

TITLE

Transitional Cultural Policies in Southeastern Europe: An Effort to Systematize Cultural Change

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BIOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

Cultural policies in the SEE countries testify of an effort to harmonize cultural developments and cultural values with the key European cultural standards (e.g., freedom of expression and creativity, democratization of cultures, liberalization of cultural production, etc.). They are mostly concentrated on identity issues, on character and position of particular cultures, on cultural diversities and intercultural relations. Such concentration may result in interpretation of own cultures as superior to other neighboring cultures, and lead to cultural isolationism. A wider cultural development and communicational frame is therefore needed. It includes intellectual concepts that may clarify transitional intellectual chaos and new knowledge on cultures that would enable better understanding of the ongoing cultural transition processes. The main asset of the SEE cultural policies consists in their subsumed effort to help systematize cultural values in the new, post-transitional contexts of SEE countries, to sustain cultural research and implement cultural changes. This effort is not always transparent enough; it is not all-encompassing and it is carried on with difficulties.

KEYWORDS

Cultural policies, Southeastern Europe

ARTICLE

1. Introductory remarks

Southeastern Europe encompasses Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia (FYROM), Romania and Serbia and Monte Negro. The traditionally used term denoting this area is of Turkish origin: *the Balkans*. It clearly includes and stresses references to 'orientalism', and therefore may be burdened with rather negative connotations (spatial and economic underdevelopment, social traditionalism, extreme cultural and historical diversities, lack of intraregional communication, internal inconsistency of the region, etc.). *Southeastern Europe* is supposed to stand for a neutral, non-political and non-ideological concept, although it was developed in the context of German interests and dominance in the region. Recently a new term, invented by the EU, has been introduced to usage: *Western Balkans*. It excludes Greece and Slovenia (members of the EU), and refers to the ex-Yugoslav post-socialist countries of the region plus Albania, and minus Bulgaria and Romania, which have enjoyed the status of 'candidate country' longer than Croatia and Macedonia. The conceptual differences among *Balkans*, *Southeastern Europe* and *Western Balkans* reflect a long history of inter-relationships among different peoples, civilizations, cultures, religions, histories, and, above all, the foreign hegemonic interests and influences, ranging from the Turkish to the present-day EU ones, and reflecting different perspectives on the region. Southeastern Europe is far from being interlinked and harmonized internally in either cultural, religious, economic, or in any other respects. Even today, it represents a borderline area between East and West, North and South. It is not even constituted as a region in a contemporary sense. However, a certain flexible mutuality among peoples and cultures in this geographic area is discernible: this space has to share its natural wealth, infrastructures, cultural heritage, artistic specificity, its proper regional diversity and blending of different influences. In this respect, Southeastern Europe is more than geography and less than history; perhaps a notion that may best be described as a kind of *spiritual geography*. Post transitional developments may prove that the region is indeed a part of Europe, ready to build its new identities by sorting out Mediterranean, Central European, Western and Eastern influences.

2. Some historical reflections

The recent history of the region is particularly marked by the 1990-95 wars of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Five new independent states have been established to replace the ex-federation of six republics. The present day cultural policies have to be analyzed in the perspective of establishment and functioning of these states, which have been asserting their re-found identities and stressing cultural and all other differences among themselves in the perspective of major systemic changes, i.e., of transition from socialist to capitalist systems. These processes have been lasting for about twenty years now.

The state identity of other SEE countries has been more constant and has lasted longer. Processes of their establishment may have taken a few decades, but these countries have been constantly functioning as states that did not try to harmonize their cultural diversities outside of their proper state borders. They have appeared on the international scene after the final collapse of the Turkish Ottoman Empire, i.e., at the end of the First World War in 1918. Although histories of Albania, Greece, Bulgaria or Romania have been quite different and diverse, their historical experience does not include establishment of a federation, but it includes strong socialist block involvements with either USSR or China.

Notwithstanding state borders and state identities, all SEE countries have remained and are now multicultural. Their social, economic and particularly cultural development has been strongly colored by the intra-state assertion of national and ethnic identities of either majority or minority populations, and by the parallel cultivation of long lasting links with hegemonic countries influencing their over-all development. The French influences are

typical of Romania, Serbia and Greece; Italian of Albania, Greece, Croatia; German and Austrian of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina; Russian of Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, etc.

The cultural history of the SEE region is strongly marked by all kinds of borderline and external influences, ranging from the times of old Greek and Roman cultures to the present day globalized cultural industries. Such influences have enriched cultural creativity and multiplied cultural differences. They have also stimulated the authentic, very diverse folk cultures, to develop and sustain centuries' long resistance to cultural influences, or to re-create such influences in the frameworks of their proper authenticity.

3. Concepts and re-conceptualization of SEE cultural policies

Contemporary cultural policies' concepts are often developed from notions like *governmentability* (R. Barthes, M.Foucault, P.Bourdieu), or *good governance*, which are blended with Kant's ideas on education and cultivation of human beings. They refer to 'management of populations through suggested behavior' (1). Ideas on the role of cultural policies in contextualizing the present values and in developing understanding of conditions that cultural policy may provide for future cultural development (2) have added other functions to the list of performances expected from cultural policies. The fact that cultural policies belong to a corpus of public policies used by contemporary societies to regulate functioning of different specialized activities is referred to when a holistic approach to cultures and cultural values is promoted. Indeed, (public) policy transfer proves that many social areas and public policies do influence conceptualization and implementation of cultural policies (e.g., education, media, employment, etc.).

In Southeastern Europe, the concept of 'governance' may be difficult to apply to the present-day formulation and implementation of cultural policies. Identity concepts, the dynamic redefinitions of national and collective identities and strong influences of intellectual and cultural heritage have appeared to be more important in the last about fifteen years of cultural transitions. It would be difficult to say that cultural policies in the region may be defined as "a system of arrangements" (E.Alderson), or as any functional system that tends to regulate relationships among artists and creators within the society as a whole, and particularly with states who have produced cultural policies. The societies of Southeastern Europe rather tend to project general concepts on creativity, arts, national identity, etc. on the area called culture which indeed reflects a general cultural context rather than any type of creativity, the social position of artists, intellectuals or anybody who contributes to the production and establishment of cultural values.

The newly elaborated cultural policies (published in the period from 1996 to 2005) have introduced an intention to change such holistic cultural concept into an area registering cultural activities, evaluating them and providing for organizational, financial and other aspects of their functioning. Yet, the regulations of cultural activities and production, including their management, are still in the initial phase. These are very much in the shade of the contents and symbolic meanings understood as 'culture' that remains a socially privileged area which is not supposed to be analyzed from the standpoints of functionality, organization, infrastructure, or finances, and that could be approached only as a value *per se*. Criticism of such symbolic interpretation of values, meanings and contents is however possible or even welcome, but it also functions beyond the scope of practical regulations, analyses or a systematized body of knowledge on cultures and cultural activities. Such an approach favors a neat expression of differences between an aesthetic identification with cultural values and bureaucratic assessments of such values. If bureaucratic aspects can be associated with regulations, organization, or financement of culture, the aesthetic values are beyond such 'governance' of culture and they remain closely connected to the general, 'philosophical' views of creativity, society, communication or development. The nature of a particular culture and of a particular society might then be presented as almost untouchable, or offered as a ready made concept embedded in the centuries' long cultural development.

Elaboration of cultural policies has announced and introduced specialization of cultural field as a scope of activity and creation *per se*. The tradition of elaboration of cultural policies in some SEE countries has been rather well established (e.g., the first explicitly stated Cultural Policy of Croatia was published in 1982) (3), but it hardly influenced the cultural policies formulated in the last decade of 20th century that have promoted radical conceptual changes and new understandings of cultural fields.

The differences between the socialist and new cultural policies are of systemic, conceptual and practical nature. While the socialist cultural policies were mainly constructivist and oriented to the creation of 'a new man' imbued with the best humanistic values, the transitional ones reflect the deconstruction of such values and the return to traditional ethnic values which are supposed to stand for the dominance of collectively shared cultural belonging that protects an individual from all dangers of creative experiments, insecurities of individual cultural identifications, or of existential nausea.

This orientation may be identified as the one to primordial values and approaches. It was openly and directly supported by the revival of religious values and more active participation of churches in social and intellectual life. It openly opted for conservative social values.

The socialist cultural policies may be, and rightly, accused of a strong promotion of ideological involvement in all types of cultural creativity. However, in the new policies the ideological stress did not vanish. It was shifted to national and ethnic cultural values recognized now as a source of 'the right' cultural identities. The new transitional policies have been politically justified by their efforts to promote national and ethnic identification of populations, and thus diminish impacts of internationalized cultural contexts. In parallel, they introduced radically different approach to cultures and cultural values. Cultures became specialized fields of creativity and work. They were no longer interpreted as an integrative part of overall social and cultural development. They were 'liberated' from an ideologically sustained search for new worlds, new societies, new human beings, and cured of shocks imposed by the necessity to educate large layers of populations, develop an excellent taste, and sustain at all costs the search for excellence, as well as for the best possible professional performance in all fields.

The European Program of National Cultural Policy Reviews, 1995-2000, launched by the Council of Europe (4) incited the process of redefinition of cultures and cultural policies in the SEE countries. The concepts and ways of thinking about culture and cultural creativity have evolved. Interpretations of cultures as means of building a new man and a new society radically dissolved into a multiplicity of identity evaluations, relationships among these new identities, flexibility and openness in value judgments and individualized or lost value hierarchies. The backgrounds to this were attempts to neatly describe all elements that enter, or might enter, the field of culture. The European Program incited descriptions of cultural activities and their regulations. This new, descriptive in-view often reflected rather chaotic cultural and social realities, particularly because re-organization and financing of cultural activities have been lagging behind all value and conceptual changes.

4. Elaborations and practices of cultural policy making

As culture became to be understood as just one of the professional fields, it also became evident that it needed to be regulated, organized, financed, productive and submitted to functional evaluations. The region has entered the phase of a more rational approach to cultures. This phase began with the detailed descriptions of cultures and cultural activities.

A) Descriptions of the cultural field

The Croatian cultural policy may be an illustrative example of a descriptive effort in formulation of cultural policy. In the National Report on Cultural Policy in Croatia (5), twenty-three authors have covered, apart from the introductory information on Croatia and the presented conceptual frameworks, the following issues: *Cultural policy in the Republic of Croatia* (Legal and organizational framework, Financing, Decentralization, Participation in cultural life, Art education, The labor market in culture, and, Privatization); *Cultural activities and cultural industries* (Literature and publishing, Visual arts, Music, Theatre arts, Film, The media); *Cultural heritage* (Monuments, Archives, Libraries, Museums); and, *Internal and international cultural relations* (The multicultural mosaic of Croatia, International cultural cooperation). The Conclusions refer to all the entries mentioned. The list of the issues treated in the elaboration of this cultural policy is rather extensive, and harmonized within the European Program of National Cultural Policy Reviews (1995-2000), launched by the Council of Europe. This rather detailed description was evaluated with appreciation. The evaluation team noted that "...the term culture is broader than the 'arts': it is more anthropological – defined by the lived experience of Croatia and what is special and distinct about the place and its people."(6) Indeed, the initiation of new cultural policies has been based on detailed description of the cultural policy field and in this respect rather 'anthropological'.

The merits of such approach should not be undermined. In some cases the description of cultural policy areas enabled the introduction of certain in-views that were not present or popular at the time. E.g., The Cultural Policy of Bulgaria (7) directly introduced an analysis of the minority nations and their cultures in the mainstream thinking about the nature and character of Bulgarian contemporary culture. Multicultural situations were also 'discovered' in other cases (e.g., Albania, Romania). The effort to describe and eventually define the area of culture enabled development of flexible approaches to different cultural activities. Their mutual interlinking sometimes became the focus of the future cultural development strategies (e.g., in the case of tourism and cultural heritage in Croatia, etc.).

B) The role of the state

The states have remained main organizers, supporters and financiers of cultural activities in the post-socialist SEE countries. Central government policy priorities still dominate the newly developed cultural policies. They are mainly implemented, administered and financed by the ministries of culture. It is true that most of these policies have proclaimed the need to decentralize cultural activities and their financing. However, local authorities are not quite ready to organize and support different cultural programs and their implementation or to develop local and city cultural policies. Decentralization therefore remains a clearly proclaimed aim, but both hard and complicated to realize. Its implementation is either postponed or very slow. At any case, central governments maintain "a privileged interventionist role in establishing and enforcing policy priorities for culture" (8). This is characteristic of all SEE countries, be they post-socialist, candidates to join the EU, or members of the EU. The dominant role of state in culture cannot therefore be ascribed to a particular political system or to particular characteristics of a society. It is also questionable whether it is the result of transfer of some administrative systems, or just the choice made because culture has always been paid a lot of lip service, but never high enough on the agenda of SEE governments.

C) Other agents and their roles

A short overview of the main characteristics of the SEE cultural policies may help further systematization of cultural change. So far, it has remained mainly conceptual. Elaboration of cultural policies has provided for a respectable knowledge basis on recent cultural developments and cultures of the region. Suggestions put forward through cultural policies have incited changes in legal regulations, some aspects of financement and organization of cultural activities. However, the gained knowledge and elaborated concepts were not able to

incite and support a general institutional restructuring in culture, or to provide for a serious re-organization of theatres, museums, and other major cultural institutions.

In order to open a perspective for implementation of cultural policies, other agents and actors involved in cultural life and the introduction of new types of activities, like e.g., cultural industries, should be mentioned.

Civil society activities have emerged with the transition. The influence of civil society on cultural policies and cultural life is rather feeble in the post-socialist countries. Some recent studies have promoted "participative cultural policy making" (9) for the SEE countries, but the practical implementation of this approach would demand diminishing of the state influence. Active cultural participation had an established tradition in the countries of ex-Yugoslavia where the self-management socialism functioned for more than thirty years. Yet, practical activities of civil society groups were mostly confined to professional organizations (e.g., of actors, painters, film-makers, etc.) and not very transparent. Although this tradition has been abolished due to political changes, and although it vanished quickly, the non-governmental cultural organizations developed through "participative cultural policy making" proved to be adaptable to the newly introduced market conditions. However, they could not compete with the state supported organizations in an environment in which the markets are generally feeble and the state interventionism very strong.

The *private investments* in culture are practically non-existent or limited to the foreign foundations' donations that have supported cultural activities during the war and during the most difficult transitional years (10). However, evaluations of such support are rare. Some organizations (e.g. Dance Center in Zagreb; a network of 'Club-ures' established all over the region with the support of the Soros philanthropic funds, etc.) have been able to develop their activities. The general cultural scene in all SEE countries remains dominated by the state investment and state interventionism that is rarely matched by a few feeble private initiatives or by ever more rare projects supported by foreign donors.

5. A tentative typology of cultural policies

A further systematization of the SEE cultural policies might be checked through the following key models of cultural policies (11): cultural diffusionism, cultural functionalism and cultural mercantilism. The cultural policies of the SEE countries would best fit the model of cultural functionalism, developed in the 1970s and 1980s through the work of international organizations and the evolution of national cultural policies. This model opts to create conditions for a more democratic cultural life, greater public participation in cultural production and consumption, and for improved institutional effectiveness and increased efficiency of all the agents of cultural life. The state retains an important role, but other agents are gradually included.

If the written and established cultural policies in the SEE countries are compared, this model would best reflect the *transitional character* of their cultural policies: they are introduced and partly implemented through the influence of international organizations; they are destandardized in the respective cultural realities of the SEE countries and domesticated as 'national' cultural policies. In this respect, cultural policies in the region tend to be ever more localized, and thus less standardized (12). Their further deconstruction proceeds through the elaboration of regional and city cultural policies, that are still rare and weak, but also indicative of the undergoing processes of localization and domestication. It is an open question whether processes of localization will result with the full endogenization of cultural policies, which would then imply not only a wider social participation, but also an organized activity of civil societies and local administrations, as well as much larger impacts of the emerging cultural markets.

6. Regional frameworks

A wider development and communicational regional frameworks would certainly increase possibilities for practical implementation of the SEE cultural policies, although they all primarily refer to their respective national contexts. Such frameworks include intellectual concepts that may clarify transitional intellectual chaos and incite the production of new knowledge on cultures that would enable better understanding of the ongoing cultural transition processes. The main asset of the SEE cultural policies consists in their subsumed effort to help systematize cultural values in the new, post-transitional contexts of the SEE countries, to sustain cultural research and implement cultural changes. This is gradually achieved as the processes of localization are initiated through elaboration of city and regional cultural policies. These are not yet intertwined, but some regional frameworks for their development are discernible, e.g., at the level of the city cultural policies.

Another important 'investment' in cultural policies' regionalization would be the *development of cultural industries*. Cultural industries are developing as part of overall process of industrial restructuring and technological innovation in the region. The market-supported cultural consumption influences cultural production ever more, but the state generated cultural policies remain hardly involved with the problems of cultural consumption, cultural industries development and market growth. On the contrary, they tend to distance themselves from such developments and thus practically create a gap between state-subsidized cultural activities and industrial cultural production and consumption. Although the type of cultural production in SEE still remains artistic and artisan (13), cultural industrialization has entered the region through cultural consumption, new technologies and an expanded media presence.

The general context of development of cultural industries in SEE is still marked by the late economic and social modernization of the region (14) and by the intensive transition processes. It has become evident that all these countries need to go for the industrialization of culture and for more intensive and open inner and outer communication. Such ideas have not yet been extrapolated on the regional cultural development or cultural policies scene. The regional cultural markets are however growing (particularly pop music, film production, etc.), but cultural infrastructure and cultural policies are not much affected by this growth.

Intra-cultural *regional links* are few and weak. In transitional times cultural communication has generally diminished and an exclusive orientation to Western European countries has prevailed. Now, a more dynamic cultural exchange might be supported by the emerging cultural markets and cultural industries. Cultural policies should, however, respond to such incentives and provide for an active employment of the state in further development and opening up of cultural exchanges and communication. Cultural industries' policies or creativity policies do not exist in the region. Their eventual elaboration may become a challenge for regional cooperation and open new perspectives for the analysis of own cultural situations.

The new knowledge on cultural development in regional frameworks would diminish emotionally based reactions to other (mainly neighboring cultures) and different cultural values within the region, and eventually sustain balanced interest in particular cultures' creativity. This might be supported by rational approaches promoted through sustained cultural research and expanding interest in cultural creativity in other countries of the region.

All these processes are increasing the intercultural tolerance in the region. They are gradually diminishing the role of the state in cultural creativity and increasing the impact of cultural industries and markets. They are contributing to democratization and de-hierarchization of cultures, which are gradually exposed to more intensive communication. Since the mutual interconnectedness and knowledge on the neighboring cultures is low on the regional level, cultural policies might contribute to stimulate interest in functioning of the neighboring cultures and in their eventual interactivities. An exclusive orientation to western European cultures, which developed

particularly during the transition period, would then be balanced by the regional cultural contributions, and eventually enlarged communication with all cultures.

7. Conclusion

Contemporary cultural policies in SEE reflect an effort to redefine cultural creativity in general. A set of previously established functional aims (creation of a new/integrative/ culture and a new/harmonic/ man) has been deconstructed. Revivals of historic, ethnic and religious values have constituted frameworks for the redefined cultural identification that included self-assertiveness, limited communication with other cultures and intolerance of other values. The conceptual disintegration has almost been completed; the revival processes are still underway. Cultural policies are oriented to identity issues. They are elaborated and established by the states, which are still in search of identity clarifications. Cultural diversification and decentralization remain important challenges, but their practical implementation is slow or postponed.

Common basic concepts for the SEE cultural policies have been introduced through the influence of European organizations and, more generally, influences of the European cultural environments. Although the elaboration of cultural policies stems from the traditions established in the early 1980's, all contemporary cultural policies of the Southeastern European countries have been extrapolated within the European Program of National Cultural Policy Reviews, launched by the Council of Europe. The methodologies have been designed and harmonized as part of this program. When applied, they displayed different approaches of particular countries to their cultural life and development. Treatment of cultural diversity has also been destandardized and in many cases atypical. Systemization of cultural change still largely remains within the conceptual and analytical frameworks, while the practical implementation of the new approaches is still slow.

Now the problem of institutional restructuring within the cultural field and further endogenization of cultural policies has become central. Interest in the regional SEE frameworks and their possible role in the implementation of cultural policies appear to be ever more realistic. It is based on better knowledge on neighboring cultures, as well as in sharing of mutually connective experiences. Particular attention should be paid to development of cultural markets and the emerging cultural industries, which may provide for sustainable further cultural developments in the SEE region.

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