

# Evaluation of Croatian Cultural Policy

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Throughout entire Eastern Europe, including even the Czech Republic, the heroic period of taking revenge upon the symbolic legacy of the red star which featured Lenin's and other local dictators' figures was marked by taking revenge upon the model of cultural mobilisation which provided socialist states with the guarantee of a certain kind of ideological legitimacy. Would Wajda have produced his "Iron" and "Marble" men had culture not occupied such a high position within the ideological mechanism of his state (L. Althusser), although it was obviously just craftiness on the part of the regime which helped it to present itself as a "cultural state" in its dealings with the democratic West. The animosity towards cultural policy encountered in a minority of "kulturtragers", whose favourite motto was "return to Europe", was partly due to the fact that the model of cultural policy was scrupulously followed by Hitler's Nazi regime and is one of the key words associated with totalitarian ideology. However, sobering-up period set in as soon as the ministers of the new democracies were requested to declare their intentions to the Council of Europe.

Once back from Strasbourg at least it became quite clear that cultural policy, "politique culturelle" or "kulturpolitik" was not invented either by Nazi manipulators or the socialist engineers of the soul. And that the degree of democracy in post-communist states will be measured against their respective implementation for cultural policy in line with the European models

of the democratisation of culture, the culture of democracy and participation.

## Investment in the Future

The evaluation of the cultural policies of the EU member states on the one hand, and UNESCO's projects regarding cultural policies in the world on the other hand, have provided an external influence for the project which would result in the national report on the Croatian cultural policy. The two professional bodies dealing with cultural policies are the Department of Culture of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia and the Institute for International Relations. The latter has attained such a high level in the research of culture that their re-

sults have become a widely respected benchmark. That is why the recently completed national report which was presented to the Council of Europe under the title of "Cultural Policy of the Republic of Croatia: National Report, IMO, Zagreb, 1997", represents a symbolic moment, the final break with the childhood disease pertaining to the heroic period of prattling about cultural policy and, hopefully, an introduction into the conception of the Croatia's cultural development strategy for the 21st century. The project team was led by Professor Vjeran Katunarić, Ph.D., project manager, and Biserka Cvjetičanin, Ph.D., executive editor-in-chief of the study alongside Katunarić.

The significance of this study for Croatian culture (and politics) is bound to inspire a lot of discussion.

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To start with, we should remind ourselves of the story about the "return to Europe" which gains in seriousness with this study, and that the expert and research value of the evaluation of Croatia's cultural policy may become a paradigm for all the future strategic steps to be taken within the process of the Europeanisation of Croatia.

The study as a whole, and especially its introductory and concluding - epistemological - parts, signed by Katunarić, may easily rival the national reports of Finland, Italy or Sweden, despite the virtual impossibility of drawing comparisons with any of the above-mentioned countries as regards their scientific and research infrastructure. In every respect, the evaluation of Croatian cultural policy goes beyond the Croatian (state) cultural policy itself. Those who are ill-disposed might argue that it is not all that unfathomable, if one regards cultural policy purely as a sequence to the authoritarian policy of other means, where among myriad Croatian wonders (the naive art, VAT and others) it is no surprise that European cultural "observers" tend to perceive Croatia as a provincial country of kitsch and the exotic. However, before displaying any signs of cynical disposal, one should make an effort to find out what the 294 page long study has to say about the state of affairs in Croatian culture and why Katunarić and his team did not stop and acquiesce in merely diagnosing that intellectuals, regardless of their political orientation, i.e. whether they are "state-forming" or "opposition", are imbued with cultural pessimism.

### Models of Cultural Policies

Modern literature which deals with models of cultural policy (Girard, Wiesand, Schuster, Hall, Volkerling), referred to by Katunarić, departs from the assumption that the conceptual neutrality of a state is unquestionable in democratic orders. Cultural policy is an instrument of the comprehensive state policy in culture which assumes a broadly understood "world of life" from art to leisure. The state tries to implement a type of hegemonic political power which depends both on the teleological extent of actions on the part of the ruling party, as well as on the consensus reached by all subjects of cultural policy within a civilian society.

Post-World War II models of European cultural policy may be defined, as Volkerling, for example, has done, as: idealistic (monocultural, with the criterion involving the rule of high-profile culture), materialistic or professional (cultural democracy, welfare state), market (neoliberal hegemony) and nationalistic (the emphasis is placed on the rule of the concept of national unity via spectacularisation). Katunarić is taking the fourth

model, as per Volkerling's typology, as the epistemological foundation of Croatian cultural policy from 1990 to the present day.

Its characteristics and fundamental difficulties lie in the fact that it departs from an assumed idea of the national mobilisation of culture aimed at providing the state with ideological legitimacy, which in practice implies that the ideal of national interest understood as unity appears as a rather poorly defined framework for cultural policy actions. In other words, the question is who should determine the boundaries of national unity in the situation in which the neutrality of the state in issues of culture is unquestionable and is provided for by its constitution and programmes.

Having recognised in this reduction model an essential trait of the romantic and Messianic concepts of culture used to reinforce the nation state which emerged after the dissolution of communism and the break from Yugoslavia, Katunarić refuses to be impressed either by the enlightenment-type cultural optimism or by cultural pessimism. He has opted for a critical approach to show that the model of Croatian cultural policy, as well as the respective models adopted by other countries undergoing transition, consists of a group of pragmatic measures which, from the initial romantic story about the de-ideologisation of culture and the "return to Europe", have served to hide a series of historical controversies. With regard to the previous strategy of the cultural development of Croatia ("The Red Book of Culture" dating from 1982), which was a practical implementation of the idea of the democratisation of culture, but with an ideological identity card of self-management socialism, from the very beginnings Croatia opted for the centralisation of cultural policy and the method of financing from various funds, and in the face of the explosion of legislative regulations, it has duplicated the normative idealism of socialism with a view to subduing the "world of life" to the will of law. This is true of nearly all sectors of cultural policy, from publishing to film and the media.

### Programmatic Goals and Effects

The programmatic goals of cultural policy have never been explicitly defined, but rather derived from political documents. That is why national interest on the one hand and market orientation on the other present themselves as the recto and verso of the neo-conservative hegemony of the state. For example, the analysis of cultural activities and cultural industries may best be illustrated by the most extreme case of the Croatian book model. This shows that the situation involving books is not only below the pre-1990 level, despite the surge of new private publishers, but that there is a collapse of the sys-

temic book chain in which the brutality of wild capitalism not only closes down book stores, but, by means of the VAT, it undermines the very foundation of the self-proclaimed Croatian cultural identity as the "nation of the book". One does not even have to draw any comparisons with the state of affairs in publishing in Serbia, as was recently done by Branimir Donat, who used this to corroborate the fact that "we have lost the battle in this field" during a round table discussion of publishers.

Aside from the fact that this type of discourse gives rise to the duplication of the concept of culture as the policy by other means, aside from the fact that even among romantic enlighteners cultural pessimism grows reciprocally with the decrease in volumes published, at the moment, the industry of culture (books, the media, computers, film) in many countries is becoming the export generator of the first order. The problem lies in the fact that the collapse of the book production chain testifies to the breakdown of the model of cultural policy of neo-conservative hegemony. National interest plus market thus show that Croatian cultural policy fails to rule over itself, i.e. that the Ministry of Culture cannot be autonomous in governing the policy of cultural development since VAT does not present itself as an extra-systemic natural disaster, but rather as a logical sequence of the seemingly neoliberal economy, Balkan-style, for which culture is first and foremost an unacceptably high cost for the state.

Therefore, it is not surprising that one of the conclusions of the study is that cultural tourism remains *terra incognita* for Croatia, as if the economies of culture of other Mediterranean states - Greece, Italy, Spain - are reinventing the wheel when they offer high-profile cultural events, and at a time when the historical cities of Italy, such as Florence, capitalise on their historical monuments in such a way that the entrance fees suffice for the self-reproduction of their own restoration and new investment.

Despite the ideal according to which Croatia should attain 1 per cent allocation from the budget for cultural activities, it is certain that the effects of the current allocation rate at the state level and at the levels of so-called decentralisation (counties, cities and communities) do not guarantee the standards of the cultural capital of the nation at the level of comparable countries in Eastern Europe, especially Hungary and the Czech Republic, although there is an incredible exception to this, even on the global scale, and that is Medimurje, where over 42 per cent allocations from the budget for culture. Katunarić very rightly singles this out as a "post-modern syndrome" and proof that "Croatia is still not down on her (cultural) knees". It would take us too long to list all the valuable attempts of the evaluation of is-

such as privatisation, legislation, the area of culture, put together under the unfavourable circumstances of incompatible cultural statistics and the lack of relevant empirical reports provided by the counties for the purpose of the systemic analysis of budget allocations for culture (only 10 counties have submitted their incomplete data about the financial resources they allocate for cultural needs). After all, the purpose of this essay is to draw attention to the problems in evaluation and judgement presented by Vjeran Katunarić and his numerous team members, and not to judge critically each and every author.

The concluding evaluation of the study, which is a reiterated summary of all previous analyses seen as some sort of case-studies of the elements of cultural policy, tries to intensify the initial doubt regarding the meaning of cultural pessimism implying the following cultural determinants: an insuperable gap between high-profile and mass culture, social inequality of universal proportions, ethnocentrism and chauvinist nationalism, the clash of civilisations, cultural irrationalism, culture as the budget favourite and, finally, culture as a symbolical decor of political power. Contrary to this, cultural optimism emphasises bridging the gap between high-profile and mass culture, supporting alternative culture as a normal part of the overall production, ethnic tolerance and co-operation, and reinforcing cultural capital as a creative and productive power of the nation.

### **"New Deal" as an Option for a New Cultural Policy?**

The national report does not draw attention to the real issue, although it clearly recognises that the problem lies in who creates national interest; the real issue is the definition of the actual decision maker in the matters of important, teleological determinants of Croatian cultural policy. One can easily predict the answer to the rhetorical question whether, when it comes to the implementation of the model of cultural policy which would respect the European situation at the state level, consistent cultural decentralisation is possible without prior political decentralisation: Highly unlikely!

That is why the attempt to look for a compromise solution for a possible Croatian cultural "New Deal", as the initial stage of parting with neo-conservative national hegemony, presents a reasonable dose of optimism, since culture still holds some of the common interest and nobody can be indifferent to the prospects of facing the end of the century sitting in the darkness of barbarianism or with the awareness that the alliance between the state and civilian society (high-profile and alternative culture) raises hopes for the future. The future of an illusion? This study at least tries to eliminate this. ■