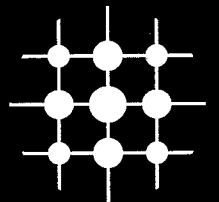


# The Role of Arts in Processes of Social Change

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# The Role of The Arts in Processes of Social Change

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# Challenges and opportunities in fundraising through networking

Lidia Varbanova, Program Director, Arts and Culture Network, Open Society Institute, Budapest;  
Vice President of the European Network of Cultural Administration Training Centers

I doubted if this was the right time for a conference, because it is just before Christmas. But then I realized that it probably is a good time, because the year is at an end and this is the time when people make all their plans for the following year, and they make a summary of what they have done and what they have not done in the current year. We are very close to receiving presents from Santa Claus and coming from Bulgaria I can assure you that children are very frustrated and mixed up with the notion of "Santa Claus". In the past we used to call him "Father Frost" and now his name has been changed to "Santa Claus". So children are completely confused as to who this person is. Is he alive or not? Are there miracles in the world? When does this person bring presents? This is also a very serious question, because here in Austria he comes on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December, in Bulgaria on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December, in Russia on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January and so on. So children feel absolutely lost with all these changes going on as they also reflect everyday life.

Probably all of us in this room believe in miracles and we should believe in Santa Claus because we deal with the arts. We are either much like "real dreamers" or "dreaming realists" because it is really difficult to deal with the arts in this changing world in Central and Eastern Europe.

## I would like to stress 3 important things:

- 1) How can we understand the arts and culture in this framework of social change? What do they mean? Can culture really help and how is it considered from the point of view of the open society concept?
- 2) Networking in Europe: Why do we need it and what are the main problems we are faced with in networks like this one. Are there any major dangers and shortcomings in networking in Europe today?

- 3) Fundraising in general and the problems we face when trying to convince people who have money and who do not believe in Santa Claus in general, that our project is the best one. So I would like to place emphasis on our difficulties in managing projects from the point of view of new strategies in the arts and culture network of the OSI (= Open Society Institute).

Talking about civil society we all know that this is very much linked with diversity, with freedom of speech and with many aspects of systematic change. We are trying to create a so-called "third sector" which includes far more independent organizations, associations and clubs than it has in the past. Of course, this is the positive side of the "civil society" concept, but in many countries it is still linked very much with an absence of identity and mobility in the cultural sector. Although it is often commented that Europe is opening its borders, a lack of mobility still persists because there are many other problems, such as that of gaining an entry visa. For many countries the problem is also the lack of democracy, even when we maintain that the democracy exists. Most of the changes are very chaotic. In everyday life we feel the pressure and the stress of the political and economic uncertainty surrounding us. There is a lot of external support for Central and Eastern Europe. But is it really helpful? To what extent does it live up to the real needs and expectations of these countries? Are western models or Canadian and American models being thus imported? Or are we attempting to utilize this external funding as a means of preserving and developing the identity and the national heritage of these countries?

There is a very interesting book about to be published by Dorota Ilcuk on the Civil Society in Central Eastern Europe. It makes a very interesting comparative analysis of a couple of Eastern

European countries in terms of the so-called civil society. There was a conference in May 2000 in Canada about the importance of arts and culture for social cohesion. When we talk about social change we should also bear in mind the importance of the arts and culture for the cohesion of an open society, which in some Eastern European countries still seems to be a long way off.

### **Why can arts and culture contribute to social change?**

#### **I myself am able to think of a couple of important reasons.**

- (1) Culture can open up public space and public debate. These days, we no longer view culture and the arts as being pure artistic activities, but as something that brings people together, that initiates debate and unites politicians, sponsors and representatives from the third sector with the aim of sharing and finding ways to proceed further in the cultural field.
- (2) The culture of a certain city or village becomes more and more important. We have to link our artistic projects with the outside world and draw closer to the public, stage artistic events outside buildings and place them in non-conventional public places. This is something very important for Central Eastern Europe 10 years after the political change. In the past, we became used to the fact that most of our cultural organizations were traditional organizations - with a roof, in a house where artistic activities took place. Now it is important to get arts and culture outside to as many places as possible, to diversify and regionalize our activities.
- (3) The arts these days deal with a range of different issues in our society, such as women's issues, the problem of AIDS or immigration. "Immigrants' culture" is a particularly serious topic as in many places around the world minority groups have been responsible for changes in the culture of the majority group. So the question arises: who is the minority and who is the majority – especially in places where we deal a lot with immigration?
- (4) Culture is also involved with so called "social help", in which we use culture and the arts to help people at risk or in prison, or to help those with mental or physical disease who are in need of therapy. So the arts can help in a social way to improve the living conditions of marginal groups in society, helping them to a more position.
- (5) Art is very much liked by education. This is probably one of the main reasons behind the creation of the current network. When we say arts and education we can mean many

things by it, starting with basic education, higher education, adults' education... Thus there are many areas where art can help people to improve their education throughout their entire life. This is also one of the reasons why the open society network has a special program called "Step by Step" in which there is a special emphasis placed on children's education.

- (6) The arts are also linked to minority groups which is the reason why we often talk about intercultural communication and multicultural adaptation. Of course, a serious problem arises when we invest so much in minority groups – are we really helping them to come closer to the mainstream culture of the country? I personally believe that we have to support more projects for mutual understanding and adaptation between different minority groups, not only to support their own cultural or social life, but because people are only prepared to get together when they can share their leisure time.
- (7) Finally, the arts and culture are important for social change because they make cities and regions safe. If you walk through the streets of Budapest, you feel safe; there are lots of cultural buildings and artistic events going on every night. People, who participate in artistic activities, actively or passively, cannot be criminals.

The second issue I want to talk about is networking. The whole concept of networking is relatively old on the European continent. It started in the mid-80ies, when the first networks were established. These networks were like meetings amongst friends or professionals with the main aim of sharing information in order to survive and fighting together for money, arts markets and political attention. This was a wonderful beginning.

In the cultural field there are more than 70 officially registered networks today. Networks are very different in terms of their aims, objectives, membership procedure and activities. They are based on a democratic, horizontal approach, which means that anyone can join the network or leave it. I would like to mention some problems and failures in networking which I find important:

- 1) The problem of becoming a member, an issue that is relevant for several countries from Central Eastern Europe. To become an individual or institutional member, you are required to pay a subscription fee, which - in some cases – is more than 400 Euro. In Central Eastern Europe this is a

lot of money. So the question of how to raise funds to help more people and organizations – especially in isolated areas – to enter the networks, is a serious problem. Some networks therefore create their own fund for these financial problems. A good example is the existing Thomassen Fund at the European network of Cultural Administration Training Centers.

- 2) The problem of competition. What all networks have in common is their need for money although sources of funding are very limited. The Council of Europe and other European organizations are able to help sometimes, but there are many networks to be supported, and the question is: who is going to get this limited amount of money? Therefore at times there can be not talk of being friends and helping each other as the networks enter into a competitive process. This is why the question of how to avoid competition and to create real partnerships seems a serious problem to me.
- 3) The problem of sustainability. Some networks emerge, are unable to support their activities and then disappear again. Sponsors want to see results, however networking is not necessarily about results, but rather about processes. So the question is how can politicians be convinced that networking is something worthwhile and how can financial support be found if there is no final result?
- 4) In Central Eastern Europe we still have not developed any national or regional networks. Networks are still not recognized by the majority of the population as being important. Indeed, in certain countries the law actually prevents networks from being formed. Some of the very old networks are still not officially registered, and as the law does not technically allow them, they can hardly expect to find any support for their projects.
- 5) Some of the networks have become organizations themselves. They have started off by networking out of a coordination office, based on a horizontal principle, and have gradually developed the same hierarchical structure as other organizations.

We had a very interesting conference in Turin at the beginning of November 2000, organized by Fondazione Fitzcarraldo. One of the workshops was devoted to the future of networking in Europe. The prediction was that in the future people will have computerized networks and the human culture of networking will probably no longer exist. Networking will probably involve

smaller groups rather than large structures, which are expensive in terms of maintenance and travel costs. The future of networking in two or three years is therefore not particularly clear.

The last problem pertains to how to use networks for fundraising. Finding money for our artistic activities and creative ideas always seems to be something of a miracle bearing in mind that financial sources are scarce. Maybe we should talk about "state money versus mobile money". I very much liked Peter Inkei's idea, which was expressed at the CIRCLE conference in Vienna last month, about the fact that civil society and foundations help the flow of free money in society.

Why is fundraising becoming more and more difficult and why do we need it?

- 1) We cannot talk about contemporary artists and their work without dealing with money and markets.
- 2) Europe is a continent with lots of creative ideas but resources are limited for helping to implement these ideas. There are just a couple of funding sources for the arts, cultural activities and organizations. The state is the most traditional of them in Europe. In many countries, the ministries of culture are trying to reshape financial structures – they want to provide funds using project subsidies, together with budget subsidies. However, the bureaucracy in these ministries very often prevents real government support for artistic projects. In addition, the overall share for the arts and culture in national budgets is decreasing drastically in many Central and Eastern European countries.

Sponsors provide another opportunity. The sponsorship culture only has a brief history and is not well developed in our countries. We have had a "business sector" for just ten years now and it is sometimes linked with the "mafia" and with "money laundering". There are cases in which businessmen prefer to give money whilst remaining anonymous. The existing tax legislation provides an important stimulus for business sponsorship, but in many countries it does not exist, or does not work efficiently. In the case of Romania, for example, there is a 10-page law on sponsorship, but it does not seem to help in practice.

The third important fundraising source is the foundations. We still feel the lack of regional and national foundations in Central Eastern Europe. There are more than 150.000 officially regis-

tered NGOs in Central Eastern Europe, of which approximately 10% are foundations. One of the problems is that most of them are seeking grants themselves and not necessarily giving grants, and that unfavorable laws often restrain them.

Fundraising practice in the arts and culture is not an easy process. Some of the burdens are:

- 1) The increasing bureaucracy of the funding bodies. The application procedure is, in some cases, much more time and money consuming than the amount received in the grant.
- 2) Having an idea and expressing it in a written form are two different things. Foundations and sponsors have to be aware of the difference between having a good idea and being able to realize it in the form of an artistic project.
- 3) The drastic decrease in money for the arts and culture has not only occurred at a governmental level, but it is also taking place in the majority of foundations around the world. When more closely examining their structure, one can see that the arts and culture receive the lowest level of priority within their supporting frameworks.
- 4) Very few funding bodies support "seed" projects, newly established venues and organizations. In general, they prefer to fund something, which has already existed for several years.
- 5) And again, the problem emerges that sponsors and foundations want to see results, while pure art is very much linked to the creative process.
- 6) There is very little money for amateur artistic activities and organizations.

So in practice, it looks as though even if you are a good fundraiser in the arts, there are not so many places for you to obtain money for your project.

Finally, I would just like to add a few words about the Arts and Culture Network of the Open Society Institute. Its major role is to promote collaboration and artistic stimulation throughout the region, but also to stimulate the process of change in the field of cultural policy and to contribute to the overall systematic changes in society. The network program works in tandem with the national foundation local arts and culture initiatives and recognizes that needs and conditions vary dramatically among the countries in our network. The strategic policy of the Arts and Culture Network Program is to be proactive, inspirational and a catalyst for national foundation cultural activities, to be multi-faceted in its approach (education, information, Roma, etc.) and inclusive of all groups of people and disciplines of

artistic expression. There are two components in the Network program - Cultural Link and Cultural Policy.

The Cultural Link program enables professionals in the region to do the following: cooperate, exchange and develop art and cultural projects which provoke debate within society; raise new and contemporary questions; introduce new, experimental, innovative forms of art; contribute to direct social change (fight against social, ethnic and religious exclusion); change or raise issues within cultural policy.

The Cultural Policy program is a new component, which contributes to the promotion of long-term structural changes in the field of cultural policy - the development and implementation of different models of cultural actions with specific emphasis on projects that "cross borders". Priority support is given to long-term projects aimed at the following aspects: the development of legislative and fiscal policy in the field of culture; transformation of existing infrastructures into more flexible and self-sustainable ones; new entrepreneurial and fundraising models of cultural institutions and events; education and training of cultural administrators (policy-makers), arts managers and entrepreneurs (including training of trainers); establishment and development of new artistic venues and resource centers linked with cultural policy issues; cross-cultural communication.

In my professional life, I have always seen things from the "grant-seeking" point of view. Now I work for a "grant-giving" organization. I see that both perspectives are not really easy. I face lots of challenges, but I also see an enormous source of opportunities in the fundraising process through networking. I still believe in Santa Claus and I sometimes write him letters. It helps a lot to be a "real dreamer" and a "dreaming realist" when dealing with the arts and culture!