed to receive funds and grants from other sources. If an NGO wants to implement an economic activity, it has to become a subsidiary of some limited liability company, or register as one itself. Unfortunately, that means running two organizations, and in some cases doubling the payable taxes. Sources: [http://www.parliament.am/law\\_docs/241201HO268eng.pdf](http://www.parliament.am/law_docs/241201HO268eng.pdf), [http://www.parliament.am/law\\_docs/310103HO516eng.pdf](http://www.parliament.am/law_docs/310103HO516eng.pdf) (accessed May 2014).

67 According to the writings of Taguhi Torosyan.



integrating post-Soviet countries, a European Union-type economic alliance that was proposed by the president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, as Russia's alternative to the EU. This political U-turn has put into question the future of cultural collaborations between Armenia, the Eastern Neighborhood and the EU, since Armenia's obligations under the Customs Union will be incompatible with those under the Association Agreement with the EU that was to be initiated at a summit in Vilnius in November 2013.<sup>68</sup>

It seems that soon it will become increasingly difficult for the independent sector to receive funding from the non-EEU (Eurasian Union) countries, because Moscow will almost certainly require a kind of harmonization of the member countries' legal frameworks in order to keep them under total control.<sup>69</sup> And as the situation with the Foreign Agent Law in Russia requiring the non-profit organizations to register as "foreign agents" has demonstrated, human rights and civil society organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Transparency International, and cultural and arts organizations with critical activities and agendas, will be under attack. The current regime ruling in the Eurasian Union will only fuel the additional interest towards the individual artists. The question of the survival of the institutions and the direction they will have to take to insure their survival remains unanswered at this point.<sup>70</sup>

## Urban Struggles

In 2011, around the time the SPACES project was launched, a new dynamic developed in the urban space of Yerevan, connected to a wide civic movement for the protection of the Mashtots Park, a part of the Main Avenue designed to shape the city center and cross the central ring. This public park in Yerevan was occupied for several months (trending through

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68 This text was written in 2013.

69 Similar concern is expressed in the article entitled "Is Russia Seeking to "Neutralize" Armenian Civil Society?" available at <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/68361> (accessed on May 2014)

70 Today, there are around 3552 registered NGOs in Armenia (as of February 2013, according to [http://www.crrc.ge/uploads/files/conference/conference\\_2013\\_abstracts/V.Gevorgyan\\_M.Matevosyan\\_Is\\_Googling\\_a\\_method.pdf](http://www.crrc.ge/uploads/files/conference/conference_2013_abstracts/V.Gevorgyan_M.Matevosyan_Is_Googling_a_method.pdf)). However, very few of them are active; according to the research conducted by Transparency International in 2011, there are only 100 to 150 active NGOs. For more details, consult [http://transparency.am/files/publications/NED\\_publication\\_2.pdf/](http://transparency.am/files/publications/NED_publication_2.pdf/) (accessed June 2014).

#SaveMashtotsPark and #OccupyMashtots hashtags) in order to resist the municipality's plan to transform it into a commercial zone. With the emergence of the movement, the park, neglected for many years by the municipality and the public, was turned into an active public space where daily events were organized such as civic tribunals, public talks, discussions, film screenings, and exhibitions. These protests and the presence of a wide coalition of citizens (different communities, from environmental initiatives to LGBT, the anarchists and nationalist groups) that consolidated around a common goal remained in the collective memory of the city as an important moment, a step towards the potential imagining of a new type of communality. Triggered by the ecological discourse (protection of the trees in the park), during the next two months, the movement gradually moved towards a more socio-economic context - the struggle against oligarchy and the "people above the law" who, having economic and political resources, put their interests before those of the people.

Other urban struggles were articulated even before the Mashtots Park protests. They focused on places of high symbolic value which were threatened with being changed beyond recognition, as they did not fit into the economy and politics of a new socio- cultural paradigm created in collaboration between the municipality and "large cap". The open hall of the Cinema Moscow in Yerevan is a good example of this. The cinema was removed from the list of monuments under state protection in 2010 by a governmental decision. This decision was motivated by a plan to demolish the cinema hall and return the land to the Armenian Church, in order to rebuild a 17<sup>th</sup> century church that had been located there until the 1930s, when it was demolished. An unprecedented mobilization of citizens leapt to the defense of the Cinema Moscow. Different arguments were raised on this occasion, from issues of monument preservation, to the cultural and aesthetic value of modernist architecture, to a broader consideration of public spaces. As a result, the cinema hall is still in its place and has even started functioning, although, legally, it was donated to the Armenian Apostolic Church by the cinema management.

Activities organized within the SPACES project continued in this vein, including a series of artistic interventions and public talks organized by Utopiana.am. Negotiations with government agencies continued as well,

if only through formal procedures in relation to the organization of events in public spaces and official permissions. Still, we cannot perceive the exchange of official letters with officials and their positive responses as an achievement, because experience shows that when an EU project is over and the EU logo is removed, the formal interest of the government in independent cultural organizations and their activity disappears, along with the basic communication channels.

# **The Moldovan Report**

## Moldova

Population:	3,559,541 (2012)
Official languages:	Romanian and Russian
Cultural minorities:	Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Belarusians, Bulgarians, Gagauz, Georgians, Germans, Greeks, Jews, Lithuanians, Poles, Roma, Russians, Tatars, Ukrainians and Uzbeks
Political system:	Parliamentary republic
EU relation:	A partner country within the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) since 2004
GDP:	EUR 5.2 bn (2009)
GDP per capita:	EUR 1094 (2009)
Capital:	Chişinău

## CULTURAL DATA<sup>71</sup>

Funding (2010)

Culture as a share of total central government spending: N/A

Government expenditure for culture: EUR 19,163,697

Government expenditure for culture per capita: EUR 7.70

Share of central government spending on culture: 60.24 %

### A selection of national cultural policy objectives:

- Preserving and protecting cultural heritage and developing the cultural tourism sector
- Ensuring equal conditions for promoting creative work and artistic freedom
- Facilitating cooperation between decision-makers and cultural associations
- Promoting international artistic exchange and new technologies in the cultural field
- Improving cultural management (e.g. staff education and training)

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<sup>71</sup> According to *Cultural Policy Landscapes: A Guide to Eighteen Central and South Eastern European Countries*, Erste Stiftung Studies, Vienna 2012

## The position of Non-Institutionalized Cultural Actors in Moldova

If we start from the presumption that non-institutional entities operating in arts and culture today could be linked with the first attempts of artists to develop their practice beyond (outside of) the existing institutional establishment,<sup>72</sup> in the Moldovan context, we can track the origins of so-called “underground art” in the middle and at the end of the 1970s (the Balti group, Stefan Sadovnicov, etc.) and during the 1980s (the Rust sculpture installation<sup>73</sup> in the Sculeni Barrier in Chişinau, etc.)<sup>74</sup> However, it seems that they did not have as great importance as the alternative groups from bigger centers of the USSR (Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Riga, Tallinn, Novosibirsk, Odessa, etc.). Some researchers relate the reason for the limited range of influence of such initiatives to the fact of *extremely limited contacts with Western art and the harshness of the Communist government of the Republic*<sup>75</sup>.

As in other former USSR republics, a new wave of liberalization encompassing the culture field came with Gorbachev’s *perestroika* (transparency) at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of 1990s. After 1989, groups of artists united by the same ideas and platforms of creation started to appear. To a great extent, however, with the exception of the members of the Chişinau Center for Contemporary Art (KSA:K), they remained at the same time members of the Union of Plastic Artists of the Republic of Moldova. These groups, such as the ones named Ten and Phantom, typically included ten to fifteen artists and did not always have a doctrine or a theoretical program. These visual artists’ association in groups was very often made with the aim of organizing

72 We could relate this to the idea of institutional critique (which is, particularly here, inseparable from the ideological/political critique of the system creating those institutions).

73 “Rust,” or “Rugina,” to use its original name in Romanian, is an informal sculpture park created in the mid-eighties by architect Nicolai Ischimji and artist Valerii Moshkov, who collected metal scrap, rusty leftovers and disposed manufactured ready-mades in the area surrounding their ateliers, transforming them afterwards by welding them together. It is situated in the Sculeni district in Chişinau, where around fifteen artists had their ateliers at the time, in old storage houses, annexes of the factory buildings. The work of the two artists was exposed in the front yard; having no infrastructure, proper storage or potential buyers, the collection of huge objects organically appeared and stayed there. According to some opinions, “the works were politically charged, with a hint of rebellion against the state” (Ron Sluik). Nowadays, a group of artists and citizens is trying to save the sculpture park, as it is endangered and partially already damaged due to the privatization of the land where it is located. See more at <http://www.rugina.org/en> and <https://www.flickr.com/photos/61746310@N07/> accessed June 2014.

74 See more at <http://www.arta.neonet.md/intro/en/> accessed May 2014.

75 Ibid.

exhibitions or cultural manifestations. In any case, this group association didn't affect the creative independence of the artists, everyone being able to maintain his or her individuality.<sup>76</sup>

With the beginning of the independent Moldovan state, in the early 1990s, intense collaboration and cultural contacts were established between the Republic of Moldova and Romania. Political and cultural implications of this connection have a complex background, mainly based on historical ties, the common Romanian language and the sensitive contemporary geo-political position of the Republic of Moldova.<sup>77</sup>

In 1996, the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts (SCCA) opened its doors in Chişinău.<sup>78</sup> This marked a significant turning point.<sup>79</sup> The SCCA openly promoted arts and culture as carriers of democratization and liberalization processes, at the same time trying to inscribe local artistic practices into the globalized world of art, implicitly including art market possibilities.<sup>80</sup> The center's mission stressed "the support of a new generation of socially active artists, capable of questioning the legitimacy of the official cultural policy, with its inheritance of the totalitarian past. In this sense, the Center is in a continuous search for cultural forms which would correspond to the newly established social, political and economic order of a society in transition."<sup>81</sup>

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76 Ibid.

77 Romanian cultural institutions, including the Romanian Cultural Institute (ICR), the Romanian Ministry of Culture and Religious Denominations, and the Department for Relations with Diaspora Romanians (part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) are very active in supporting cultural projects in Moldova. These institutions provide significant funding for the development and dissemination of Romanian-language cultural production. They provide financial assistance to the press as well as to various local cultural initiatives.

78 The Soros Foundation opened its office in Moldova in 1992.

79 According to Vladimir Urs, the SCCA introduced for the first time the notion of "contemporary art" along with "new artistic practices" in the Moldovan context.

80 However, it is important to mention the fact that, in spite of the liberalization of the possibilities of expression in the last decades and the appearance of private galleries in Chişinău and other towns of the republic (galleries like Aorta, Coral, and L-Gallery), the social and material state of the great majority of artists considerably worsened in the Republic of Moldova. Our sources emphasize the drying up of state commissions, and the fact that the museums, being budgetary institutions with small allocations from the state, diminished considerably their acquisitions of works of contemporary art. The period of transition to a market economy in the Republic of Moldova led to an exorbitant increase of the maintenance costs of the workshops, the suspension of the construction of new workshops, as well as the mass migration of artists and their works beyond the territory of their birthplace. The non-formed market of artistic value very often offers priority to bad works, kitsch, copies and reproductions of pictures of classical art. Contemporary professional art, being marginalized neither ideologically nor administratively, continues to be marginalized economically in the Republic of Moldova. See more at <http://www.arta.neonet.md/intro/en/> accessed March 2014.

81 From the mission statement of KSA:K, the Chişinău Center for Contemporary Art (formerly SCCA),

Soros centers were opened in many post-socialist countries. Initially, they were created to document the local art scene, to finance current art projects, and to represent “emancipated local art” on the international scene. Over time, the centers were linked into financial, communication, exhibition, promotion and education networks “bypassing the gaps between the East in transition and the West in globalization.”<sup>82</sup> However, according to some theoreticians (Šuvaković, 2002), something quite indicative happened very quickly after the establishment of Soros Contemporary Art Centers: the emergence of similar new art in entirely different and often incomparable with that of local cultures. This phenomenon led to the term “Soros realism,” coined by theoretician Miško Šuvaković, describing a type of post-socialist art financed by American businessman George Soros through his contemporary art centers and funding schemes. Although it was not originally used pejoratively by Šuvaković, “because of its reverberation of the very name of Socialist Realism, a style of socialist propaganda in painting and sculpture, it stated the irony of renewed political funding of art, that censors by financing rather than by forbidding.”<sup>83</sup>

The centers for contemporary art were just one segment of the overall activities of the Soros Foundation. They were part of the Foundation’s broader agenda, focusing on areas such as education, media and civil society development. Through various programs, the Soros Foundation became, at the time, one of the most important funders of culture-related programs in the country, offering a significant number of grants and scholarships.<sup>84</sup> An important characteristic of the NGO sector in Moldova is the fact that its development has always been overwhelmingly dependent on foreign funders. With this in mind, we can assume that the first registered NGOs, including those dealing with culture, appeared when foreign funds became available in the country.

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available at: <http://www.ceeculture.info/OnelInstitut.asp?InstitutionNr=287&nw=Balkankult%20%20European%20Cultural%20Co-operation> accessed April 2014.

82 Miško Šuvaković in “Ideologija izložbe: o ideologijama Manifeste” (2002), available at: <http://www.ljudmila.org/scca/platforma3/suvakovic.htm> accessed April 2014.

83 See more at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soros\\_Realism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soros_Realism) accessed April 2014.

84 For more details, see the 1996 Soros Foundation Moldova Activity report available at [http://www.soros.md/files/SFM\\_Annual%20Report\\_1996.pdf](http://www.soros.md/files/SFM_Annual%20Report_1996.pdf) accessed May 2014.



Since the government of the Republic of Moldova decided in 1997 that all non-governmental organizations must re-register, this made it possible to map, more or less precisely, the situation of NGOs working in the cultural field in Moldova, according to the Chişinău-based policy researcher Veacheslav Reabchinsky. In 1998, there were 585 NGOs in the country, of which approximately 22% were cultural. Most NGOs were located in Chişinău; regional NGOs represented only 14% of the total number. According to the figures from 2005, there were more than 3400 NGOs registered in Moldova, but only 10-15% of these could really be said to be functioning organizations.<sup>85</sup> Today the situation is slightly different. Since the most important (foreign) funders have shown little interest in developing long-term strategies to support culture, the number of cultural NGOs has decreased dramatically, to the extent that they nowadays constitute less than 5% of NGOs in Moldova.

According to curator Vladimir Us of the Oberliht Association, organizations forming the independent scene today are those that managed to survive the last decade, which was pretty hard for those who were working autonomously.<sup>86</sup> They have developed their own networks, mostly in collaboration with other European organizations, and have reached a state of minimal stability in unstable times, due to the fact that their funding mostly comes from Europe.<sup>87</sup> Still, their situation is still very precarious.

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85 Cultural NGOs in *Moldova: A Brief Introduction* by Veacheslav Reabchinsky, Centre for Cultural Policies, Chişinău (2005), available at <http://www.labforculture.org/en/directory/contents/region-in-focus/moldova> accessed March 2014.

86 Here we can mention several such organizations: Centre for Contemporary Art (KSA:K), Oberliht Young Artists Association, Junact, Portal informational pentru arta si cultura in Moldova, SITE Architecture, Cultural Heritage and Design Centre, Collaboration Partnership centre, Workshops for Future, Culture and Change in Moldova, ARTIStudio, Arts Centre Coliseum, Papyrus Studio, Association Alternativa Noua, Centre for Cultural Policies, Association of Contemporary Music of Moldova, Association for Development of Modern Dance in Moldova, Teatru Spalatorie, OWH Studio. Some of our sources claim that in Moldova, the distinction between independent and state cultural actors is sometimes blurred by the fact that some artists and artistic groups are funded partially or fully by the state but nevertheless maintain an "independent stance" in artistic, aesthetic and philosophical terms.

87 The following international funders were listed as main sources for supporting culture in Moldova: Soros Foundation Moldova, ICR (Romania), Alliance Française (France), Kulturstiftung des Bundes (Germany), the European Cultural Foundation, the Institute for Foreign Relations (Germany), the Bockmann Foundation (Netherlands), Kulturkontakt (Austria), the Merck Foundation, the Caucasus Foundation. USAID is also present, though not directly addressing culture, and more recently, the EU culture funds.

## Relation to the Governmental Agencies

Until not long ago, the independent cultural scene in Moldova was quite fragmented and limited to specific, isolated fields.<sup>88</sup> The players were rather amorphous and spontaneous in their activities. Only a few cultural initiatives seemed to have regular activities, but even they relied on a great deal of enthusiasm and voluntary, unpaid work. The need to join together and form alliances in order to reflect and improve the position of independent cultural workers arose only recently. The scene is relatively small for a city like Chişinău, but with a tendency to grow and proliferate under the proper conditions. A few physical spaces have emerged recently, hosting programs and gatherings of independent cultural operators and youth, marking a significant step towards greater visibility for the scene.<sup>89</sup>

Stefan Rusu of KSA:K speaks of the situation in the year 2011, when several independent cultural organizations and individuals came together to protest against the lack of transparency in the Ministry of Culture's decision-making, in relation to Moldova's participation in the Venice Biennial of Contemporary Art. As it appeared, the Ministry of Culture, without any previous public consultations, selected the Moldovan representatives at this event, which was seen as unacceptable for many independent cultural actors, as well as for the professional community. According to Vladimir Us of Oberliht Association, this was one of the moments of mobilization, when the

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88 The organizations which shape the independent cultural scene in Moldova represent various fields of cultural and artistic activity: visual arts, performing arts, dance, music, management, cultural policies, heritage, architecture, training and education, literature, publishing, etc. As different as they are in terms of experience, expertise, resources, competencies and capabilities, they have one characteristic in common: they are all active in their domains and have been developing and implementing projects that have an impact on society (Reabchinsky, 2005).

89 In the year 2009, a small architectural unit named Flat Space was commissioned by Oberliht Association and installed in downtown Chişinău, in front of the Cultural Department of Chişinău Municipality. Its flat, open form facilitates its use by various subjects including cultural operators, city dwellers, and youth. In 2012, triggered by the public presentation of the Tandem programme / Contemporary ArtsFestival, ZPACE was established: an empty house, a historical monument, in the Chişinău city center was given to the youth/cultural initiative under a special rent contract signed with the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History, with the agreement of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Moldova. Ever since, it has served as an independent scene hub. Another interesting example is an initiative by the association Teatru Spalatorie which opened a space in 2012, hosting theatre performances, and with a bar to bring in money. In the beginning of 2014, an artist-run space called Cocosul Rosu began its activities. It is also important here to mention the first attempts of squatting the abandoned buildings and their transformation into spaces for youth gatherings, along with the organisation of various events. The first recorded squat in the Republic of Moldova, named Centro 73 Chişinău, emerged in 2010. See <http://centro73.wordpress.com/>, accessed July 2014.

independent actors started to think about consolidating their efforts around a public campaign and offering a collective response.

In recent history, some local observers (Reabchinsky, 2005) reported an atmosphere of permanent tension, often degenerating into conflict, between the non-governmental sector and the decision-making bodies in all fields of activity, including that of culture. The absence of dialogue with decision-makers was obvious, as was the absence of experience of collaborating with state structures. The exception was a 2003 draft law on the activity of theatrical and concert organizations, for which the government took into account the opinions of the independent-sector professionals. As for other matters, some local independent cultural actors claim that most negotiations with the ministry are carried out in private, by different institutions or individuals trying to obtain particular benefits from the state.

According to our correspondents, another factor to consider is the political environment between 2001 and 2009, when the Communist Party (PCRM)<sup>90</sup> held a majority in the Parliament, and after April 2009, when power shifted to the coalition of three democratic parties that used to be in opposition. If between 2001 and 2009, independent culture was not subsidized due to political reasons, as it was perceived as a threat to the political course promoted by the PCRM, then after April 2009, culture was simply not listed among the priorities of the new government. It was not considered from the economic point of view, and was thus totally neglected, says Vladimir Us. Moreover, due to the economic instability, culture was seen as one of the last fields to be taken care of.

Various efforts were made for bringing the independent actors' needs closer to the officials, but they failed to produce the needed effect.

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90 Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) is a nominally communist party led by Vladimir Voronin. It is the only communist party to have held a majority in government in the post-Soviet states. It is the current opposition party in Moldova. According to its statute adopted in 2008, Article 1, the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova is a "lawful successor and heir of the Communist Party of [Soviet] Moldavia both in terms of ideas and traditions." While officially espousing a Leninist Communist doctrine, there is debate over its policies. *The Economist* magazine considers it a centre-right party, communist in name only. See more at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Party\\_of\\_Communists\\_of\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Moldova](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Party_of_Communists_of_the_Republic_of_Moldova) accessed May 2014.

In 2004, a discussion was started about the need to create a National Cultural Fund. Since then, the draft version of the law has been created, but it has not yet been enacted. Starting in 2006, considerable efforts have been made by the Soros Foundation Moldova through its cultural policy program, which obtained support from European funds a year later.

In December 2006, the European Cultural Foundation and the Soros Foundation Moldova launched a one-year pilot initiative intended to lead to a long-term cultural development process in Moldova, to be facilitated by both organizations in the coming years.

**For 2007, the following objectives were set:**

To draft some initial policy visions and concrete practical measures for cultural development in Moldova, which will be collected, conceived and commonly accepted/shared by all leading stakeholders in the cultural field;

To set up a task force/working group comprised of cultural managers and decision-makers who will promote the interests of the cultural sector and advocate for them at all relevant policy levels;

To develop training and capacity building programs and tools/services, gradually serving all relevant stakeholders in Moldova's cultural sector;

To build up a group of culture professionals as local trainers/consultants/experts who shall develop and implement future training and consulting programs in Moldova.

In 2009, a new opportunity was created for non-governmental organizations. They were permitted to apply for state financial support; a mechanism for this was created by the Ministry of Culture, according to which approximately MDL 700,000 (approximately EUR 50,000) would be distributed annually to all non-governmental organizations active in the cultural field and officially registered in Moldova. Although the amount distributed by way of an open call later increased, reaching MDL 3 million in 2012, this mechanism unfortunately proved to lack transparency and means of public control.

A few more attempts were made after the political changes in 2009. The National Congress of Culture Workers was held between 2010 and 2011. It gathered several hundred people who, against a background of political changes, tried to advocate for reforms in the field of culture, stressing in particular the need to create the National Cultural Fund. Later there was a round table at which representatives of different parties were invited to sign a collaborative act through which they would become obliged to support and contribute to cultural reforms. Since that moment, though, there have been no concrete developments.

A group of independent filmmakers tried to lobby for a new law on cinema in front of the Ministry of Culture. They introduced modifications to the existing law and adapted it, according to them, to the new reality, but they had little success.

On the local level, although the Culture Department of the Chişinău Municipality signed a cooperation agreement with the National NGO council in 2011 that has not brought any changes in terms of cultural cooperation between the Culture Department and independent organizations. The Culture Department has an annual budget that it distributes non-transparently, without public bids. The inaccessibility of the city administration has been pointed out as one of the obstacles in pushing the dialogue forward.

## Recent Developments

Through September and October 2013, within the frame of the SPACES project, the Oberliht Association conducted a small-scale survey regarding the existing cultural policies in Moldova and the current status of independent cultural operators.<sup>91</sup>

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91 The survey was conceived with SPACES partners, and targeted active cultural actors of the independent scene from the Republic of Moldova, important agents for development and diversification of the autochthonous artistic and cultural process. 16 people responded to the questionnaire, of which 8 represented the NGOs for culture and art, while 8 were independent artists, the majority of them from Chişinău. 5 respondents represented the performing arts, 2 represented cinematography, 4 represented visual arts and contemporary art, 1 represented literature, 2 represented the mass media and 2 were students of the Art Academy. The five questions sought to find out if the cultural policy promoted by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Moldova was efficient for the development of the cultural sector and what were its main gaps; what the national priorities were, and whether the current legal framework

The respondents defined independent cultural actors as physical persons or legal entities, free from direct political influence and relatively autonomous from a financial point of view (having access to various sources of funding), making their decisions autonomously, implementing their own activities and promoting their own agenda independently. On the one hand, they were perceived as more ambitious and active than some state institutions, as having potential and able to have a strong impact on social innovation and the development of the cultural process. On the other hand, a fifth of the respondents considered them influenced by their donors and sponsors.

The majority of the respondents thought the independent actors had an essential role in the development of the cultural movement, both at the national and international levels. Seen by some as nonconformists and who expand the experimental fields in arts, they aim to synchronize the cultural movement in Moldova with that in the rest of the world, offer space for promotion and support for young artists, create new values, re-affirming the idea of the importance of culture in society. Having the freedom to generate proper ideas and projects, they bring diversity into the cultural area and try to remove contemporary art from its isolated, self-sufficient position, thus establishing new artistic trends. Although the independent actors have a big potential for change, according to some respondents, they should unify their efforts and collaborate closely to advocate for change in the cultural field, on the national and local levels.

One of the general conclusions of the survey was the invisibility of independent culture in the cultural policy of the state. It was not represented well enough and did not benefit from any programs addressed specifically to it. Naturally, for these reasons, their activities were not visible enough.

Regarding the existing cultural policy priorities and the need to propose some changes, only a few respondents proposed specific suggestions for improving the situation in culture.

Some respondents affirmed that the current legal framework is obsolete; both in terms of the language used and from the point of view of the

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and programs that were initiated by the Ministry of Culture were taking into account the actors of the independent scene and their needs; what recommendations people might have for improving Moldovan cultural policy. From the answers, one can also learn about the contribution of the independent scene to the development of the cultural sector.

represented values, it does not address the cultural realities. The legal dispositions are very general, without being supported by new programs and strategies for each sector of culture, while a general strategy for culture supported by complementary development of different sectors is missing. Today, the preservation of material and immaterial heritage is among the state priorities, while the living culture and the projects of the new generations of artists remain unsupported by the state.<sup>92</sup> Also, it is not clear what set of values is guiding the employees of the ministry in proposing new cultural policies.

Many respondents wish for changes, but they find it difficult to formulate the objectives that could improve the situation; they propose few concrete recommendations. On the other hand, the officials who have been assigned to elaborate the cultural policy do not consult the opinions of the artists and cultural workers, which demonstrates that transparent procedures in the cultural field are still lacking.

**After collecting the answers to the questionnaire, problems referring to the legal framework and existing programs in the field of culture were identified:**

- The absence of priorities in cultural development;
- Arbitrary decision-making by the officials;
- The need for structural change of the cultural sector relying on the old system of institutions and relations;
- The need to support cultural mobility and provide equal access to cultural products for inhabitants living outside the capital;
- Inadequate managerial skills in the administration of the cultural institutions;
- The absence of a transparent system of distribution of public funds and the lack of additional sources for funding culture;
- Outdated university-level artistic educational programs.

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92 Nevertheless, the following priority is listed among the CP priorities: "Promoting international artistic exchange and new technologies in the cultural field." However, like many others, this priority seems not to have been implemented. International artistic exchanges are along the lines of "Azerbaijan Culture Week in Moldova" and "Moldovan Culture in Belarus Week." Considering new technologies, there is a program for digitalizing cultural material/non-material heritage. Novoteka is another program for libraries, connecting houses of culture to the Internet.

**Recommendations were offered by the respondents, with the aim to improve the existing cultural policy framework:**

**A new role for culture** – Culture should regain its role and place among the national priorities. The Ministry of Culture should assume the responsibility for this, along with the civil society and the private sector. Cultural development should be rethought and new priorities established; contemporary and new media art, and socially engaged artistic practices, should be included among them.

**More transparency in the activity of the Ministry of Culture and its relation with the civil society, and more participation** – Platforms for regular meetings between the independent sector and authorities should be established in order to increase the transparency of the decision-making process in the field of culture. Additionally, new procedures of public consultation should be created, through which certain laws or measures in the field of culture can be discussed with civil society (culture NGOs, professional groups). The result of public debates should be a new cultural policy framework that will better fit the needs of independent organizations and assure the viability and visibility of the independent sector.

**Funding for youth projects and initiatives** – The funding system of cultural institutions should be changed, and project-based funding should be increased. The mechanism of distribution of public funds in the field of culture should be improved and become more transparent through the introduction of new procedures that create equal opportunities for all. For example, a public competition for new members in the Board of Experts at the Ministry of Culture should be organized, as they are responsible for the selection and recommendation of projects to be financed from the state budget. There is also a need to define clearly the criteria and priorities according to which public funds for culture may be distributed, so as to avoid non-transparent allocation of funds. Stronger support should be offered to the independent cultural sector, youth groups and active artistic collectives. Competition procedures should become more precise and simplified.



**More resources for the independent cultural sector** – Independent organizations from Moldova should be offered working spaces, workshops and production spaces for artists. The state-commissioned projects should be accessible to the public. There should be scholarships for young artists.

**Art education reform** – A comprehensive reform needs to be carried out in the field of artistic education. The curriculum should be renewed and subjects related to cultural management and cultural policy, curatorial studies, new artistic practices and the theory of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century art should be introduced. There is also a need for mobility programs for teachers and students.

**Open, transparent and efficient cultural institutions** – Both state institutions and independent ones should develop their work through programs and projects; the quality and performance of the administration of cultural institutions would increase if public competitions for their directors were announced.

During the SPACES project, several policy forums gathering representatives of independent cultural organizations were organized, in an attempt to create advocacy platforms. These were followed by a series of capacity-building workshops which introduced cultural management techniques and advocacy tools to the participants. Several meetings with representatives of governmental agencies were also organized in order to push forward the dialogue related to the reform of the cultural system in Moldova. In this way, an informal network was created of local cultural actors willing to share experience and develop their activities further by improving their stance towards decision-makers and funding bodies. Unfortunately, just a few of them see themselves as active participants in advocacy actions directed towards the local and central administration.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Culture seems to be much more open recently, says Vladimir Us. In a speech at a June 2014 policy forum, the vice-minister of culture invoked the need for independent cultural organizations to get involved more actively in the development of the cultural sphere in general and thus support the efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Culture. It seems that there are serious indications that the Ministry of Culture will

provide support and stay open for dialogue with the independents, for the purpose of speeding up the development of the situation in the cultural field, Us claims.<sup>93</sup>

## Urban Struggles

The common threads in all four SPACES cities are the urban struggles and citizens' protests against excessive privatization of what used to be state-owned property intended for communal use. The city, the urban public space, policies of discrimination and exclusion within the urban space, decision-making transparency in local public administration – all these issues have been ignored or pushed to the margin of public discourse in Chişinău, just as in the other three cities, Tbilisi, Yerevan, and Kyiv.

Within the last twenty years, the public space in the city of Chişinău has suffered a series of transformations which affected it in a negative way: the degradation of the existing public zones (parks, sport infrastructure and the like), the privatization of public property, and explosion of construction of residential buildings, an increase in the number of cars, the exclusion of citizens from decision-making processes concerning urban policies and city development. The configuration of forces in the urban policies in Chişinău today is as follows: an administration which acts mostly in the interest of business, scattered groups of activists, and mostly passive citizens.<sup>94</sup>

The civic sector, including independent cultural operators, has been one of the leading forces in the processes of civic resistance to the irresponsible administration of public goods. In many regards, these protest actions are an innovation within the Moldovan political context, as the groups of activists managed to build a discursive and active political field positioned outside the traditional political space, exceeding the narrow framework of political

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93 According to an analysis by the Contact Center, out of more than 3000 existing NGOs, only 10% are focused on culture. However, out of all registered organizations, only 2% are functioning effectively; therefore, in such conditions, an art market cannot exist. Consequently, the lobbying capacity of civil society in the culture field is very weak, and the state, by means of its authorized bodies – the Parliament, the Government, the Ministry of Culture – should sustain the non-profit sector involved in cultural activities, Vladimir Us reports.

94 According to Vitalie Sprinceana in "The city belongs to everybody: claiming public spaces in Chişinău" (2014).

party logic, and put on the political agenda issues such as urban citizenship, symbolic policies and the right to claim the city.

**Examples of such protest actions and movements in Chişinău are:**

The Europe Square protest – an initiative formed in the winter of 2012-2013 to stop the construction of a pizzeria in the Central Public Garden

Rotonda – an initiative formed in the winter of 2013 with the aim of restoring a section of the former Komsomolets Park (currently Valea Morilor)

Civic Platform – an initiative for networking and organizing all urban activists in Chişinău

Vydra – an initiative for cleaning the parks, public gardens and other green spaces in Chişinău

# **The Ukrainian Report**

## Ukraine

Population:	45,453,282 (2012)
State language:	Ukrainian
Cultural Minorities:	Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Belarusians, Bulgarians, Georgians, Germans, Greeks, Hungarians, Jews, Moldavians, Poles, Roma, Romanians, Russians and Tatars
Political system:	Unitary Parliamentary-Presidential Republic
EU relation:	Association Agreement with EU signed in June 2014
GDP:	EUR 84.3 bn (2009)
GDP:	per capita:EUR 1825 (2009)
Capital:	Kyiv

## CULTURAL DATA<sup>95</sup>

### Funding (2011)

Culture as a share of total central government spending: 1.56 %

Government expenditure on culture: EUR 760,140,000

Government expenditure on culture per capita: EUR 12.20

Share of central government spending on culture: 37.33 %

## A selection of national cultural policy objectives<sup>96</sup>

- Protecting and preserving cultural heritage and folk and amateur arts
- Ensuring freedom of artistic creativity and copyright protection
- Increasing the importance of regions, districts and historical cities
- Supporting and developing international cultural cooperation and exchange
- Promoting equality for cultural minorities and supporting cultural education programs

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<sup>95</sup> According to *Cultural Policy Landscapes: A Guide to Eighteen Central and South-Eastern European Countries*, Erste Stiftung Studies, Vienna 2012

<sup>96</sup> Please note that this is a selection of national cultural policy objectives as they were stated before the political change in Ukraine that occurred in the beginning of 2014. New priorities are being discussed at the time of writing this paper and are expected to be officially accepted within the following months. The new short-term cultural policy priorities are listed on the following pages, in the "Current developments" section, written by Kateryna Botanova.

## **The position of Non-Institutional Cultural Actors in Ukraine**<sup>97</sup>

Since 1991, the development of the Ukrainian independent cultural scene has paralleled the general political and economic climate. In times of highest civic activity and/or political crises, it raised its head and flourished. In times of political stagnation and “soft authoritarianism,” it slumped to the edge of non-existence. The relation between the activity of the independents and the local economy is quite the opposite. The more tranquil the political landscape was, the easier the development of the markets, and smaller the support to independents.

Thus, the most active times, when new initiatives and organizations emerged and the already existing ones developed and became more visible and active, were the periods of 1989-2000 and 2005-2010. Major gaps were the second term of president Leonid Kuchma, ending with the Orange Revolution, and the term of president Viktor Yanukovych, ending with Euromaidan.

Euromaidan, a major civic uprising against Yanukovych’s corrupt government and the geopolitical turn away from the EU towards Russia, gave a major impetus to the development of civic activism. Whether it will also put wind in the sails of the independent cultural scene is still unknown. At the time of this writing, the new Ukrainian government has had to deal with upcoming parliamentary elections, which will most probably influence political alliances and consequently the government itself. There will be pressure from the citizens and activists to conduct reforms in all sectors, and there will be demands from the EU to bring national legislation in accordance with EU standards, as stated in the Association Agreement, and, of course, there will be the war in the east.

This new chapter of Ukrainian history gives a significant chance for independents to become more active, visible, and influential, and have their say in forming the national agenda for culture.

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<sup>97</sup> The author of the Ukrainian report is Kateryna Botanova, director of the CSM Kyiv, a SPACES project partner.

## History

The concept of an independent culture, as opposed to the state or official culture, has its roots in the underground movements and artistic groups of the late years of the Soviet Union. During the perestroika era of the late 1980's, and, more or less, the first decade of Ukrainian independence (1991-2000), independent and non-institutionalized art groups worked to dismantle the idea and the myth of over-regulated, censored and self-censored Soviet culture and its artistic style – social realism.

This was done mostly through carnival actions, laughter, and burlesque, as defined by philosopher Bakhtin.<sup>98</sup> The best and most widely known examples of this are the Kyiv-based artists' squat Paryz'ka Komuna (Parisian commune, named after the street where it was based), the art group Mazokh Fund, the poetry group Bu-Ba-Bu (Burlesque – Foolery – Buffoonery) of Lviv, and the Vyvykh (Dislocation) art festival. Although their works were overtly political, very critical towards both the Soviet past and the new faux-democratic distorted reality of their present, they neither perceived nor positioned themselves as cultural activists, political entities or agents of change. On the contrary, they set a trend for independents to keep as far away from state politics as possible. Independent art initiatives and, later, institutions became a synonym for new, progressive, open, European developments, while “state” and “public” were labels for corrupted, outdated, often folklore-based culture.

The institutionalization of independents resulted from the activities of the Soros foundations, which makes this process quite similar to others in other post-Soviet and, to a certain extent, post-socialist countries. The policy of the Soros foundation in Kyiv known as the International Renaissance Foundation (IRF)<sup>99</sup> sought to nurture and develop the third-sector as a base for democratic changes in the country. That resulted in hundreds of artistic and cultural NGOs throughout the country by the late 1990's. In one way or another most of them were fed from the IRF Cultural program, which at that time had yearly budgets of approximately USD 1-1.5 million (an unbelievable amount of money for an economically depressed country, where a monthly salary of 250 USD in the city of Kyiv was considered quite a large income).

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98 Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin was a Russian philosopher, literary critic, semiotician and scholar who worked on literary theory, ethics, and the philosophy of language.

99 IRF has opened its operation in Kyiv in 1989 and was launched as a foundation in 1991.

When the priorities of Soros and his foundation shifted in the early 2000's, funding for culture started dropping dramatically, by more than 50% every year until 2003, when the cultural program at the IRF was closed. Soros Centers for Contemporary Art in Kyiv and Odessa – the only two art institutions directly established by Soros' foundation as spin-offs of the foundation programs – survived until 2008 and 2003 respectively. Most of other cultural NGOs were either closed down or went into hibernation by the mid-2000s.

Soros' motivation for such a drastic change was to let independent actors fish for themselves instead of providing them with daily food. As good as this motivation might have been, there were no fish around to fish for. More than a decade of independent Ukrainian state did not bring forth any living model of support or development for the cultural sector, other than the old Soviet one of spending money on a few state-run institutions and major festivities (usually of a folklore or pop character).

The independent actors were too unmotivated, divided and politically passive to fight for fish. An attempt by the CCA in Kyiv to foster the Ukrainian Independent Art Forum – a network of cultural and artistic NGOs that could lobby in their interest and influence cultural policy reforms – failed quite quickly. The network was established and registered in 2001 with some 20 members from all over the country, but never actually managed to produce anything, and died slowly by 2002-2003.

The mid-2000s saw new developments in the non-governmental, non-official cultural sector. Public money was still basically (and legally) unavailable for the non-governmental sector, unless one knew a way around the law, while private interest in arts, especially in visual art, was steadily growing. NGOs were going through a major decline, while private institutions, foundations and galleries were popping up. Art Kyiv Contemporary – the first Ukrainian art fair – was launched in 2005. It has taken place every year since. By the end of the 2000s, Kyiv was the center of a rapidly-developing Ukrainian art market with about 30 active galleries. Other gallery scenes were slowly starting up in Lviv, Odessa and Kharkiv. The Pinchuk Art Center, a privately owned center for contemporary art which belonged to an oligarch and son-in-law of Ukrainian ex-president



Kuchma, opened in 2006, featuring all the stars of the world art market and twice officially representing Ukraine at the Venice Biennale.

This major shift of public attention towards the emerging art market, which was happily greeted as a necessary component of a neoliberal economy, caused an interesting effect. In public discourse, as well as the discourse of governmental policies of late 2000s and early 2010s, it was the private sector in art that *nolens volens* usurped the meaning of the phrase “independent art scene.” All the privately owned, privately run, commercially oriented galleries, art spaces, centers, foundations, and, later, festivals, art schools, and all the rest, became the true independents. That is, they started producing new products for the market of art goods and services, fun and edutainment. They were the independents proudly carrying the flag of opposition not to the state *per se*, but to the boring, dull, secondary “official” culture, the one supported by public money. And the state was quite happy with this status quo, because it meant that the state did not owe anything to independent culture, either. During the last 10 years, in the eyes of central government, culture didn’t need any support – and thus it did not need any space devoted to it in public policy – because it was self-sufficient and presumably well-fed.

Very few cultural NGOs emerged during this time, but more and more cultural and social initiatives, art groups, collectives, associations and assemblies appeared starting in the mid-2000s. With a few exceptions like REP, most groups were informal and did not last long.<sup>100</sup> But all in one way or another wanted to change their immediate or more general environment – be it contemporary art discourse, the urban environment, or the rights of various marginalized groups like students, migrants, and women.

The contemporary art scene saw the rise of the REP group in Kyiv and SOSka in Kharkiv.<sup>101</sup> In 2006-2007, being residents at the CCA, the REP group hosted a community project, gathering, discussing and working together with different self-organized groups from Ukraine and Europe. By the end of 2000s their work and active position in the student activist environment at the university of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (where CCA was based at that time)

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100 REP (Revolutionary Experimental Space) is an artist group established in Kyiv in 2004.

101 SOSka was founded in 2005 by Mykola Ridnyi, Serhiy Popov, and Ganna Kriventsova in Kharkiv.

produced Hudrada (Art Council), a collective curating group that consisted of artists, curators, activists, philosophers and others, and the Visual Culture Research Center (VCRC), a non-institutionalized environment of young intellectuals, artists and activists. The latter was banned from the university in 2012 during one of the most important censorship conflicts related to the contemporary scene in Ukraine, when it was accused by the university's president of showing "not art, but shit." Their exhibition "Ukrainian Body" was shut down.<sup>102</sup>

In the early 2010s, the independent cultural scene in Kyiv and some bigger cities like Lviv, Odesa, Kharkiv, and Dnipropetrovsk consisted of an unaccounted for, but rather small number of both institutional (NGOs) and non-institutional independent actors working in the vast field of socially engaged cultural and educational activities, urban struggle and research. Most of them were clearly positioning themselves as political actors, articulating and sometimes acting out burning social issues – censorship, monetization and the neo-liberalization of art, the marginalization of different social groups, urban issues. But they were rather few in number for a country as big as Ukraine, a country in such a harsh political and economic deadlock.

### **The situation surrounding independents can be described as:**

- The non-profit sector in culture was nearly non-existent and had little influence.
- In small initiatives, experimental ideas were bright and carried great potential but were very short-lived and dramatically non-professional.
- The stage was taken by big spectacular shows organized by large private or semi-private institutions.
- The media followed only star events and only when it was clear how much a particular one would cost.
- Young professionals such as art critics and managers were approaching art from the perspective of its market value.
- Audiences were showing increasing interest in cultural initiatives and events, but were measuring their worth exclusively in terms of money or prestige.

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<sup>102</sup> To learn more about this case, please visit: <http://vcrc.org.ua/en/ukrbody/> accessed July 2014.

## The Need for Change

The need for change was palpable for a long time, but there were two major obstacles in the way: the corrupt authoritarian political regime, built by then-president Yanukovych, and the lack of solidarity between the independents. Having close to zero support for their activities made most independent initiatives very short lived, and often had them competing with others for the little influence and public space still available. Their political position could be realized on a very local level only, as was the case with the struggle for Hostynny Dvir (an architectural and cultural monument in Kyiv that was to be turned into yet another shopping mall), or debates against censorship in art and about freedom of expression in universities (like the ones related to the painting over of the work of Volodymyr Kuznetsov in Art Arsenal, a state-run cultural center,<sup>103</sup> or around the closing of the Ukrainian Body exhibition in Kyiv-Mohyla Academy). But even these local victories turned out to be temporary: after half a year of “Occupy Hostynny Dvir,” the artistic community was kicked out and the building went under illegal reconstruction; the exhibition was closed and VCRC was banned from the university; the work of Kuznetsov never reappeared on the walls of the Art Arsenal.

In the given circumstances, any attempts to debate, develop and include agenda reforms in the national cultural policy were seen as futile both by the society of independents and by the governmental agencies including local cultural departments and the Ministry of Culture.

A few attempts at wider policy debates were made between 2005 and 2008 by different actors from the independent scene, such as the Dakh theater group in Kyiv, but they never produced any concrete recommendations. Between 2010 and 2013, another attempt at developing a network of cultural NGOs was made by the Center for Cultural Management in Lviv. The Ukrainian Culture Network (<http://ukrkult.net>) consisted of about 15 to a few dozen cultural institutions which underwent capacity development training (with support from ECF) and developed cultural maps of participating cities, but despite several attempts, it never went for unified advocacy actions.

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<sup>103</sup> To learn more about the issue of censorship in art in Ukraine, including the case of V. Kuznetsov's banned mural, please visit: <http://www.guernicamag.com/art/blacked-out-in-ukraine/> accessed July 2014.

Nevertheless, it did not come as a surprise that different expert opinion-polls agreed on the same points. One was done by the KORYDOR online magazine run by the CSM (Foundation Center for Contemporary Art), another by the Public Policy Forum organized by the CSM within the framework of the SPACES project. A third was a questionnaire that was sent out to different representatives of the independent sector within the SPACES cultural policy research component. The results were the same. Basically, the independent cultural actors had a common vision about the direction and quality of the reforms needed.

The SPACES questionnaire, carried out in the summer of 2013, was sent out to 25 people from 6 cities and received answers from 9 cultural agents from 3 cities.

The respondents noted that the role of the independent actors is potentially important, even central, as they can create a common ground, uniting different sectors and actors to work together for change. They are the carriers of innovations. They can channel the creative and transformational potential of society in the direction most needed. They have to become major developers of cultural policy. But, as a matter of fact, they are rarely seen in the public field, they are not influential, and they lack unity.

**The major problems in the national cultural policy were mapped by the respondents as:**

- Financial non-transparency, post-Soviet system of institutional support for culture,
- Lack of articulated priorities for development,
- Soft corruption (when decisions are made based on personal contacts, not on expertise),
- Nationalism and post-colonial discourse,
- Lack of space (physical and political) for the independent scene,
- Outdated education system in culture and arts,
- Instrumentalization of state-supported cultural institutions (museums, theaters, libraries), depriving them of their social role,
- Attention to representation and large events instead of development and innovations,

- Non-transparent and non-expert policy making,
- Separation between cultural policy and cultural economy on all levels.

### **Relevant recommendations are:**

- Include independent initiatives and actors in the process of developing the new strategy for culture,
- Develop a vision, strategy and an implementation plan for short and long-term perspectives, which would be relevant to the current situation,
- Keep the most culturally deprived social groups in focus,
- Create a transparent and open mechanism of grant support to cultural initiatives,
- Provide cultural initiatives with spaces at minimal rates,
- Self-organize in coalitions and alliances of independents to control governmental agencies,
- Decentralize,
- Provide equal rights and opportunities for “official” and “non-official” culture,
- Reform the network of state-supported institutions,
- Stop looking at culture as a field of entertainment.

## **Current Developments**

Within three months of this questionnaire’s completion, the Euromaidan events had started, painfully transporting the country from a no-hope state to a state where reforms and changes, long talked about and demanded, were possible.

Apart from being an active part of protests at Maidan, independent agents occupied the Ministry of Culture at the end of February 2014, when active fights in Kyiv were over and the drive for change was huge. This occupation resulted in the establishment of the Assembly of Cultural Workers. This is an informal, horizontal, multidisciplinary entity, meeting irregularly in the basement of the Ministry of Culture. For a few months the Assembly stirred a more active discussion on the role of independents

in forming policy and monitoring the Ministry, forming working groups on different disciplines and putting on the agenda the question of closing the Ministry of Culture. At the time of this writing, the Assembly is striving to keep its monitoring functions, despite conflicts between a minority of more active members and a rather passive majority.

Maidan has sparked other self-organized initiatives. Launched in May 2014, the Congress of Cultural Activists is another group that debates the potential role of the independent sector. In Lviv, the open platform Dialogue gathers independent organizations, artists and some city officials to collectively develop a reform strategy for the city.

In March 2014, an alliance of independent institutions and cultural actors (researchers and journalists) was established to strategize reforms in the field of culture. The alliance, of which the CSM is a part, started collaborating with the Ministry of Culture when the government changed and new officials came in. By mid-summer, the 2014-2015 Short-Term Strategic Priorities were developed and are to be adopted by the Ministry of Culture after wider expert discussion at the end of July. The process is supported by the RMCBU of Eastern Partnership Cultural Program with the wider aim to develop a mid- and long-term strategy for reforms in culture by 2025.

The short-term priorities were developed taking into account the research and recommendations for cultural policy reforms within the framework of SPACES as well as recommendations from Ukrainian independents, gathered from the aforementioned questionnaire. They are based on the current situation in Ukraine.

**The short-term priorities are:**

To foster wide inter-regional and intercultural dialogue to promote respect and understanding for unifying the country.

To preserve cultural heritage for present and future generations.

To develop cultural industries as a driving force for social and economic innovations.

To introduce European standards of transparency, openness and accountability to the government on all levels.

These priorities are finalized with a set of goals and priority steps, necessary to set solid ground for further reforms. The Alliance for Reforms in Culture plans to continue working on a long-term strategy and to hold a number of wider discussions with independents from different parts of the country.

## **Urban Struggles**

Since the beginning of the 2010s, urban space has been one of the very few spheres where public protests could take place and where the protesting potential against Yanukovych's corrupt regime could be channeled. A number of activist initiatives resisting illegal construction and the ruin of cultural heritage areas have been active. Most, like Save Old Kyiv, are in the capital, but some are in other cities. Centers of conflict included Hostynnyj Dvir and the Yunist factory, both located in historical center of Kyiv.

For half a year, Hostynnyj Dvir was occupied by activists and artists, and was run as an open-air, grassroots art center. The initiative sought to protect a historical landmark from being turned into a shopping mall. The activists lost the case and were forcibly driven out of the space by the developers.

The former Yunist factory location was allegedly meant to be turned into an office center, possibly a high-rise in the heart of old Kyiv. Mass protests made the developers change their plan for the location. It is now slated to become a cultural center, controlled by the public council. The SPACES caravan event "Architecture of Common" took place at the former Yunist factory in May 2013.

CANactions, an architectural movement related to contemporary architecture, was launched in Kyiv in 2008. It developed into a festival, young architects' competition, discussion forum and professional expert environment educating and lobbying for urban spaces for everyone.

Other initiatives, like the Bikers' Association, have also made an important input into developing a vision of what a contemporary urban environment should be.

The CSM has been working on opening spaces for culture in the city and reclaiming public space for three years. Various projects have taken place, such as art in public spaces, discussions on what public cultural institutions the city needs, the roles of independents in reclaiming and reimagining the public domain with participatory educational events, aimed at channeling citizen action towards the public space they want to have.

Recent changes in the country made a considerable impact on the re-appropriation of the city by the citizens. Numerous smaller and larger initiatives have appeared in Kyiv, changing the city through public action. One of the first decisions of the new Kyiv city council, where one of the main activists is now a deputy, was to cancel the license for the reconstruction of Hostynny Dvir. But it definitely will take more time for real changes to come about.





# **Recommendations and Possible Scenarios for the Development of the Third Sector in Culture**

This research is focused on the new, emerging cultural practices united under the aegis of “the independent cultural scene”. By examining the situation in four countries, two urgent needs were determined: the need for self-conceptualization/self-determination of the independent cultural actors, and the need to influence governmental policies towards greater transparency and recognition of these new, emerging cultural practices and actors. Therefore, recommendations in this paper are articulated on two levels: the paper contains recommendations for the members of the self-organized communities known as the independent cultural scene, as well as recommendations for government agencies.

## **Recommendations for the Independent Cultural Scene Actors**

**Independent cultural actors need to come together** locally in order to define common visions which will serve as grounds for collective action.

**They need to define common values** through developing a common mission.

**They need to act from larger organizational platforms** such as alliances and unions, and to establish mechanisms of horizontal decision making and exchange within the platforms.

**Due to the specific political context of the EaP countries**, with their unstable democratic institutions and procedures, there is a common opinion that the independent scene has to achieve self-sustainability by creating models of self-reproduction in order to attain a more favorable negotiation position. Once the independent actors are recognized as economic and social subjects, their relevance will not to be disregarded by decision-makers.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>It is important to notice that we are not talking about commercialization of the overall activities of the independent scenes nor their total reorientation as profit-making entities. This provision comes from the concrete experience of the independent scenes, which have in some cases been totally neglected and ignored by the state agencies and public funds. This provision comes from the necessity for independent scenes to survive and keep their activities running, thus developing commercial services as well. For example, the ICA Yerevan has changed its status from an NGO to a foundation in order to be able to develop some commercial activities such as publishing, education, and management services. ICA and Utopiana.am are also very important as education hubs for new generations of cultural operators,

**Independent organizations' activities** need longer-term (three year) strategic planning.

**Independent media platforms** (websites) covering and analyzing cultural topics within the wider socio-political context, run by independent organizations able to determine their editorial politics independently.

**The need to gain public visibility** by acquiring a stronger media presence through writing, commenting and debating in printed and electronic media, locally and internationally.

**The need to gather regional independent cultural organizations** (outside the capital city) and connect inter-regionally by establishing collaborative networks, eventually on the basis of exchange programs or the like.

**They should develop** common short- and long-term priorities and join in common advocacy campaigns.

**The independent cultural sector needs to expand** its struggle for recognition by engaging in a wider political and civil struggle for the common good aimed at reclaiming the public sphere. The demand for changes in the cultural sector must be political, and to gain political importance.

## **Recommendations for Governmental Agencies**

**Rethink the existing national cultural policy strategy**, or develop a new one which would take into consideration recent developments in culture and include a wide range of new and emerging independent cultural practices (urban culture, new media, youth). These practices need to be seen in the light of recent technological and urban transformation processes and valued as contributions to spontaneous socio-cultural innovation as well as to the processes of creating social cohesion. The rethinking or development should be done in close collaboration with the representatives of the civil society / independent cultural scene. Accordingly, structural change needs to be

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offering specific educational modules such as a curatorial school and new media labs, and in this way greatly contributing to the self-reproduction of the scene.

introduced within the Ministry of Culture. A new council for independent, innovative cultural and artistic practices needs to be established. The title and the domain of the new council should be defined by the needs of the respective context and the newly-emerged independent cultural scene.<sup>105</sup>

**Develop transparent decision-making mechanisms in the cultural sphere.**

An open call for publicly-funded projects should exist as a precisely formulated document, visible and easily accessible on the Ministry of Culture's website. The open call should be organized according to specific disciplines and cultural fields (fine arts, theater and performing arts, music, publishing, innovative cultural and artistic practices, etc.), and in accordance with priorities previously defined by the Ministry of Culture. They should be managed by different, independent councils, including the Independent Culture Council. The councils should be composed of independent experts, and should be cross-disciplinary in order to include all those cultural practices covered by the term independent culture (defined above). The open call should preferably be made on a 6 or 12 month basis. The open call should have a predetermined and publicly-acknowledged budget. Projects should be submitted through an application form, which must be easy to find on the official website. There should be a time limit for the Ministry of Culture to respond to all submitted projects. Feedback should be legally guaranteed, and visible on the official website.

**Involve representatives of the independent culture scene in decision-making processes.** This should be enabled by establishing independent research units to deal with research on the local cultural processes development. The context-related results of the research should inform the cultural policy strategy document. Independent actors should be enabled to propose candidates and/or be elected to the independent council for evaluation of independent culture project proposals. The independent culture councils should have autonomy in the evaluation of the applications

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<sup>105</sup>In Croatia, the first such council established within the Ministry of Culture in 2004 was named Council for New Media Culture. Afterwards it was renamed Cultural Council for Innovative Artistic and Cultural Practices. Cultural councils are legally established at the Ministry of Culture for particular areas of artistic and cultural creativity: for proposing cultural policy objectives and measures for their implementation, especially for proposing programs of public needs in culture for which funds are provided from the state budget. The cultural councils are established in order to ensure the influence of cultural workers and artists on the decision-making process within the culture and the arts field.

and their decision should be binding for the Ministry of Culture. The members of the independent culture council should receive symbolic remuneration for their engagement in the process.

**Involve the private sector in the support for cultural activities** by creating interfaces such as foundations and arm's-length bodies for the support of arts and culture, and mechanisms to make investment in culture attractive to the corporate sector. The most recognized measures include tax exemptions for cultural investment, necessitating changes in fiscal policy.

**Establish new hybrid institutions based on public-civic partnership**<sup>106</sup> which would directly include NGOs in decision-making.

**Create production centers with a clear mission to support independent production and service centers for presentation of their programs.** Hybrid institutional types where many different actors are involved in governance and control would be a solid structural way to ward off clientelism, which has been reported as a threat by many independent cultural actors and an obstacle to the common action towards a more transparent system of culture.

**Create a lottery fund as a source for financing independent culture.** Design specific funding schemes in accordance to the needs of local contexts.<sup>107</sup>

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106 A good example for this type of partnership is the Zagreb Center for Independent Culture and Youth (POGON), a public non-profit institution for culture, based on a new model of civil-public partnership, founded and managed by an alliance of independent culture organizations named Operation City, on one side, and the City of Zagreb, on the other. As a direct result of the advocacy and activism of previous years, POGON is nowadays established as an innovative model of cultural institution providing high-quality and reliable services in the production, presentation and affirmation of independent contemporary art and cultural practices, as well as the active participation of youth in cultural and other activities in Zagreb. For more details, please visit <http://www.upogoni.org/en/> accessed June 2014.

107 A good example is the Kultura Nova foundation recently established in Zagreb. The foundation is the result of many years of successful initiatives of civil society organizations that advocated the establishment of a special fund for the civil sector in culture. The initiative of civil society organizations was recognized and supported by the Ministry of Culture, and members of the government who have continued to support the development of the foundation after its establishment. The foundation is not a competing or alternative funding source in culture in relation to those existing on the national or regional levels (through which the funding for cultural programs of civil society is also provided). Kultura Nova is a complementary measure in the system of financing culture that will contribute to the stabilization and development of civil society in the field of contemporary art and culture. Within the Croatian model of cultural policy, this foundation is an important example of the establishment of an autonomous body which was given the responsibility of deciding on the provision of technical and financial support to the civil sector in culture. Kultura Nova is the first foundation in the cultural sector in Croatia established by the state. By establishing such a foundation, the Croatian state made significant progress towards the

**Foster inter-ministerial collaboration in order to stimulate cultural production development as a motor of social development.** Giving out state- and municipality-owned spaces for long term lease and management by the independent culture initiatives.

**Stimulate international collaboration beyond bilateral cultural exchange agreements** by encouraging mobility of artists, independents, and other cultural actors.

## Public Space Recommendations

In light of the civic urban struggles presented on the previous pages, the ongoing issue of public space in post-socialist countries (and beyond) has been at the core of the SPACES project. The discussion has been moving from theoretical reflections to the issue of its usage, its production, and its defense.

In the framework of the SPACES project, as part of the program “Chişinău Civic Center – beyond the red lines,” the Oberliht Young Artists Association organized, in collaboration with participating experts, a regional conference in Chişinău called “Public space in post-socialism: inclusion, exclusion and practices of its reclaiming.” The conference, which took place in September 2013, gathered scholars, architects, activists, curators and artists from Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, Macedonia, Albania, Poland and Hungary who study, research, or are active in the field of public space, dealing mostly with the problems related to the administration and reconfiguration of public spaces in the post-socialist period.

The presentations explored the following topics: urban development and urban planning, beautification, degradation and commodification of public spaces, social movements reclaiming and defending public spaces, inclusion and exclusion in public spaces of various social groups (religious minorities, people with disabilities, sexual minorities, the poor), the politics of public spaces in post-socialism, corruption and lack of transparency in the process

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practices of those European countries which are improving the financing system in cultural and artistic fields through a variety of mechanisms. See more here: <http://kulturanova.hr/> accessed August 2014.

of privatization and administration of public property, symbolic or religious appropriation of public spaces.

Activists from Chişinău and the region presented cases in which the civil society, social movement or other groups of citizens have mobilized to oppose these invasive practices, to redefine the concept of citizenship, civic identity and participation.

**Instead of a conclusion, several recommendations were drafted as follows:**<sup>108</sup>

**Raise awareness** among various active groups and citizens about the need to open public spaces to the local community and citizens

**Provide the local actors** with theoretical knowledge, instruments and tools that can help them to initiate concrete activities in order to open more the public spaces

**Empower the local community** to demand better management of public space, and give it a voice in the urban planning policies

**Increase the participation** of the users and consumers of public spaces (urban dwellers and artists, visitors to the city, social and cultural groups) in the designing and organizing of spaces able to respond better to the needs of these communities

**Influence the decision-makers** and the existing public policies in terms of protecting, opening access to, developing and creating new public spaces in the region in partnership with the local community

**Prevent public authorities** from shirking their responsibility for maintaining existing public spaces (parks, cultural and sports infrastructure, recreational areas, playgrounds, and the inner courts of blocks of flats, etc.), which usually results in the degradation of those spaces

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<sup>108</sup> According to Vitalie Sprinceana.



**Stop the process of the commercialization of public space** resulting in the explosion of outdoor publicity, selling and distribution points all over the city, street vendors, etc.

**Prevent the substitution of the public function** of various public spaces with profit-making type of activities (parks, public toilets, etc.);

**Avoid the exclusion of various social groups** from using the public space (the gay community, disabled people, religious minorities, economically disadvantaged groups, etc.)

**Counteract corruption and lack of transparency** in the process of privatizing public property

**Invent new forms of institutional collaboration** between authorities and citizens (public-civic partnerships)

**Promote “the right to the city” agenda** and increase the participation of citizens in the process of determining the allocation of public money.

Nowadays, we have been witnessing a general tendency to commercialize a wider and wider circle of what used to be considered as non-commercial goods and services, things which used to form the basis of social equality: free education, health insurance, access to natural resources. The response to these commercialization processes are the social movements with high level of solidarity and self-managed organization challenging those processes. The key question at this moment is how to support those social movements and how to contribute to the re-conceptualization of the dominant political discourse, the one claiming that the current economic crisis is the crisis of the “too expensive” and “unsustainable” social state.

The SPACES project and the conference mentioned above attempted to offer some reflections, possible answers, and tools for dealing with the situation that has been challenging a big part of our generation of cultural workers, activists and citizens, in the global context.

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