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What is so appealing in arts and culture?

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During the late twentieth century Western economies started to transform themselves to more service-oriented economies with a strong emphasis on culture as a driver for local development. Report named “Our Creative Diversity” done in 1995 by the UN World Commission on Culture and Development constitutes a crucial moment in evolution of the theory of development evoking the importance of culture and relating culture with development, opening up the space for expansion of the new cultural economy. Ten years later, UNESCO’s Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions has been linked with this document supporting the same course of thinking.

Exploitation of cultural and artistic resources of the place has started to be seen as a way of local regeneration and development, which will help increase economic growth of the city or country. This important role given to culture in producing wealth and better future lies in its creative and fertilizing potential, universality and communication quality. Due to these qualities focus started to expand on international market as well. As *UNDP Creative Economy Report 2010* explains, creative industries have shown more resilience to the impact of the global economic crisis than traditional manufacturing industries: “despite the 12 percent decline in global commerce in 2008, world trade of creative goods and services continued to expand with an average annual growth rate of 14 percent.” The creative economy is seen as a source of socio-economic growth, jobs, innovation, and trade, while at the same time, accelerated by the new technologies and the Internet, contributing to social inclusion and cultural diversity.

Even though the new economy started its development following the Post-Fordist mold of consumption and service, this course of thinking soon began to change simply because people are culture and culture is people. Quite naturally, public demand began to show that culture is not just something to consume but to interact with. This notion particularly became apparent with the raise of social media and Web 2.0. As Pine II and Gilmore say, experiences have emerged as the next step in the “progression of economic value”.

Moreover, we live in cognitive era. Daily exposures to information challenge us to process them, to conceptualize and apply knowledge and to be more and more creative in solving problems.¹ Therefore, a lot of recent international initiatives place their primary focus and money on education and learning, and target groups are no

¹ It is kind of symptomatic that, although based on pseudo-scientific New Age concept, idea of so-called Indigo children is becoming more and more popular in the time context. For example, it is said that these new kids absorb knowledge like a sponge.

longer just children but adults as well with life long learning projects more and more popularized. European Commission Strategy for the coming decade aims to the smart growth. As stated, EC wants the EU to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. *The Decade of the Mind* project is starting to spread its initiative internationally asking money for research of the mind across many disciplines over the decade from 2012 to 2020. The aim of this initiative is to advance our understanding of the mind, thus further education and learning, which will at the very end bring economic benefits. As Sir Ken Robinson suggests, we have to think differently about human capacity and radically change education paradigm so we can meet challenges of the 21st century. New way of thinking and gaining knowledge gives rise to creativity and it is an essential capacity for growth.

City and image building

I thought of the stories I had in mind as if they were neighbourhoods.

And I imagined characters as if they were streets... The characters – the streets – are many.

(Alessandro Baricco's description of his book "CITY")

The transformation of city economies in the post-Fordist era placed culture and tourism as their main businesses. These new so-called "entrepreneurial cities" have started to use marketing as a constituent part of their governance. Since the culture has taken a huge role in economic development, urban competition has increased, both in terms of image building and its ability to attract tourists. This new trend has, according to Allan J. Scott, two main objectives, one is to attract tourists and the other one, more important, is to draw investors and high-skilled workers.

Associating a place with a cultural icon is an attempt to imbue a place with a creative character. (Evans, 2003) Kavaratzis states that the aims of city branding are increase of investment and tourism, community development, reinforcing local identity and identification of citizens with their city. Current trends in place branding are related to city's personality like Gaudi's Barcelona, mega-events (e.g. European Capital City of Culture project) and so-called flagship constructions, emerging characteristic of a number of new museums among which is certainly the most famous and representative the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. What becomes questionable is internal city development i.e. values and satisfaction of residents, its *genius loci*, improvement of lifestyle, diversity etc. and moreover purpose. Many cities in the world started to copy the approach (e.g. satellite museums) raising the risk of overlooking the local culture and identity as a source for ongoing development. *Money and originality of design are not enough... You need many ingredients for big, emblematic projects to work, and one of the keys is the active support of local communities.* (Giddens, cited in Evans, 2003)

This entrepreneurialism trend introduced marketing as unavoidable tool in city image building and strategic planning. But, what is the purpose of image building? The purpose is to build a strong relationship between "hosts" and "guests". It is all about trust and bonding, therefore speaking of city brand, it doesn't mean logos and slogans but identity, value, trust and communication. For example, since the middle of the eighteenth century, when the British Museum was established, museums became a key element in creating the symbolic image of the place. They have been used to promote national and metropolitan cultural pride as well as sense of prestige and this tendency was particularly supported by the architecture. *The concept of the museum is a brand in itself*, and from the marketing point of view, belongs to the category of *value brands*. (Rentschler and Hede, 2007) When it comes

to intercultural relations, museums represent diplomatic actors by their nature. According to the ICOM Statutes (2007) museum is defined as *non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, ... communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purpose of education, study and enjoyment.*² They communicate culture and build cultural bridges across borders creating a sense of cosmopolitanism through shared heritage.

Shared means interaction in order to eliminate differences and find the joint narrative between nations and societies. Therefore, cultural diplomacy, initially practiced as a means to export culture of one country to another, currently starts to change its definitions and strategies fostering interaction in approaches and initiatives. When we speak about Serbia and image building nowadays, which will be discussed more afterward, European integration represents a national priority number one (while this same Europe currently faces the “occupy” movement), thus culture is given a major role in these processes. Even though a lot of actions have been taken in this respect, especially due to the aimed candidacy for the European Capital of Culture 2020, paradoxically we still have two major museums (National Museum and Museum of Contemporary Art) closed for several years. Serbia is in fact facing nation branding challenge or real “cultural diplomacy in action”. Country has to act on several aspects: to promote its own culture, to help others to understand it while regaining trust among its own citizens, to fight stereotypes and prejudices which were created due to the recent history, and in the meantime has to stay on track with contemporary worldwide courses while being more and more economically pressured.

Growth of festivals

...like mosquitoes after the rain.

Large festival growth in recent decades, especially art festivals, is a result of evolving city marketing trends. Acknowledged as an entrepreneurial form and catalyst for change, especially in terms of urban regeneration and tourism, many city authorities have quite invested in festivals. Beyond local benefits, through festivals cities differentiate themselves in the global-market as well. But, what is the meaning and the purpose of festival in social and cultural terms?

When we google the word “festival”, we’ll mostly find definition as: *A festival is an event, usually staged by a local community, which centers on and celebrates some unique aspect of that community.* So we are told that festival is something exceptional and represent the relationship between local group and the place. It is rooted in society being a part of people’s identity and shared values. They are value brands same as museums with the purpose to establish and/or strengthen a sense of belonging and local pride. In other cases, usually in case of art festivals, they emerge *in response to artistic needs lacking within that place or in tandem with the changing artistic needs felt by diverse resident and visitor community groups within a place.* (Quinn, 2005) They also play an important role in exchanging ideas and experiences between art lovers and practitioners. Therefore, they serve to celebrate, strengthen and improve. They are engaged with the lives of those who live in particular place in many ways. Festivals are the tool for building a socio-cultural sense of belonging and providing a *quality of life* element. They are also an important part of cultural consumption in general.

Regarding European project, festivals represent an important vehicle for activating the idea of European citizenship. Cultural interactions are crucial in the process of European integration because Europe is unity of many cultures. But, still, Europe needs its own citizens and citizenship refers to culture. Cultural diversity in this context is recognized as the main resource and strength of Europe. Therefore, engagement in finding the binding

² <http://icom.museum/who-we-are/the-vision/museum-definition.html> (last visited 2/11/2011)

element through interactions under the umbrella of European values is an imperative for the success of European project. Festivals represent events through which people interact, are inspired and entertained. They provide a sense of group belonging. We shouldn't overlook a sense of feeling secure in public space that festivals also prompt. Due to these social effects festivals are recognized as a valuable tool in the European integration processes. It is another matter how much intermixing of cultures can be enriching or disorienting and what exactly do European values imply. Is it possible, is it really about mutual exchange and understanding, or is it a one-way street?

But, many argue this role of festivals nowadays, based on outcomes of several cities' engagements regarding investment in these kinds of events. Results are showing that many *city authorities tend to disregard the social value of festivals and to construe them simply as vehicles of economic generation or as 'quick fix' solutions to city image problems.* (Quinn, 2005) Most common justification for the growing investment in festivals that can be heard is about its effect in image making, attracting visitors, promoting urban lifestyle and regenerating derelict city districts. But, dealing with city image building and attracting visitors and not with the mind of the city i.e. people and inner culture opens up the possibility of birth of "same" cities. Urban events have to be linked with the place and must move beyond image making preoccupation in order to avoid potential reproduction of sameness.

Mikser Festival in Belgrade is an example of a good and smart festival recently established and still developing but already showing very good results due to smart approaches. The group of people wanting to make invisible Serbian design scene more visible to local community, media and industry launched the initiative. It is kind of forum-like or showroom-like festival, which advocates multidisciplinary and interventionist approach with creative industries in its main focus. Although festival's strategy follows derelict district regeneration trend as well, placing exhibitions and showrooms in old industrial parts of the city, the whole concept is more engaged with the lives of those who live in Belgrade linked with the creative *genius loci*. Contributing to quality of life and animating community, Mikser festival is becoming a catalyst for change not just on local but on regional level as well. Therefore, the city image consequently came out as a result.

On the other hand, Belgrade's Beer Festival is established for years now as a regular musical and beer event during summer. But, if we just raise several simple questions regarding this festival we will see many gaps in approach. For example, how many different beer brands we have as an offer during the festival? Not much. Is the beer cheaper than during regular days? No. Is it safe to go to the Belgrade's Beer Festival? The accident at the Beer Festival 2011 shows it is not. Is it rooted in the lives of Serbian people? Well, yes, Serbians love beer. But, does festival play the role in improving quality of life, advancing urban policy or expressing cultural identities though the main subject, beer? In practice, it is just musical attraction that makes people spend money on beer. And with this recent unfortunate accident even the image is now questionable. Therefore, a good, meaningful and successful festival has to supply good infrastructure as well and to be focused on different aspects not just economical.

Belgrade's cultural scene and the "Belgrade 2020" project

Belgrade is facing large festival growth in recent years but there has been much uncertainty about contribution for many of the emerged events. On the other hand, visual arts are put aside, movie theaters are closed, two major museums do not work, many cultural institutions do not work as they used to, etc. Looking at these facts someone could assume that cultural scene in Belgrade is fading. On the contrary, we have very much alive independent cultural scene, which is spreading all over the city and with years becoming something very valuable to refer to. As Darka Radosavljevic Vasiljevic, directress of "Remont", Independent Art Association, says: "It seems that the audience has changed and went to some other places. There are cultural centers like Rex, GRAD, BIGZ ... and

other places where something different is going on, some young people working and moving towards new trends.”³ This culture occupies “unusual” places in the city, explores new topics, has different aims, and creates new public. And, this is something that is the result of peoples initiatives; truly independent and bottom-up like example.

For example, GRAD (http://www.gradbeograd.eu/index_en.php), the European center for culture and debate, has emerged in 2009 on the initiative of the Cultural Front Belgrade and Felix Meritis Foundation in Amsterdam. Thanks to support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands through the MATRA program and Belgrade community Savski Venac for the first time an old warehouse (built in 1884) on the bank of the river Sava has been re-designed into a cultural place. This place now hosts exhibitions, concerts, debates, performances, conferences and workshops promoting culture (especially independent, subculture) as an integral part of wider social and economic development on the national and regional levels. With this initiative and all that followed, the flourishing subculture of Belgrade is starting to be recognized as a valuable source for Serbia to become a part of European space again.

Due to the Belgrade’s candidacy for the European Capital of Culture, city government now considers this scene as very important aspect for development. As stated in the project draft, aims of “Belgrade 2020” project are to bring change in cultural, infrastructure and economical sector and to create new, European generation. And why Belgrade? Organizational Committee says because it is multicultural city, city of creative people, where traditional and modern values are in balance, etc. I remember one workshop recently held in one of the above mentioned cultural centers with the Belgrade’s candidacy topic on the table. It was mixed group of people, with Serbian and foreign guys included, doing SWOT analysis of the topic and among raised weaknesses people mentioned recent war history image, homophobia, non safety notion due to Brice Taton case, bad infrastructure, etc. Thus, “Belgrade 2020” project is facing a serious challenge. While supplying good city infrastructure and implementing safety measures, officials have to work on image building, but not just on the promotional level. Branding strategy has to include fighting stereotypes and prejudices, cultivating local cultural values and behaviors, and creating feeling of trust .

And what about culture which has not been included in strategic planning for decades? Belgrade has an important heritage to share (and to protect as well) and lot of unique cultural and artistic potentials, particularly in human resources. These resources should be seriously and responsibly analyzed with the clear vision and priorities in planning, bearing in mind for whom we want to implement the new strategy. In this respect, strategy has to foster open up approach, diversity aspect, collaboration, aesthetics and ethics. Although creation of the so-called new generation is quite tempting and we all know by heart that youngsters are the catalyst for change and growth, we shouldn't forget or neglect the demands of the old one. People are the key beneficiaries and creators of the culture and their well-being should be the reference point for a long-term development of the society as a whole.

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