

Financing of Non-Governmental Organizations

by horrorkatze

Keep up your smile and positive vibrations while you are applying for a new grant!

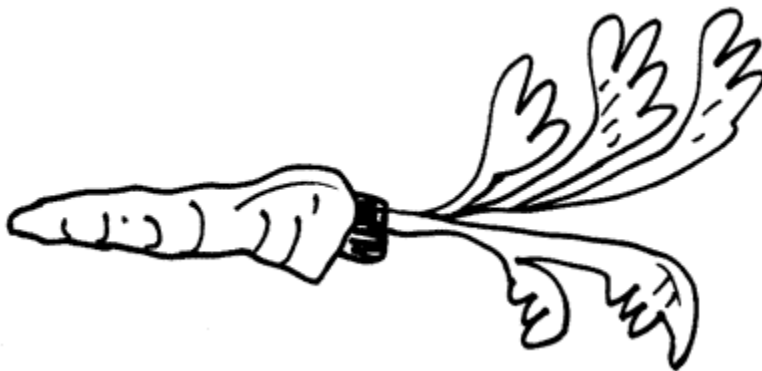
Crediting and Financing may be seen as an instrument of impact of the powerful on the one that "needs help".

The so called "independent" sector, as an important and traditionally liberal motor in the changes to some "new" & "democratic" way, plays a specific role in the sponsorship process.

The questions about the relations between Non-governmental Organizations and their financiers are unavoidably at the forefront, because the powerful influence of world corporations and the ruthless market of neoliberal capitalism characterize the crisis in which we find ourselves.

For example, when we check the data on the NGO sector, we can see, astonishingly, that global foundations are the dominant employers in Third World Countries! (For example, during the 80ies in South America, the only profit was made by the so-called "independent" sector and the war industry. The fact is that the NGO-crew is one of the highest and most educated classes in Third World Countries.)

In the field of culture and cultural politics, in the region of ex YU and east Europe, global foundations and agencies for financing are also main factor in the process off pushing transition and building a new glocal social and political administration. Today, when this process is almost coming to an end in East Europe and the Balkans, and when the agencies for cultural funding are focusing more on some other continents, we ask ourselves about the nature of the cultural politics which have been installed and suggested? What kinds of controversy are shaping these processes between cultural Non-governmental Organizations and those who give them support?



Go ahead for the open society!

Let's remember The Fund for an Open Society, better known as the Soros Centre, who made intensive propaganda during the 90ies about the need to empower a democratic & open society, which was, from their perspective, not so developed or present in this geopolitical context.

Many cultural commissars were called upon to return applications to the famous Open Society and its politics.

The generous and humanistic Georg Soros was offering a new "Marshall Plan" to the self recognised east European cultural workers and offered them the chance to promote the promised liberal standards or to lustrate themselves from the "black communist past".

Across the whole Balkans Soros Centers were springing up, mobilizing every individual who could speak English and was able to fill out the first Soros applications.

One of the first Soros Centers was Cinema Rex from Belgrade, which had existed already for 12 years.

Soros is today the majority owner of the Serbian radio & television station B92, a mighty and transformed channel which is broadcasting programmes like "Big Brother", the Milosevic trial from The Hague, sitcoms, the European Football league or suddenly discovered archives of war crimes in Yugoslavia.

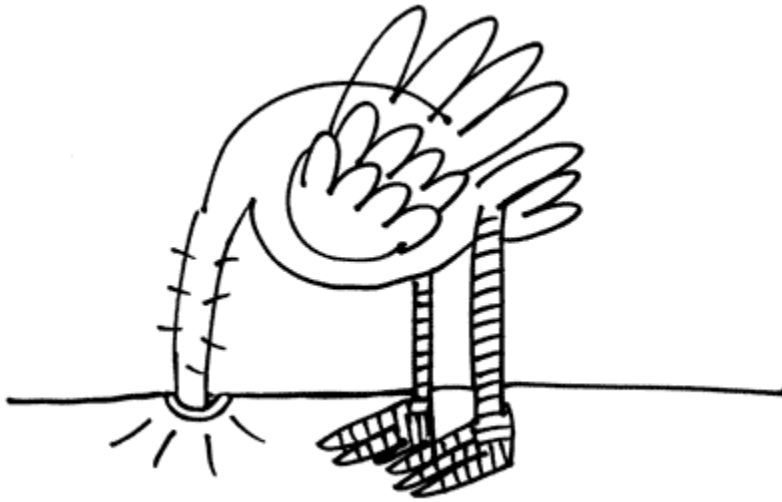
Soros went further, making centers for new "indoor societies", (in the beginning of 2000 Moldavia was on top and later Azerbaijan or Kyrgyzstan...).



The Independent dependers

Cultural workers, activists or artists were somehow trying painless to fill out the given applications, without too much thinking and arguing.

The usual manner was the "ostrich with its head in the sand", without too much analysis of the guidelines offered by the doubtlessly capitalistic and neoliberal political hierarchy. They just wanted to be creative from their heart and saw money as just a resource and tool. Under such circumstances, the ones who specialized in this quickly came out to be better adapted to the reality of applications.



It's true to say that the cultural sector has a large number of young volunteers. They are satisfied if they are chosen to participate in cultural projects and to socialize with the fancy "in" milieu. The Managers have been trained at various seminars provided for the elaboration of strategies, the volunteers are volunteering for them. Anyway, It's important to swallow the whole bite: the new tribe of managers has to build up a good network with the local hierarchies, not hiding their huge talent for chameleonic opportunism.

Up until now, in the name of "independent culture" and the "independent scene" several million dollars have passed through the banks of "independent" cultural organizations.

What are the direct aims of foundations in a certain context?

One of the aims is just to burn money inside the cultural sector, some kind of potlach to demonstrate the power of "open societies" and their ability of cynical selfcriticism. Their intention is to absorb any real critical effort into the so-called "independent" scene. But, in fact, this scene depends on highly mediated political and economical intentions. The resulting projects are overburdened with management, power and mediation, for example in the case of new media projects or in the meta-cultural production, which lacks any kind of concrete content.

Right here we are standing on a very slippery slope, faced with numerous contradictory examples, such as when donations by the IMF are given to anarchistic and anti-globalistic projects, organizations and meetings. With their vassal-like "umbrella politics", their speeches lose any critical weight, becoming simulation and decor.

For some of them the goal is a pure pop-fetish or trend placed for entertainment, domestication and putting asleep the body of the new consumerists.

The aim is to proof that it's not possible to realize any independent action without financing. And, so, if you don't have a detailed PR plan, an expert for marketing and fancy catalogue, for sure you don't get how the business goes today.

How contradictory the foundations are themselves becomes very evident when they are financing purely political organizations. Namely, the same foundation supports right-wingers in Texas, a dictatorship in Azerbaijan and in Albania, democratic processes.

Global agencies for reconstruction and optimization are prepared in advance to support projects that are dealing with the negative side effects of the process of the so-called transformation. Grants are given for the suppression of local neofascism, against clericalism, fundamentalism and different aspects of local nationalism. Right now, considering these phenomena, one question comes up: Who is generating whom? Id est. capitalism produces it's own ugly children against whom it already has a planned agenda for extermination..

Also, NGOs addicted to receiving financing to help solve many different problems, are trying to enlarge and induce local problems. It's an acceptable marketing strategy, why not? Well, nevertheless it's important to acquire new grants and continued existence for the next year. The agenda of all foundations is domestication and putting to sleep, so smile and feel positive vibrations while you are applying for a new grant!

Substantial geopolitical determinations

Let's remember all those geopolitical determinations with which new definitions of geospace and of the possibilities of moving inside them were shaped.

These guidelines are the tools with which a specific cultural policy is to be reinstalled. We can observe this in the example of the breakup of Yugoslavia, and we can follow a number of renamings and identifications through various geopolitical frames. Until now this space "X" has been characterized as east European countries, South East Europe, thereafter, Balkan countries and the newest, the Western Balkans.

There have been plenty of political reformulations like: postcommunitic countries, countries in transition, emerging societies, postsocialistic transformation, shaped according to political mediation and the necessary strategic solutions. The real top spin and compilations of famous quotes ornament formularies and applications in almost every cultural projects and was always the perfect instrument, in it's deficiency of creativity, to blur the nature of cultural policy and it's consequences.

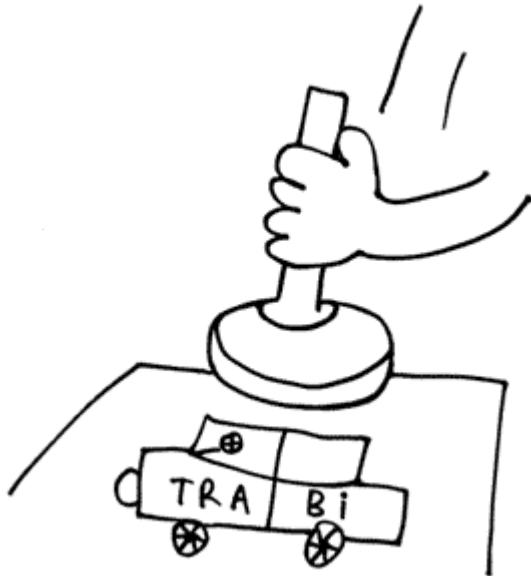
It isn't so easy to escape from this kind of branding and it's used with appetite, even, of course, if it has nothing to do with the real situation.

Horror cabinet of foundational branding

The brand "postcommunism" was used remorseless, and led to the funny situation in which the famous DDR car "Trabant", was taken as a symbolic notion of the system in ex Yugoslavia in various cultural projects.

You should realize, the famous "Trabi" was never driven in the ex YU, and the social system during the time period in question was state controlled capitalism with a self managing social policy.

Numerous international projects were established constituting cooperation according to some new specified geopolitical determinations. The guidelines were fulfilled and themes like "Trabant" mention above were mascots.



Production of various Balkans and Easteuropean exhibitions soon began, new media centers were installed, also "UFO" galleries of contemporary arts, (although not so often in places where the locals never heard what this, in fact ,is). Balkan Nordic Switch was organizing an exchange programme in which you could only take part if you were from a specific "Balkan or Nordic race". Balkanism and the Balkans, retrospectives from this view or the view of the "Other", became a theme for endless projections and debates, led by many artist, cultural workers, curators, cultural theoreticians and sociologist from one or another part of east & west.

Let's put the question of how is it possible that Greece, as part of the Balkan Peninsula, never played a part in similar cooperations and discussions? After all, funds from different EU countries like German Bundeskulturstiftung, Austrian Kultur Kontakt, or Swiss Pro Helvetia, were awarding grants for projects which satisfied standards inside the geopolitical frame of the Western Balkans.

Lifting of the Western Balkans Identity

Well, what, in fact, is the Western Balkans and how is it discussed right now? It is, as it seems, all ex YU countries, without Slovenia, but including Albania.. The expectations are that foundations have to speed up the integration process of the Western Balkans into the EU and that cultural workers have to push this process as much they can.

So, Let's mention the conference held on 1. December 2005. in The Hague "The Hart of Matter Balkans". It was a meeting of big importance for the work of the European Cultural Foundation, again in the frame of the geopolitical context of

the Western Balkans, and their further positioning in the region. European Cultural Foundation (ECF) and their hierarchical structure lead us to Brussels and other administrations of European Union. The participants of the conference were persons like Austrian ambassador to the UN -Wolfgang Petritsch, Netherlands minister of Foreign Affairs - Bernard R. Bot or ex Serbian and Montenegro minister Goran Svilanovic. Also present were almost every cultural worker from the ECF network, and the Macedonian playwright Goran Stefanovski told a vivid story about an imaginary poet, Zoran, and the EU stars inside his heart. The Impression altogether is that around these kind of meetings is flying the fame of a strange "enlightenment" while strategies like: cross-cultural conflict management, multi-cultiðnic projects, work on "Enlargement of Penis, upsss...sorry, Minds", integration, etc... rain from managers.



From the report we can read some more from many conclusions: For example to end the stigmatization of the Balkans. Hmm... until now were they only concerned with the production of stigmatization? or what?? That the Balkans should become equal member of EU, and that the democratic building of a new Balkan identity (whatever it is), has to be completed. The Balkan identity, hmm, there are also probably Apeninian or Pirineian Identities, but "The New Balkan identity" surely has something to do with NSK or MTV Adria! This charming document you can download from the official ECF web-site, and the address is:

<http://www.eurocult.org/PDFdb/news/BalkanReport.pdf>

What to do?

But how is possible to be truly independent and how to stay out of this powerful machinery, which is sucking up any free action?

The recipe can be very simple and clear if you bear in mind that only unmediated action and direct contact can be preconditions for creating a real space for free action. Development of personal and self organized economical possibility, on the fundamentals of solidarity and the real alternative.

Maybe it's not possible to develop expensive productions but better is to be really independent, whatever you achieve!