

Istanbul's Cultural Constellation and Its European Prospects

Dr. Dragan Klaic

A Report Commissioned by www.labforculture.org

Executive Summary

This is a systematic analysis of the existing cultural infrastructure in Istanbul – its problems, key issues and prospects. The author, a cultural analyst based in Amsterdam, spent a month in Istanbul in the autumn of 2005, immediately after the beginning of EU accession negotiations with Turkey. The purpose of his trip was to explore potential connections between Istanbul's cultural resources and structures and those elsewhere in Europe.

In this report Istanbul is described as a booming and rapidly developing metropolis with a cultural infrastructure that is grossly inadequate for its 16 million inhabitants, and with high unemployment rates despite the city's visible economic vitality.

Wealthy individuals, corporations and private foundations complement a limited public engagement in culture, but often with an enmeshment of roles, responsibilities and functions. Entrepreneurial attitudes prevail among cultural operators; however, what would nominally pass for commercial culture is often in fact unprofitable and dependent on private subsidies. There is a rapidly growing realm of small-scale artistic facilities, geographically concentrated and with low visibility, little continuity and a perennial lack of production means. State cultural infrastructure is very limited – consisting mainly of antiquated, centrally run institutions – and inadequate for the growing levels of tourism and rather indifferent to the needs of the population. Istanbul's city infrastructure mirrors that of the state, privileging one zone and neglecting the Asian part. Various municipalities of Istanbul continue to build cultural centres as prestige objects, but without an underlying concept, programme, competent staff or operating budget. The promotional bilateral activities of foreign cultural institutes and consulates mean that a European cultural presence is becoming more evident. However, a strategic EU engagement is dramatically lacking.

The author concludes with pleas for the formation of a broadly representative organisation for arts and culture and of more alliances and umbrella structures to connect the various players and enhance their mutual trust and cooperation. The municipal authorities could perhaps be developed into possible interlocutors and supporters, while private foundations need to expand and clarify their role and improve their governance. A cultural policy centre – focusing on documentation, information and training – should be established in order to highlight good practice, safeguard achievements and stimulate and inform debate. A whole generation of future leaders, mostly educated abroad, needs to create a proper cultural infrastructure and renew cultural policy from the bottom up. The constant engagement and support of foreign private foundations, networks, institutions, the EU and EU member states is urged in order to speed up the cultural dimension of Turkey's EU integration. There are no inherent, insurmountable cultural obstacles to this process; rather, cultural development and the renewal of cultural policy would aid Turkey's overall reformist efforts on the road to full EU membership.

Purpose and background

In the last few years a few cultural operators from Turkey have been finding their way to meetings of the European cultural networks and to various conferences on cultural policy and training opportunities such as the AMSU. Some of the new structures, such as the Avrupa Kültür Derneği (European Cultural Association, Istanbul, www.europist.net/akd), have organised training in cultural policy and cultural management in Turkey and opened debates on how to modernise and develop their cultural policy. I felt that the complexity of cultural-political circumstances in Turkey at this time deserves more attention and that the future prospects of the cultural system ask for a detailed study; also that European cultural networks need to be significantly expanded by including Turkish colleagues in the arts, culture and academia, and that these networks need to improve their understanding of the resources and opportunities available in Turkey.

At the end of 2004 I decided to spend the following year one month in Istanbul. Necessity dictated that I limit my exploration to Istanbul, as the megalopolis with the most intensive concentration of contemporary culture, with the most elaborate infrastructure and thus with the greatest number of initial and potential partners in any cultural cooperation project. The city is so big and complex that I felt I would be better off focusing on it alone rather than fragment the limited time available by travelling around the country. Istanbul is an obvious point of entry for anyone interested in Turkey's cultural-political prospects. With the debate on the compatibility of Turkey and the EU becoming increasingly heated in Western Europe, I was curious to know what Turkish cultural operators themselves thought about the cultural dimension of their country's integration into the European Union, especially since their voices are rarely heard.

Over the past fifteen years since the end of the Cold War, I have personally been very much engaged in the development of ties and collaborative relationships between Western European cultural operators and their counterparts in Central and Eastern Europe. I have studied the cultural systems of post-communist countries and their slow transition, the disorientation and decay of some established cultural organisations as well as the explosive growth of many new, forceful and internationally oriented initiatives that, in just a few years, have formed the strategic interfaces of their country's cultural constellation with the rest of Europe. In lectures, seminars, articles and consulting missions I have advocated the comprehensive reform of the cultural systems of post-communist countries (this has still not taken place) and encouraged new initiatives rather than the risky overhaul of the tired older institutions. With this experience in mind I was eager to identify the most dynamic forces in Istanbul's cultural sphere, as well as the most important cultural-political issues which need to be addressed and the cultural strategies which should be developed in order to speed up Turkey's European integration. With my post-Yugoslav background I felt a strong kinship with Turkish traditional culture, the influence of which shaped much of my early Balkan experience. I also wanted to test and elaborate some of the stances developed in my most recent book, *Europe as a Cultural Project* (ECF, Amsterdam, 2005, available at www.eurocult.org), the final report of the Reflection Group I moderated on behalf of the European Cultural Foundation for two years, in which the cultural dynamic of Turkey was also invoked. Hopefully, the present report will stimulate the curiosity of my colleagues across Europe regarding the cultural life of Istanbul and Turkey generally, helping them to orient themselves on a first visit. Hopefully, too, it will inspire my Turkish colleagues to analyse their own conditions and set out their own developmental strategies.

Timing and circumstances

I arrived in Istanbul two weeks after the EU's historic decision to begin accession negotiation with Turkey, a decision reached on 3 October 2005 following difficult efforts to overcome the unilateral opposition of Austria. The first delegations of Turkish civil servants flew from Ankara to Brussels for briefing and previewing sessions regarding the chapters of the Accession agreement, with research and culture being considered first, on the assumption that they are the least controversial. A good deal of public attention in Turkey was focused on the statements of European politicians and EU functionaries concerning Turkey's qualifications for the EU. Turkish political parties in opposition began modifying their position in view of the accession process becoming a protracted political reality.

Half of my four-week stay coincided with Ramadan, when cultural life tends to become a bit reduced – even though some of my local colleagues preferred to put the blame on the cultural season's slow start. Anyhow, following Ramadan Bayram (Sugarfeast), cultural activity visibly intensified. I witnessed the celebration of the Day of the Republic (29 October) and the commemoration of Atatürk's death (10 November), with a privileged view from my lodgings of the ceremonies around the Atatürk Cultural Centre and the Independence monument at Taksim Square.

I could observe at close hand the domestic reaction to Orhan Pamuk's Frankfurt Buchmesse speech, which was followed by new accusations in addition to those made after his interview with a Swiss newspaper, which led to a court trial (scheduled for mid-December) for insulting 'Turkish identity'. Even some in Istanbul who do not disagree with Pamuk's stance *per se* express irritation at the presumed negative impact of his statements abroad, mixed with some jealousy that Pamuk has become a privileged Turkish voice addressing the rest of Europe. Many hasten to add that, contrary to what was said by Pamuk in the infamous interview, he was not the only one to speak out about the mass murder of Armenians in 1915 and about the state repression of Kurds in the 1990s.

Fortunately, I arrived during the Istanbul Biennale and could visit its exhibitions in detail and attend some of the discussions and presentations in its programme (www.iksv.org/bienal). The curators Vassif Kortun from the Garanti Platform gallery and Charles Esche of the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven presented in this 9th Istanbul Biennale a rich range of works inspired by Istanbul itself, some developed during residencies in the Garanti Platform gallery, all placed in several dilapidated and abandoned buildings in Beyoğlu, which was once the Western part of the city. Artistic responses to the urban life – its intensity, speed, decay, delirious features, sheer size and mass – dominated some of those places. Ideological passion and folly, ideological iconography and violence appeared in others. Some works created elaborate obfuscations, entrapping the viewer (so to speak) and creating phoney realities and alternative historic narratives. The Biennale provoked a strong response, with over 55,000 visitors and excellent reviews in the European press, although there was some criticism in the Turkish press regarding certain artistic work which was felt to be offensive, and some uneasiness as to how the next Biennale in two years' time will manage to reinterpret the concept and go even further than Kortun's and Esche's masterly exploration of the city.

By coincidence, I was able to take part in two international conferences that were taking place in Istanbul during my stay: one, on Balkan cultural studies, at the Bilgi University in collaboration with the University of Malmo, reunited me with several old friends and colleagues; the other, *Eurozine's* yearly network meeting of cultural magazines, hosted by the Turkish periodicals *Cogito* and *Varlık*, was sponsored by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism and Yapı

Kredi Culture and Arts Centre, and explored the ambiguities of neighbourhood and featured Pamuk himself as a cautious, non-committal opening speaker.

And to top it all, Theatre a.d. Ruhr arrived after Ramadan Bayram at the City Theatre and presented five splendid productions: *The Merchant of Venice*, *God*, *Antigone*, *Dreigroschenoper* and *Le petit prince*. The hall was filled well beyond capacity at all evening and afternoon performances, with some 700 mainly young people crowded in – even though I never spotted a single poster in the city. But Roberto Cuilli and his company have been nurturing a collaborative relationship with the Istanbul City Theatre for many years and seemingly do not need much publicity. I was again amazed by the diversity, articulation and radical quality of the productions and the formidable nature of the company whose development I have been privileged to follow closely since its very inception in 1981.

In reconstruction

Istanbul is in a phase of accelerated change. In 1920, the city had around 500,000 inhabitants, half of whom were not Turks but Greeks, Jews, Armenians, Italians, French etc. Today there are 15-16 million inhabitants and the percentage of ethnic minorities has become miniscule. In his most recent book, *Istanbul* (2005), Orhan Pamuk describes the melancholy, decaying and quite provincial city of his childhood in the 1950s, insecure and impoverished, with many wooden houses collapsing rapidly or burning down, with old American cars stuck among animal-drawn carriages on the streets.

Today, traffic jams are dramatic, and very few collapsed wooden houses can still be seen (in fact, some have been carefully restored). In the meantime, many solidly built houses dating from 1880-1923 have been utterly neglected, allowed to decay and finally been abandoned, leaving dreadful scars and few visible traces of their former elegance. Many are being restored now that inflation has been tamed, banks are giving credit and real estate prices are rising. Non-Turks have been leaving the city in waves since 1923, especially after the 1955 pogrom and after every military coup, but nowadays Western Europeans are settling again in the city and there is a steady inflow of immigrants from the Middle East, the Balkans, Caucasus and Russia. The tourist industry is booming: the city had three million tourists last year. Dozens of 3-star and 4-star hotels have been built around Taksim alone in recent years, and they do not seem to suffer from a lack of clientele. There are many bleak urban sights, and many ugly, cheaply built edifices from the 1970s and 1980s, and an endless sprawl of improvised cheap housing for the newly settled inhabitants, covering huge areas, on and on for kilometres, on both the European and the Asian sides. Yet this does not make the city less fascinating.

There is much new wealth, a sizeable middle class, and fashionably dressed modern youth, westernised in behaviour and taste, hooked on pizza, rock music and Starbucks. The preponderance of youth in the demography is visible, especially in the number of male and female students commuting to universities in the morning and the even bigger number of adolescent men roaming the centre aimlessly at the end of the day. The recent monetary stabilisation and the economic boom which followed the 2001 crisis provide some encouraging economic statistics, but many young people seem to be unemployed. And since some women often stay at home after dark, the idleness of young men on the streets is only more apparent in the evening.

Political life is intense and argumentative and the press lively, with columnists opinionating in a critical manner about the government, the judiciary and what is euphemistically called ‘the deep

state', i.e. the invisible power web of the secret services and their extended connections in the criminal networks. The ruling AKP has a very comfortable majority, and the few opposition parties that reached the 10% of votes needed to enter the parliament act often with vehemence and out of frustration while all the other parties kept out of the parliament are rather marginalised and disoriented. Turkey recently changed many of its laws, including the Penal Code, but 'insulting Turkish identity' remains a punishable offence. During my stay a few constitutional amendments were ushered through the parliament quickly and smoothly. However, some legal changes have still to be fully implemented, especially concerning the use of non-Turkish languages in public, on radio and TV. Twenty people were fined 62.60 euros each in the south-eastern city of Siirt recently, for using the letters Q and W on placards that were displayed publicly – letters which do not appear in the official Turkish alphabet (but do in Kurdish). This vigilance is applied selectively and ignores the ubiquitous display of website addresses, brand names and foreign titles (*TDN*, 26 Oct 2005). A large proportion of the judiciary, of lawyers, the military, the police and civil servants, as well as some educators and journalists form the bulwark of the anachronistic, rigid Kemalism, expressed as nationalism and authoritarian state secularism.

Regulations concerning NGOs have been changed several times, causing some confusion even among lawyers, but in principle setting up an association of citizens is relatively easy. Receiving grants from abroad remains complicated, however. That is why some operators choose to run autonomous initiatives as commercial firms, eventually making a commitment in the statutes to reinvest all profits. Only a large NGO can apply to be granted the privileged fiscal status of a foundation, and it seems that no one these days is getting government approval for this. It makes little difference anyway, as the fiscal advantages are very modest.

The proposed national budget for 2006 of some 108 billion euros almost meets Maastricht EMU criteria. Unemployment is rather high, however, and women are still massively left out of employment across Anatolia, where an emerging entrepreneurial class caught up with globalisation economically while remaining socially and culturally rather conservative, as the recent ESI study *Islamic Calvinists* points out (www.esiweb.org). Some Turkish and foreign experts add that the social security and pension systems are unsustainable in view of the altered demography and prolonged life expectancy, while at the same time many workers have no social security benefits at all because they work illegally.

Three private museums

In a single year Istanbul has seen the opening of three new private museums that are still unmentioned in most of the tourist guides. The Sabancı family opened its mansion on the Bosphorus to the public. The mansion contains a substantial collection and was during my stay preparing to host the first major Picasso exhibition in Istanbul. The Kıracı family renovated an elegant 1880s building near the Pera Palace hotel and opened its Pera Museum as a free-entry facility, hosting a fascinating collection of Turkish and European paintings of Turkish life between the 17th and 20th centuries and an excellently displayed exhibition of Anatolian weights and measures and traditional ceramics. There is also an auditorium and extra space for temporary exhibitions of the contemporary arts. After a presentation of some Turkish artists, I attended the lavish opening of an exhibition of Dubuffet's work, arranged by the French Cultural Centre and the Dubuffet Foundation.

Istanbul Modern is a large facility in a post-industrial complex near Karaköy harbour. Its core collection has been built up through donations by mainly Turkish collectors, led by another Sabancı, Eczacıbaşı, and some artists' and foreign gifts. Rosa Martinez (co-curator of the 2005

Venice Biennale) has been appointed the chief curator for five years and has exhibited Turkish and foreign artists. The facility is well run and has a restaurant café with stunning views and a gift shop that has sophisticated merchandise. Some 160 years after the beginning of museology in Turkey (thanks to the pioneering efforts of Fetih Pasha to secure archaeological findings and ruins by placing them in the St. Irene church in 1846 and later in Aya Sophia), Istanbul has a museum exclusively devoted to the modern arts and the prospect of attracting major contemporary artists through its well known and well connected chief curator. In only ten months of operation the museum had 360,000 visitors – a stunning success.

A major player: IKS SV

Istanbul Modern is one of the main initiatives of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and the Arts (IKSV, www.iksv.org), a doyen of private foundations, which has been operating for thirty-four years. IKS SV was a pioneer in introducing contemporary foreign arts to the public, through its cluster of festivals (film, music, jazz, theatre and the visual arts biennial). Increasingly, IKS SV has been moving from a role as interface and presenter to one as stimulator of domestic developments. It is run predominantly on private resources acquired through consistent fundraising and international partnerships. Government contributions are occasional and very modest; yet, even to the government, IKS SV is undoubtedly a respected and influential interlocutor. In a few years the Foundation will move to its new headquarters in a splendid secession building with a stunning view of the Golden Horn, which is currently dilapidated and uninhabitable and therefore used by the Istanbul Biennale for some of its best installations. The new headquarters will provide IKS SV with a 300-capacity venue, ample offices, a rooftop restaurant and café and a flagship store for Turkish fashion and design and its own merchandise. This would be a prominent place to present the work of a number of autonomous groups, but also – according to IKS SV director G. Taner – a site for regular debates about cultural life and cultural policies. He seems to be quite aware of the fact that IKS SV is perceived by many in Istanbul as a large, even overwhelming player which could easily be accused of enjoying a monopolistic position and which therefore needs to create a platform that will be used and made meaningful by other initiatives; also that the credibility of IKS SV among cultural operators depends on its openness and inclusiveness, that its reputation needs to be validated by the new generation of operators which has been well educated abroad and currently lacks proper resources, influence and visibility.

In organising its festivals, IKS SV depends on collaboration with some existing venues whose normal programming is at odds with the festival's orientation and content. But festivals are periodical events and even though there are many of them, organised by many players, the continuity of creation and presentation could be improved. For IKS SV it would make sense to pursue the idea of acquiring and developing Antrepo No. 5 as a cheap, efficient and quickly available performing arts venue in the immediate vicinity of Istanbul Modern. Antrepo, a former warehouse, was used for the 9th Istanbul Biennale's exhibitions and debates. It could be turned into a performing arts venue quickly and with very modest investment. In its operation it could develop fascinating synergies with Istanbul Modern. More importantly, it could become functional within a few months while the proposed new headquarters would take two to three years to develop and prepare for operation. Both sites, Antrepo and Istanbul Modern, are perhaps only temporary in nature, depending on the extent to which the entire Karaköy harbour area is modernised. But even an operational life of two to three years would make sense in terms of urgent needs.

An exceptional opportunity: Santral

Another major project of potentially great impact is the Santral campus of Bilgi University. Turkey has a great number of state and private universities of very varied quality. It seems that anyone can set up a university without an accreditation procedure. Consequently, many private universities exist to make fast money or even wash money. Bilgi is a clear exception in its consistent quality, international orientation, and efficient and quick development (www.bilgi.edu.tr). Its two Istanbul campuses are well run, comfortable and well equipped; located in poor areas and connected by shuttle buses, they frequently host international conferences. When in September 2005 a court banned a state university from holding a conference on the deportation and murder of Armenians during the First World War, the conference was quickly moved and successfully held at Bilgi. Recently, the university acquired a long-term lease from the government for a large area of 120,000 sq.m. at the NE of the Golden Horn; this was a former turn-of-the-century electricity plant which had been decommissioned some twenty years ago. A new campus is in the making there which will fuse education, research, cultural heritage presentation, urban regeneration and residential functions. An energy museum and contemporary arts museum are to be set up, as well as a library, labs and classrooms, offices and sport facilities. A large open arena near the water will serve for cultural events. There is the possibility of creating a small port and offering a fast connection by boat to the Eminönü harbour. The campus should accommodate some seventy (foreign) artists and scholars in residence and offer a whole street of craftsmen and artists studios. Around eight hundred students would be on campus every day.

Whoever comes to the remote and desolate Santral area and walks around the abandoned buildings and ruins of an industrial facility cannot easily believe that this could be a functioning campus within a year. Santral's managers are confident that they can move quickly and have the campus in operation in the autumn of 2006. There is something impressive and yet dangerous in this self-confidence and speed. Some ideas need to be tested further and elaborated or supplemented. For instance, I am not sure that eight hundred students a day would create enough density of movement and interaction to give the campus residents and visitors a sense of safety. One thinks of all those isolated and sterile modern university campuses across Europe and in the US that are perceived as alienating and dangerous places. The museum of energy could turn out to be a very costly but not very attractive facility. Serving primarily the educational market, it would not generate any substantial income. Seventy scholars and artists in residence would demand a large amount of support, and it is not certain that the educational process could absorb and integrate them all. The arts and crafts street could easily become a white elephant, since the poor surrounding neighbourhood will not provide many customers. Plans include a small concert stage in the student cafeteria, but there is no plan to create a simple performing venue for music, dance and theatre programmes – and no campus should be without one. Santral is large enough to have some space reserved for the offices of NGOs and small-scale R&D and cultural organisations which would in time be launched by its alumni, profiting in the long run from this proximity and partnership. Bilgi would perhaps be better served by a phased development of Santral, a gradual process that would include some experimentation and the testing of key ideas rather than a Stakhanovist rush to create everything in record time. For Santral *could* become a paradigm of urban regeneration through the synergies of science, education, culture and the arts: a model of clustering and trans-sectorial partnerships.

More real estate than culture

Another project of some potential but uncertain progress is the creation of a museum of Istanbul History in the Darphane, a former imperial mint within the Topkapı palace complex. This is a large, rather devastated building with some inner courtyards, which is currently being used as an exhibition space for those who can pay for their own promotion. I saw there a photo exhibition by a successful businessman and the announcement of a beer exhibition within a beer festival which the producers of the beer are running in several Turkish cities to stimulate the consumption of this beverage. The Darphane as a municipal history museum is the project of the History Foundation of Turkey, a small but important NGO which is engaged in oral history and bottom-up historic narratives, but which lacks capital and is dependent on volunteers. That Istanbul's fascinating multilayered past deserves a museum presentation is evident. That such a museum could profit from a huge number of visitors to Topkapı seems obvious; yet on a nice sunny November day Topkapı was indeed crowded but the nearby Archaeological Museum had hardly any visitors. To renovate the former mint means dealing with the government bureaucracy in charge both of the Topkapı operation and the protection of historical monuments: a very complicated and slow-moving prospect for sure. And yet, there is seemingly no competing plan for the use of the Darphane, so the History Foundation needs to find allies and partners to create some impetus.

In contrast to this slow-moving cultural project, on the real estate front plans are being made and set in motion rather quickly, with much publicity. Recently, Gulf investors showed interest in developing the Haydarpasha station complex, on the Asian side, where the trains to Ankara depart. This would be a large scheme that would include a modern station, garages, offices, residential housing, shopping arcades, and thousands of jobs; it would hopefully reduce somewhat the mass commute from the Asian to the European side by ferryboats and two overcrowded bridges across the Bosphorus. There are also plans for a Galata port complex, to be created on the opposite European side of the Bosphorus, between the Galata Bridge across the Golden Horn and Karaköy harbour. Investors are appearing already and again the scheme would mean offices, shopping malls, garages and residences with a stunning view, but also the demolition of some of the modernist warehouses built by exiled German architects around 1930, as well as the danger of expulsion or contextual degradation for the Istanbul Modern and the Antrepo No. 5, among other facilities.

Both projects are being communicated to the public as investment schemes, as real estate reappraisal, as employment machines and commercial and logistic hubs, but there is no mention of any cultural function to be incorporated. There is in fact no obvious source for voicing such concerns and advocating the incorporation of a prominent cultural function within two such complex schemes that will take at least ten years to materialise fully. The world of culture and the world of commerce seem to be quite separate, and the urban planners have failed to create a productive interface between them. When one considers how limited and inadequate the present day cultural infrastructure is for the booming population of 16 million, the omission of a cultural dimension in any urban regeneration scheme is inexcusable.

A Cultural Capital?

The opportunity to create such a platform in order to fuse and voice the divergently broad interests of culture, urban development, commerce and tourism is being created around the initiative to make Istanbul the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2010. There is an organising committee and a PR agency in charge; there are prominent individuals taking a strong stand to push this candidacy; a certain government commitment has been voiced; and the Mayor of

Istanbul is all for it. Recently the scheme was introduced in Brussels with the usual hoopla. Bearing in mind the experience of European Capitals of Culture over the past twenty years – critically analysed and evaluated by Robert Palmer in his 2004 report for the European Commission (see www.palmer-rae.com) – I would normally ask: Who needs all this trouble? And yet, in the case of Istanbul, I am tempted to curb my negativity and reserve judgment – or, even better, to consider some opportunities and crucial preconditions.

Inevitably, Istanbul's becoming the Cultural Capital of Europe will depend on political influence, prominence and visibility, and yes, much energy will go into real estate deals and things that have nothing to do with culture but rather with the city's infrastructure and logistics (as, for instance, a possible third bridge across the Bosphorus). It is unrealistic to expect the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (that is its official name, and in this case indeed, *nomen est omen!*) will invest much in Istanbul's cultural infrastructure. But efforts to secure Cultural Capital status might point out the drastic inadequacy of the cultural infrastructure sustained by the national government and – even more so – the cultural infrastructure supported by the City of Istanbul and its municipalities. It would reveal the dramatic absence of any cultural policy and stimulate the formation of broad coalitions to debate and articulate such a policy. There could be an orchestrated effort to balance investment in the tourist industry with investment in community arts and create an ambitious programme to develop public and private resources for contemporary creativity (which nowadays exist only as private largesse and not as a public responsibility). This could be an opportunity to remap Istanbul in terms of cultural infrastructure and ensure that its modest resources do not remain concentrated within the two square kilometres between Galata and Taksim or just a kilometre further north, while the Asian part and many areas on the European side lack any facilities. It could be a chance to upgrade professional arts education and integrate it better within the best of the existing universities. And the PR agency already contracted by the organising committee could perhaps begin by seeking to change attitudes in the popular media, which do not cover culture at all except as gossip or scandal.

Some of my interlocutors rejected any serious consideration of this idea as pure futility and an example of the touching naivety of an outsider who does not grasp how things work, how power is constructed and how public projects inevitably slide into private gain. Perhaps. But would those who adamantly reject any serious consideration of the Cultural Capital idea be willing to formulate their arguments against it and highlight what would be their *own* cultural development priorities instead? This would create at least some peg for public debate that is anyhow missing now.

Private wealth for public good

Quite a few people are getting rich in the contemporary Turkish economy and some of them are acting as culture's benefactors and donors. There are family and banking foundations spending a substantial amount of money, running their own programmes, founding and sustaining cultural institutions, and in some cases running their own cultural centres. There are successful individuals and companies who frequently act as donors and sponsors.

The Garanti Platform gallery has become a crucial interface between the Turkish and international visual arts scenes (www.platform.garanti.com.tr). Its exhibitions, projects, residences and curatorial talks and workshops are greatly appreciated. The Garanti bank sustains only the core activities of the gallery: the exhibition space in the main commercial street, offices and some residence studios and the salaries of three staff. For everything else, the gallery needs to fundraise. The bank is clearly focused on the young culture audience as its prime target group but,

according to Vassıf Kortun, the gallery is fully autonomous and experiences no interference from the bank whatsoever.

In the same İstiklal street there is the Yapı Kredi Culture and Arts Centre, a fancy facility with ample exhibition and conference space (www.ykykultur.com.tr). The exhibits are borrowed from Turkish and foreign museums and are of relatively high quality. This autumn the Centre offered a sophisticated archaeological exhibition of Turkish origin, drawings by Otto Dix (arranged with a German partner), and also hosted the *Eurozine* annual conference of the cultural magazines network. Yet some of my sources complained that the space lost much of its vibrancy after some core staff members left due to the owner's meddling. Further up the same street is the cultural and arts centre of the AK bank, AKbanksanat, which kept a low profile until Ramadan was over, with only one exhibition open, but afterwards came up with a range of performances, screenings and lectures on several floors of the building (www.akbanksanat.com).

Half a kilometre in the opposite direction is the double Tünel Sanat gallery of the T.C. Ziraat bank, not very well known and little frequented, where I saw some good photographs from post-war everyday life in Bosnia (www.ziraatbank.com.tr). In the same street, Borusan (a successful metal pipe company which sponsors a fine symphonic orchestra in Ankara) maintains a gallery and a superb music library with a music and dance education centre. And İssanat is a large, high profile concert hall, also bank-supported, with a considerable range of concerts (www.issanat.com.tr).

One can conclude from these examples that private donors amply supplement a very modest public infrastructure of cultural facilities and that they have created organisational models to deploy their resources in a direct operational way. A quick glance at the posters in the same main pedestrian street confirms that there is no lack of commercial sponsors supporting various cultural events. What is problematic here is the conceptualisation of the role and function of all that wealth and good will. Sponsors could be interested and engaging, but might also be restrictive and censorial. Private foundations confuse their grant-giving and operational roles and do not always respect the programmatic and artistic autonomy of their grantees. The separation of a profit-making commercial company from its nominally non-profit foundation seems not to be drawn very clearly. Some of the cultural organisations run by private capital have the reputation of acting as exploitative and unfair employers. The governance structure of private foundations lacks transparency, and the roles and responsibilities of the founders, donors, board members, management, staff and associated artists demand clarification and some precise statutory definition. As long as such clarification is missing, public trust remains shaky, and many cultural operators are markedly cautious and sceptical. They voice their low expectations of the public authorities; they acknowledge their dependence on private donors; and at the same time, they jealously guard their creative autonomy against government, corporate or foundation appropriation.

The new territory

The cautious attitude of these cultural operators is quite understandable, especially if one considers the fragility of the emerging infrastructure in which they operate. There is a chain of small-scale facilities, and paradoxically most of these are concentrated within the two square km between the Galata Bridge and Taksim Square, in Beyoğlu. Some are well known music joints such as Babylon, some are the much appreciated and frequented bookstores; there are popular artistic galleries and cafés, such as Ara (which has photos by İstanbul's foremost historic photographer, Ara Gül) and Onay Sanat, a place for music and debate above the café Mado on the

same corner. To visit some other places one needs a well-informed guide who will take one through the steep side-streets and up the stairs of crowded apartments. On such a journey one eventually comes to a small dance studio located in an attic or squeezed into someone's apartment, offering a daily dance class or occasional workshop for a modest daily or weekly rent, which represents a small private investment in the most basic of provisions. Galataperform near the Genovese 6. c. tower (www.galataperform.com) is a theatre the size of a living room, capable of holding fifty or so people. In November, Z Theatre was still under construction in the cellar of a private home, with a café and gallery to be installed on the ground floor, a narrow, deep facility for perhaps seventy people: a family enterprise, artistically and financially. Maya Theatre in Istiklal Street has been in existence as a small theatre venue for quite a few years; it is adjacent to a design office which makes it, to some extent, financially viable, although its programme covers no more than fifty evenings a year – the producer manager cannot attract more of an audience for her own productions and there are few groups that can scrape together 300YTL (185 euros) per evening to rent the venue for their own work (www.mayasanat.com).

Nevertheless, new venues are emerging. Mısır apartments in Istiklal has been completely revamped by its owner, a real estate developer, and nowadays it houses a plush café restaurant on its roof, with several floors of galleries, spacious apartments, offices, university alumni clubs and supporters of a popular soccer club, while on the fourth floor the new Dot Theatre has been performing a few evenings each week since last September. This is an excellent well-furnished black box venue, with almost a hundred comfortable chairs and good lighting, acquired partly through a private bank loan and partly through donations – a place that clearly profits from the prestige of the renovated building and its inhabitants (www.go-dot.org). Just around the corner, an underground car park is to be turned into an ambitious venue for six hundred people by Mustafa and Övül Avkiran: this would be the largest of the autonomous venues. Under the name of 5 Sokak Tiyatrosu, it would cater for performances, workshops, production development and other events (www.5sokaktiyatrosu.com). Far away on the Asian side is probably the tiniest space, Karga, a small room for photography, video and slide projections on the top floor of a popular café (www.kargabar.org) which is hidden in an area inhabited by millions that has nothing else like it.

Or something completely different ... There is a theatre on the periphery called Semaver Kumpanya, in a poor *quartier populaire* of the Kocamustafapasha area. This is a venue of remarkable austerity and basic provisions, which aims to serve the neighbourhood and depends by and large on the willingness of local craftsmen and businessmen to support it (www.semaverkumpanya.com). Young actors get some travel money and a communal meal, but hardly any fee, and yet they perform ninety evenings a year, putting on four main productions (and three more for children) in a 300-seater hall. On one Saturday night it was only a quarter full, with around seventy people watching a production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, done in a circus style, joyful but indifferent to the gender mix up of the play and its pervasive melancholy. .

There are of course other venues in Istanbul which present themselves as private and thus commercial places, offering a more entertaining repertory with popular TV actors, but often even these do not have sufficiently large audiences to cover costs. On the Asian side there is Oyun Atölyesi, a well appointed venue with a good café and a restaurant that seem to make money; however, on the evening of my visit only seventy of its two hundred comfortable seats were filled, presumably adding an economic loss to the artistic fiasco – for this *Othello* is utterly discredited by an acting style that is shamelessly borrowed from TV sitcoms (www.oyunatolyesi.com). BKM in Besiktas, run by the popular Yılmaz Erdoğan (www.bkmonline.net), also cannot always fill its six hundred seats, but manages to maintain its long runs. There is commercial theatre even in the Profilo shopping centre and elsewhere, but

behind a commercial façade there is usually an artistic entrepreneur acting as a silent sponsor or subsidy giver.

If within a small cultural segment permeated by ambition and artistic innovation there is no lack of artistic energy and readiness to take risks, and if there is no lack of entrepreneurial thinking and willingness to make substantial investments, there is nevertheless a lack of money for development and production to fill the existing small venues with new work; a lack of trust among individuals, preventing them from forming compact and sustainable collectives and delivering some creative continuity; a lack of marketing strategies and effective publicity; and, ultimately, a lack of audience. The last is a preposterous claim in a city of 16 million inhabitants, but is nevertheless true. These shortcomings are especially visible in the performing arts, the riskiest and most expensive of all experimental art endeavours. A possible explanation must be sought in the lack of continuity and visibility and in the fact that the venues have not established a strong enough profile to appeal to a certain audience group and develop some steady loyalty over time. There is obviously a serious absence of any audience development strategy.

Other artistic disciplines suffer more or less the same problems but have less difficulty in surviving: photography, for instance – a discipline in which artistic pursuits can be combined with more commercial work and in which inexpensive opportunities for exhibiting can be found more easily than for the development and presentation of theatre or dance. There are plans to create a Photography Biennale in 2006 (“Chaos & Magic”) for the first ever time, again with Istanbul as the main theme and inspiration. Music could always hope to attract more visibility, good bookings and money-making tours abroad. In music publishing, Kalan CDs offer a richness of carefully produced works, archival material revived and traditions resurrected, revitalised and challenged, with many cross-cultural elements and fusions of divergent idioms, accompanied by exquisite booklets and covers. And MIAM, a centre for advanced music studies linked to the Istanbul Technical University (www.miam.itu.edu.tr), which is comparable to Amsterdam’s STEIM, has a successful Divertissemento festival. And while Garanti Platform seem to be the only serious gallery – selective, relying on conceptual clarity and strategic programming – there are visual artists who survive not only by combining autonomous arts work with commercial decorative and design commissions, but also as nomads communing between Istanbul and Western Europe. Video artists, as the Istanbul Biennale made clear, are also one of the hidden artistic – and nomadic – tribes. With filmmakers it is more or less the same. Some stay away from the Turkish film industry that produces around thirty to forty full-length commercial feature films a year, all made primarily for the domestic market and some of them quite successful; others film professionals venture into commercial work and take time out to do documentaries and more ‘artistic’ films. There are many small cinemas in the centre of the city, most of them individually owned and with a varied repertoire. On the city’s outskirts are the multiplexes, dominated by the US-made films. Yet not all commercial art is really commercial, not all alternative art is really alternative, and the divisions are sometimes rather blurred.

The role of the Turkish government

And the state? What about government support? This is one more area in which the original emancipation effort of the radical and authoritarian Kemalist reformism of the 1920s-30s has been exhausted and turned into the sustenance of anachronistic models and subsidised routines. With its odd name, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism implies that the government sees culture primarily as a factor of tourist promotion rather than a developmental entitlement of the people living in Turkey. Of the Ministry’s 2006 budget of YTL 712 million (445 million euros), a huge part supposedly goes into tourist promotion. How much is left for culture I could not find out, and

nor could my Turkish colleagues. Optimists think that culture gets 15% of this sum, while pessimists feel it is closer to 3%! Sums aside, the existing state cultural infrastructure is small, inadequate, and has not grown with the explosive increase in population, the raising of living standards and the diversification of lifestyles and tastes.

National cultural institutions were established in the glorious decades of the early Republic in imitation of Western European and Soviet models, charged with the tasks of modernisation and Europeanisation, financed by the state but run with a firm hand by the state bureaucrats, in a centralised manner. Most state cultural institutions are in Ankara, some in Istanbul, and just a few in other cities. Nevertheless, all state theatre companies are still managed by the same directorate in the Ministry in Ankara. The firm control of officialdom goes against the creative processes, while the security offered to 'state artists', with open-ended contracts, makes them complacent. Government officials are not the best artistic managers and cannot act as artistic leaders. They lack some basic competences and ignore those who have them. For instance, a recent renovation of an Ankara concert hall was financed by the state but carried out in total ignorance of the resident Presidential Symphony Orchestra (CSO) and its preferences, with bad acoustics and uncomfortable chairs as a result (*TNA*, 8 Nov 2005).

In certain state museums one sees considerable know-how and astute efforts to do the utmost with modest means, even examples of exhibitions that benefit from sponsorship and donated equipment and expertise, as in the Topkapı complex, where some of the precious objects are on display thanks to investment by private jewellery firms. Recent presentations of Turkish cultural heritage abroad – in the Brussels Palais des Beaux Arts, the Royal Academy, London, and the Smithsonian in Washington DC – also relied heavily on private sponsorship. The Museum of Turkish and Oriental Arts in Istanbul's Ibrahim Pasha Palace works on two levels: a sophisticated art and archaeology presentation on the upper levels and an old-fashioned, almost naïve, stuffy and faded ethnological presentation on the ground floor. In the Archaeological Museum various periods of museology development are still distinctly visible in the presentational styles, including a very 1970s display of findings from Troy. One misses effective lighting, clear signposting and proper text boards, digital equipment, educational activities and some temporary exhibits. Topkapı cannot adequately process the crowds of foreign and domestic visitors descending on the complex, especially as large parts of it remain locked and inaccessible for no obvious reason.

The huge Military Museum in the centre of Istanbul, within the former Military Academy (a heavily armed and guarded military complex) does not convey a coherent narrative or contextualise a single battle or military campaign. Instead of making an educational impact, it bores the visitor with its endless displays of art, armour, weapons and military insignia. Even worse, in the more recent chapters the presentation glorifies the 1974 Cyprus intervention and glamorises the top brass that led the military coups between 1961 and the 1980s. The rest of the complex, called the Cultural Centre, seems to work as a rental space for exhibitions, trade fairs and conferences. It excels in security provisions, not programming finesse.

The flagship of the state cultural infrastructure in Istanbul is AKM, the Atatürk Cultural Centre on the central Taksim Square, an unappealing building from the 1980s, combining opera, musicals, ballet, folk dance, classical music, Turkish traditional music, drama, children's programmes and films in several halls (www.idobale.com). With heavily subsidised tickets and a diverse and regular programming, it attracts quite a lot of visitors, many arriving in an organised way, in groups. This is also the main venue for foreign appearances and festival features. It looks and feels like a state institution, however, or rather as a Soviet-era trade union hall. On the other side of the same square is another venue used by the Istanbul company of the State Theatre,

which performs some classics (e.g. Gogol's *Inspector General*) as well as Turkish and foreign contemporary plays, but surprisingly puts on trivial comedies by anonymous Western boulevard authors whose works appear in the repertoire of other theatres as well, alongside the frequent staging of Shakespeare.

The Ministry has recently begun allocating once-a-year support grants to certain theatre companies (the individual grants are apparently between 4,500 and 45,000 euros), but without clear objectives, criteria or transparent procedure. This inevitably provokes complaints about conflicts of interest. In the realm of international cooperation, the Ministry relies on antiquarian bilateral agreements on cultural cooperation with other governments. In fact, when I was involved three years ago in the EFAH/Interarts study for the European Commission on the international cultural activities of national governments, the Turkish Ministry was the only one of the thirty-five approached which never delivered any data nor explanation. Now that Turkish cultural operators have gained access to the Culture 2000 programme of the EU, the Ministry is expected to set up quickly a CCP (cultural contact point) to advise and support potential applicants and develop its expertise in networking with other CCPs. While the Ministry operates slowly, in a routine way, chiefly through its embassies, often confusing culture with propaganda and tourist promotion, hundreds of Turkish artists engage in international cultural cooperation thanks to their own unofficial networks, occasional private support and much personal investment. At the same time, IKSÜ is organising large programmes – *Şimdi!* (Now!) – of contemporary Turkish culture in Berlin and Stuttgart and soon in other Western European cities, with some government money and a grant from the Bundeskulturstiftung and the Bosch Foundation as an encouragement to local Turkish communities to come out of the *Gastarbeiter* ghetto and become visible in the cultural mainstream.

Local cultural infrastructure

Şehir Tiyatroları, the City Theatre, mirrors the state structure. It is an immense system with hundreds of administrators and technicians, one-hundred-and-eighty actors on permanent contracts and another eighty engaged for specific productions. It churns out dozens of productions every season and makes them tour around a network of six municipal stages in various neighbourhoods of Istanbul, including one on the Asian side (www.ibb.gov.tr/sehirtyatrolari). By its sheer size and the nature of its model, this huge factory-like system, which resulted in around two-hundred-and-twenty performances in November 2006 alone, is caught in a mentality that foregrounds planning over originality, innovation and artistic quality. The idea that the system should be run from one artistic and producing centre as a unique supplier of distinct municipal stages indicates a stern industrial logic where only the quantity of output matters. The city administration also runs a concert hall with diverse international music programmes (Cemal Reşit Rey konser salonu, www.crrks.org, thirteen concerts in November 2006 and two dance events) and a string of six cultural-artistic centres (www.kultursanat.org) which combine concerts, films, children's theatre and lectures, often repeated in several places (a total of eighty events in November 2006). I recalled the principal one, off İstiklal Street, for a failed discussion with the Gulliver network in 1993, and when I went back this time the sense of a bureaucratic fortress was confirmed as the surly guards turned me back. Concerts occasionally take place in the Yerebatan Sarnıcı, a restored former Byzantine water cistern, but a similar, smaller Binbirdirek nearby is subtlety a disco bar.

In addition, certain local municipalities have their own cultural centres which feature concerts, films, performances by various companies and programmes for children and occasionally a festival. Some offer high professional standards, some open doors for amateur groups and

programme lectures on cultural and educational matters. One even maintains its own theatre company. It seems that this layer of infrastructure is not fully utilised. Programming is uneven and unsteady. Most municipalities are controlled by the ruling AKP, but this does not mean that all cultural outlets are used primarily for Islamic propaganda. Some clearly stress folk art and traditional family values and seek to appease rather than develop their public. Especially for Ramadan, they provide appropriate traditional or religiously inspired programmes, even on the streets. While new municipal centres are being built, their function and role need further articulation. There is not much point investing in those edifices if they have no clear concept, no programming priorities or profile, no competent leadership or staff, and an insufficient programming budget. Yet they seem to be built for the glory and prestige of politicians who do not understand the interdependence of the physical facility and the quality of its programming. A quick look at some of the municipal galleries indicates that the staff running them are also not competent and that the choice of work to be presented is completely arbitrary, certainly not driven by any artistic considerations.

Cultural infrastructure is further complemented by the cultural centres of some universities. While the entrance to the oldest and largest state university, Istanbul University in Sultanahmet, is barred to those who are neither students nor faculty staff by the guards at the campus entrances (obviously in order to prevent external political propaganda stirring up the students), the cultural centre of the private and rather distant Sabancı University runs shuttle buses to and from Kadıköy harbour on the Asian side and also to Taksim in order to recruit audiences from outside. Dozens of state and private universities in Istanbul seek to absorb the enormous generation of young people, and their cultural centres obviously play an important role in cultural habit-forming. Yet not all of them are involved in many cultural activities. One that uses the former Ottoman artillery depot, Tophane, as a cultural centre mainly sublets to wedding parties and receptions.

European presence

Foreign cultural centres are numerous and increasingly active both on their own premises and elsewhere in the city. French, German, Japanese, Italian and other foreign cultural centres are located in the city centre, in the same Beyoğlu area where so many other cultural facilities are also housed. As in some other European cities, the national cultural centres declare that they are in favour of mutual cooperation, but very little comes of this as their principal task is the promotion of the national language and culture and they are steered by their own ministries and government agencies according to divergent regulations and administrative principles. Istanbul is, however, one of those strategic foreign capitals where the EU needs to assert a strong cultural presence as opposed to the mutual competition and bickering of national cultural institutes. As I argued in a 2004 article, 'Dry the Morass of Ignorance', Istanbul should – alongside Moscow and Cairo – be one of the first places where the European Commission sets up 'Houses of European Cultures', staffed by experienced cultural operators rather than diplomats and civil servants. Such facilities should stimulate multilateral cultural cooperation, advance the principle of cultural autonomy and artistic freedom, boost mobility, confederate scarce resources and amplify the impact of contemporary cultural production.

The long accession road on which Turkey officially embarked in October 2005 is littered with irritating obstacles, barricades and checkpoints of systemic, legal, institutional, political and ideological sorts. The EU can criticise, preach, point out, and scold: sometimes this will work, at other times it will be utterly counterproductive, causing resentment and irritation even among the most pro-European Turkish intellectuals and artists, not to mention the politicians, bureaucrats, military and media, which would be likely to harden their nationalist and sovereignist stances.

The EU could achieve impact by *doing something* – creating facilities and programmes for cultural engagement and cooperation that would involve, build trust and know-how, and win over hearts and minds by sheer force of example and the concrete experience of European ‘values’, ‘ways’ and ‘standards’ so flippantly invoked in the political rhetoric.

*

Conclusions

1. *A voicing platform.* The primary responsibility to consolidate, develop and innovate the existing cultural infrastructure rests of course with the Istanbul cultural operators themselves. They are a rather fragmented group, competing for scarce resources, international contacts, the support of foreign missions, even access to information – which does not in itself nurture trust and a collaborative spirit. Many of them tend to mistrust corporate interests and large foundations and display something of a knee-jerk resentment towards the government, city officials and politics generally. Furthermore, they are eager to affirm their autonomy but are in fact squeezed between the anachronistic and often dysfunctional public cultural institutions, the private ones with muddled competences and governance structures, and an overwhelming cultural industry, Turkish and imported, which draws most of the potential public away. One way of improving trust and collaborative attitudes would be to form a broadly representative platform for divergent cultural interests, set up not for some corporatist representation but to articulate and advance the common strategic interests of all. There is for instance much effort needed to pressure the media into offering better coverage of local cultural events, which is almost wholly missing from high circulation daily papers. Even basic information, such as daily and weekly schedules of cultural events, is scarce and incomplete. And among numerous local radio stations, only the volunteer-staffed Açık pays attention to cultural life.

2. *Alliances and umbrella structures.* There is a visible desire among cultural operators, especially in the performing arts, to have their own small venue where they will be free to work as they please. It is not always understood that this is neither realistic nor very efficient: who will pay for the venue and its activities and how can small groups of creators provide continuity of programming and proper marketing to attract audiences? Even those already existing small venues of this type have difficulty in functioning. A solution should instead be sought in alliances, umbrella structures and partnerships; in the clustering of various cultural initiatives under several roofs where some professional conditions of production and presentation could be secured; in the de-monopolisation of the existing facilities, so that they become accessible to various creative teams and groups on non-exploitative terms. At the moment, cultural production is fairly small and discontinuous, with very limited outreach and visibility, and with occasional peaks achieved mainly in a variety of festival formulae.

3. *Dialogue with the municipalities.* While the Ministry in Ankara remains distant and rather irresponsible, a dialogue with local municipal authorities should be sought first of all. They might not be too interested in contemporary creativity, especially of an innovative and critical nature, but would perhaps care to see the existing cultural centres run in a more professional manner, attracting larger audiences with cultural and educational activities and forms of community arts instead of traditional amateurism. If such outstanding NGOs as Anadolu Kültür are capable of introducing contemporary European art to such distant Turkish places as Kars and Diyarbakır in Eastern Anatolia, it should be possible to do the same in Kağıthane, Üsküdar, Bayrampasha and other Istanbul municipalities. Only a consistent dialogue with municipal officials could lead to the emergence of some rudimentary cultural policies that would offer some support to creators. A creativity fund needs to be established in order to finance artistic projects under certain criteria

and conditions and provide for their dissemination across the city. But to start such a dialogue, a broader advocacy and voicing platform for cultural operators first needs to be set up; perhaps a fund could be established as a public-private partnership, bringing together some municipalities and some private foundations.

4. Building bridges. The prospect of EU accession has prompted some useful initiatives in this direction over the past two years, such as cultural management and museology training and debates about cultural policies (see *Transformation in thinking, dreaming and daily life in the process of EU integration*, Eur. Cultural Assoc., Istanbul, 2005); however, these have tended to emphasise the national level and, it seems, insufficiently explored the local opportunities that exist. More attention needs to be placed on the building of bridges between private foundations and culture professionals, between private and public culture, between small and large cultural operators, universities and the arts sector, those working in cultural heritage and those in contemporary creativity, professionals and amateurs, artists and educators. Those with an impressive track record, such as IKSU, as well as such newcomers as the European Cultural Association and some other existing structures could play a pioneering role in this process. While innovation leads a fragile, pauperised existence, opportunities to raise alternative funds and gain more support (by doing community arts with children, youth, women, prisoners, drug abusers, migrants and other underprivileged groups) are not being actively explored. Equally, connections between Istanbul's resources and opportunities and the public in the rest of Turkey – as pioneered by Anadolu Kültür – are still very limited.

5. The growth of private foundations. Private foundations play a vital role in filling the gaps left by the public authorities. Since the present economic conditions in Turkey generate enough capital for further foundation forming, the emergence of new foundations needs to be encouraged, but programming priorities, function, role and governance issues need to be articulated among potential donors and founders as much as the improvement of legal and fiscal conditions. There is perhaps a role for the existing Third Sector Foundation to advance best practice and stimulate the professionalisation of the foundations' operation with respect to the autonomy and freedom of grantees. The involvement of the European Foundation Centre in Brussels or of some other individual foundations, such as ECF, could also be beneficial.

6. Documentation, information, training. Currently, even the best cultural practices remain unregistered and therefore less known and quickly forgotten. It could be useful therefore to consider setting up a small documentation centre, perhaps at one of the universities, to document the players, dynamics, practices, models and funding sources of cultural production and presentation. A university environment could connect such a centre with existing culture and arts management programmes and use its own students to do some work as part of their practical training. There is of course a risk that this would become another graveyard of data. For this reason the centre needs to serve cultural operators in voicing their arguments and improving project development, and to communicate needs and trends to private foundations and public authorities. Documentation and information-gathering, processing and distribution would lead to some forms of training and debate on cultural policy issues and ultimately stimulate consideration of a masters programme in cultural policy at some university. This would be required, since Istanbul and Turkey clearly need in the coming decade or two to modernise substantially, expand and dynamise the existing cultural infrastructure, none of which can be done systematically without the appropriate policy framework and planning.

7. Future leaders. The main resource of the cultural life in Istanbul is not structures and institutions but people, especially a whole generation of highly qualified cultural operators. Many of these operators have some junior academic responsibilities, and almost all did some

postgraduate training in Western Europe or the USA. They do not yet have responsibilities equal to their qualifications, and the existing infrastructure does not offer them many opportunities for professional engagement and development. They have to expand and change the existing facilities and create a new layer of initiatives and platforms that will serve their needs and aspirations. In a way, their position and prospects could be compared with those of their colleagues and peers in Central and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s. They are pioneers and innovators, future leaders and trendsetters. To go on, they need to work with each other and seek other potential partners and supporters; they need and deserve solid, steady support from their colleagues in the rest of Europe.

8. *Continuity of attention.* European cultural operators, networks, foundations and educational and research institutions in arts and culture should use the momentum created by the start of accession talks with Turkey and venture to explore, connect, identify potential partners and develop joint projects. The cultural and political complexity of Turkey today and the fascinating richness of Istanbul (rather than stereotypes and obvious iconic manifestations) deserve to be studied by means of a patient dialogue and recurring immersion in this pulsating megalopolis on the Bosphorus. That IKSVM will host a Theatre Olympics in June, that IETM will hold its annual meeting in Istanbul in April, and that the European Cultural Foundation plans to hold its annual Board of Governors meeting there soon: all of these are encouraging signs and also excellent opportunities for our Turkish colleagues, to be followed hopefully by many other initiatives.

9. *Turkey's EU membership.* Contrary to what some conservatives, liberals and demo-Christians in Europe tend to say, there are no inherent cultural differences that would make Turkey automatically incompatible with EU membership. Islam is not such an obstacle, neither culturally nor religiously. In fact, during my stay in Istanbul, which coincided with the intensive religious practices of Ramadan permeating public life, I was much more annoyed by the frequent display of fanatic secularism in its nationalist and militarist variants than by Islamic religiosity. There is a long way for Turkey to go, in terms of economic stabilisation, political and legal reform, the consolidation of civil society and the removal of the prerogatives and privileges of certain state institutions. Some of my interlocutors were not sure how long Turkey would need in order to complete this process; some were even doubtful whether Turkey could ever do it, but many more doubted whether the EU would want Turkey as a member even if the whole compatibility homework is done in full. There are many voices declaring that Turkey wants to be part of Europe but must guard its 'identity', its 'values', its 'way of life', its 'soul' and its 'dignity'. This is an echo of the same rhetoric that was coming from Poland, Latvia and Slovenia in the accession process before May 2004. As if accession is one more glacier joining a cluster of glaciers and not a dialectics of change in which the country joining the Union and the Union itself mutually challenge and influence each other. A broad, long-term engagement of European cultural operators with Turkish colleagues would in time help to dispel doubts, insecurities and prejudices on both sides; would contribute to the changes in Turkey, and hopefully in the EU as well.

*

Method, arrangements and acknowledgments

For my stay in Istanbul I obtained a grant from the Dutch Foundation for the Amateur and Professional Performing Arts (www.fapk.nl) to cover my expenses, and LabforCulture (www.labforculture.org) commissioned me to write this report. Garanti Platform Gallery in Istanbul acted as my host and gathered together a group of young academics and cultural operators with whom I held four weekly seminars on cultural policy. These participants were in

turn my scouts and guides, taking me around, pointing out events and places and introducing me to their colleagues. Prof. Dr. Selçuk Erez generously offered me excellent accommodation in the centre of the city.

I started my research armed with an analysis of the Istanbul cultural scene made by my friend and colleague Han Bakker in 2002-2003 for the Dutch ministries of Education, Culture and Science and of Foreign Affairs (*Contemporary Turkish Culture in the Netherlands and in Turkey*, OCW & BuZa, The Hague, 2004). Bakker took a broader scope, since he was analysing Turkish cultural initiatives in the Netherlands and in several Turkish cities besides Istanbul. At the same time, his focus was somewhat narrower, for he sought to identify potential partners for cooperation with the Dutch cultural world, while my focus on Istanbul had as a premise a broad range of possible cooperation across Europe. Some of Bakker's mapping of Istanbul has been altered in the meantime due to intensive development in the city.

I benefited from the kindness and hospitality of many institutions and individuals. I would especially like to mention Selçuk Erez; Vasıf Kortun, Öykü Özsoy and Gözde Gürsel of the Garanti Platform gallery; Görgün Taner, Dikmen Gürün, Esra Nilgün Mirze and Bige Örer of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (www.iksv.org); Üstün Ergüder of the Istanbul Policy Centre; Gerald Knaus of the European Stability Initiative (www.esiweb.org); Marco Hennis and Nanna Stolze of the Royal Dutch Consulate General; Sadun Sönmez of the Istanbul Modern (www.istanbulmodern.org); Annika Svahnström of the Consulate General of Sweden; Osman Kavala of Anadolu Kültür (www.anadolukultur.org); Emrah Efe Cakmak of *Cogito*; Osman Deniztekin of *Varlık*; Ayşe Öncü of Sabancı University; Asu Aksoy, Serhan Ada, Emre Baykal and Elif Kamisli of Bilgi University (www.bilgi.edu.tr); Mazlum Kiper of City Theatre; Memet Ali Alabora, Talin Büyükkürkçüyan, Renate Papsch; Ozgur Doğan of Açığsahne; Emel Güntaş of Cezayir (www.cezayir-istanbul.com); the leaders and staff members of many other cultural organisations which I have visited; and finally all the participants of my cultural policy seminars: Esra Aysun, Pelin Başaran, Gökçe Dervişoğlu, Gonca Gümüşayak, Ayça Ince, Aylin Kalem, Ömer Kanipak, Emre Koyuncuoğlu, Cigdem Mater, Zeynep Moralı, Mahir Namur, Sinan Niyazioğlu, Bige Örer, Öykü Özsoy, Ece Pazarbaşı, Pelin Tan, Ata Ünal, Deniz Ünsal, Sevin Yıldız, Ömer Yılmaz, Seçil Yılmaz and Rana Zincir.

Amsterdam, December 2005

About the author: Dragan Klaic is a theatre scholar and cultural analyst. He is a Permanent Fellow of the Felix Meritis Foundation in Amsterdam and teaches Arts and Cultural Policy at the University of Leiden. He lectures widely at universities, speaking at conferences and symposia and serving as advisor, editor, columnist, researcher and trainer. His fields of engagement are the contemporary performing arts, European cultural policies, strategies of cultural development and international cultural cooperation, interculturalism and cultural memory .

Educated in dramaturgy in Belgrade and with a doctorate in theatre history and dramatic criticism from Yale University, Klaic worked as a theatre critic and dramaturg, held professorships at the University of Arts Belgrade and the University of Amsterdam, led the Theater Instituut Nederland, co-founded the European Theater Quarterly *Euromaske*, and served as President of the European Network of Information Centres for the Performing Arts and of the European Forum for the Arts and Heritage. He was the Moderator of the Reflection Group of the European Cultural Foundation (2002-2004) and author of its final report *Europe as a Cultural Project* (ECF, Amsterdam, 2005). He is the initiator of the European Festival Research Project, an informal consortium for the study of the current festivalisation of daily life. His books include

several works published in the former Yugoslavia before 1991, as well as *Terrorism and Modern Drama* (co-edited with J. Orr, Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1990, paperback 1992), *The Plot of The Future: Utopia and Dystopia in Modern Drama* (Michigan Univ. Press, 1991), *Shifting Gears / Changer de vitesse* (co-edited with R. Englander, TIN Amsterdam, 1998) and most recently an exile memoir *Exercises in Exile*, published in Dutch (*Thuis is waar je vrienden zijn. Ballingschap tussen Internet en Ikeatafel*, Cossee, Amsterdam, 2004) and soon to come out in Croatian in Zagreb (*Vježbanje izbjeglištva*, Antibarbarus, Zagreb, 2006). His book on international cultural cooperation is expected in 2006. Klaic's articles and columns have appeared in many periodicals in several languages. He is a Contributing Editor of *Theater* magazine (USA), a board member of Praemium Erasmianum (Amsterdam) and member of several advisory boards in Budapest, Brussels, Paris and Amsterdam. Email: balakla@xs4all.nl

Copyright 2005-2006 Dragan Klaic

This text is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5

Licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/>)