

The ARCult Forum 2: Who's afraid of the independent cultural sector?

Report

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The aims of the debate:

- 1/ Setting up a real interactive consultation between representatives of the independent organisations and the MCC - the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs in relation to:
 - the modality of concrete support of the independent sector and of contemporary arts in the next years;
 - agreement between the declared objectives of the ministry and the priorities formulated by this institution;
- 2/ launching a sustainable discussion on the statute of independent (artists and organisations);
- 3/ launching a coherent negotiation between the diverse institutional components of the cultural field in Romania, in view of the establishment, on the long term, of a climate of trust and constructive confrontation;
- 4/ the informal institutionalization of platforms of thematic dialogue.

Participants

The meeting has brought together over 40 participants, most of them artists or representatives of independent organisations, but also public institutions, representatives of foreign cultural centres, journalists. The Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs - MCC was represented by Delia Mucica, Secretary General. Among the very active participants in the discussions were: Iulian Vrabete (musician, Holograf), Lia Perjovschi (visual artist), Rarita Szakats (executive director, ALTART Foundation for Alternative Art), Chris Nedeea (theatre director, Impossible Theatre), Cosmin Manolescu (independent dancer & choreographer), Nicu Manda (professor, National University of Theatre and Film), Dan Matei (director, the Institute of Cultural Memory), Roxana Crisan (executive director, ACT Theatre), Ion Tugearu (interim director, National Centre of Dance), Sergiu Anghel (choreographer, Orion Balet Company), Vlad Nanca (visual artist, 2020). Irina Boulin-Ghica, director of the French Institute in Bucharest has also participated in the meeting. The debate has been moderated by Corina Suteu, President, and Oana Radu, Programs director, ECUMEST Association.

Topics discussed

- How are the priority objectives of the MCC - the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs strategy translated into financing programs, what financial support is allocated to the independent sector and contemporary arts; which is, in fact, the coherence between the declared objectives of the ministry (e.g. "the improvement of the access and participation to culture, with a special focus dedicated to young people" – which is the support given to young creation?, "the development and the diversification of the cultural offer" – to what extent is this supported by an enlarged access to new forms of artistic creativity and how is innovation encouraged?) and the written priorities formulated by the ministry (see the heritage, the public libraries).
- How can one establish a real dialogue between MCC and the civil society? How can one institutionalize this dialogue? The issue of representativity and of the non-existence, according to Delia Mucica, of real partners of dialogue;
- How is the independence legitimated?; the independence as an option;
- Young people as a target audience;

- The equality of chances between the independent and public sectors referred to by MCC is it a real or a rhetoric equality? Each of the two categories of actors has or could have advantages one in front of the other (on one hand, the NGOs can access funds that are not open to public institutions, on the other hand, public institutions have the budget for infrastructure ensured).

Proposals made during the debate

LEGITIMACY OF THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR

- Establishing systems that give legitimacy to the 'independent' interlocutors in front of the public authorities and the mutual acceptance in the frame of the artistic sectors as well as by the public authorities (the criteria of this legitimacy process is being negotiated by the two parts, none of them being passive);
- Stimulating an increased reaction from the civil cultural sector to the proposals put forward by MCC;
- The need of a "decentralisation" of the dialogue between the MCC and the cultural sector, which should be more organised and include voices from all over the country, as well as an improved information and dialogue of MCC with the local authorities (because the importance of the MCC strategy goes beyond its national action, the MCC priorities being able to give a different kind of legitimacy at local level to those initiatives which respond to these);
- The need to change the accent of the debates from the exclusive focus on the mechanisms to a more active approach to the values – the values that MCC wants to promote in view of the public interest and of the fundamental constitutional values of which MCC has to be bearer and promoter.

SUPPORTING CREATIVITY

- Establishing a system of mobility scholarships – during the meeting, the MCC representative has announced the launch of such a mechanism very shortly (the budget for 2005 will be of 3.000.000.000 ROL and will suppose several annual calls), and, at the same time, has made appeal to suggestions and feedback from all those interested with regard to the profile of this fund (a general fund or more distributed on artistic fields?) as well as to the criteria for granting the scholarships;
- The need for special mechanisms for supporting intern mobility (for individuals, as well as productions, exhibitions, etc.);
- If the young people and the contemporary creation are a priority, then an increase of young audience is also needed, and also the development of an offer which respond to this, especially by encouraging young creation. Possible mechanisms:
 - Establishing a system of scholarships for young artists. MCC declared that it expects proposals from the sector;
 - The extensive setup on the long term of several audience development projects (in schools, but not only). The need of several inter-ministerial initiatives between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education and Research;
 - A positive discrimination policy directed to young artists.
- Spaces for the independent initiatives
 - Proposal on behalf of Lia Perjovschi to transform the space of the ¾ Gallery in Bucharest which remained unused in a space open to innovative projects/ labs/ creative spaces of the independent organisations in the cultural field in Romania. MCC declared its openness to this proposal, suggesting that a new ARCult forum in which concrete ideas on how this space could be articulated would be presented and discussed;
 - In general, participants have proposed the realization, at the MCC initiative, of an evaluation of the spaces available within the public institutions under the MCC subordination and which could be better used if given in the administration of independent organisations (Rarita Szakats).

THE STATUTE OF THE ARTIST

- When defining the statute of the independent artist as an individual who does not have a contract on an unlimited period with another entity, no matter its profile would be, the MCC representative has pointed out the need of a correction within the general framework of the social protection system in order to respond to the needs of the independent artists in the field. Proposal: to organise a debate together with MCC and the Ministry of Labour.
- Iulian Vrabeti has made concrete proposals linked to the issue of the certificate of independent/ freelance artist: the proposal to create in Romania a more simple system for the freelance artists, similar to other European countries, through which the very declaration as freelance makes an individual become a financial entity (who can issue receipts, cash money, etc.). Currently in Romania, due to the inflexibility of the Labour code – which is not adapted to the specificities of the cultural sector - the contract of transfer of copyright is the only legal instrument used for the works of the freelance artists (but it consequently raises problems with regard to the administration of the transferred copyright).
- There are also other obstacles for mobility and in general for the creation of the independent sector (specific to this one or more general to the cultural field), which belong to the customs legislation (the export certificates for settings or works) that also needs to be changed.

Relevant materials

1. **The strategy of the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs for 2005-2008** available at www.cultura.ro/News.aspx?ID=514.
2. A review of the debate was made by Doru Mares in Observator cultural (nr.266-267) www.observatorcultural.ro.

“The ARCult Forum” is a platform for analysis, proposals and debates initiated by the ECUMEST Association aimed at contributing to defining a long term cultural strategy in Romania

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