policies for culture
Participative Policy-Making in South East Europe

Cultural policy research in the countries of South East Europe: setbacks and prospects

international workshop of the PfC Task Force for Cultural Policy Research
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Workshop report

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BACKGROUND: The workshop[1]

The international workshop **"Cultural policy research in the countries of South East Europe: setbacks and prospects"** represented the first larger scale activity of the Task Force for Cultural Policy Research in South East Europe (set up by the Policies for Culture programme in 2004). It had four main objectives:

Mapping: To map out gaps arising between policy and research in individual SEE countries, as well as identify some good examples of productive partnerships between the policy community and the research community in SEE and other countries.

Raising awareness: To raise awareness both of the liabilities that stem from the lack of research, on the one hand, and the assets resulting from the policy making based on independent research results, on the other.

Capacity building & networking: To initiate – by incorporating research activity into the *Policies for Culture* action triangle (of relevant actors in the policy-making process) – the development of research interests and capacities in SEE countries. This is a process that may be supported by SEE states as well as inter-governmental or non-governmental organisations, and which may further be upgraded, e.g. as a regional research network.

(and the key objective of the workshop)
Setting an agenda: To define the most urgent topics of research and the methodologies that would more easily enable the conversion of the research findings into policy papers which could have an impact at national and local level. The proposed agenda will also be submitted to the inter-governmental organisations active in this field, and particularly to UNESCO, the EU, the Council of Europe and the Central European Initiative.

Presented below are the main issues raised and proposals made during the workshop[2], which brought together almost 40 experts, researchers, academics, and cultural operators from the countries in the region, Western Europe and the USA.

MAPPING: Exploring current situation and needs, as well as existing resources and opportunities

Colin Mercer provided as a starting point an overview of the broader landscape of cultural policy research, beyond the immediate context of SEE. He identified as main issues:

- lack of research paradigms and methodologies;
- lack of a coherent knowledge-base to inform policy;
- low research profile for culture in public agencies;
- over-politicisation of policy issues: use of research as advocacy;
- unavailability of privately commissioned research;
- local government not research-enabled;
- mismatch of 'cultural studies' and 'cultural policy';

[1] For more details about the workshop agenda and the participants please visit www.policiesforculture.org.
[2] Report made by Oana Radu, regional coordinator of Policies for Culture in South East Europe.

- 'methodological nationalism' (research remaining within a national frame);
- inequalities in the distribution of research capacities.

As far as South East Europe is concerned, participants considered that culture is a very marginal issue on the public agenda, and that cultural policy is not still considered to be a real part of public policy. Moreover, there is little recognition of the role of culture; for instance, it is not taken into consideration at all in the evaluation of the quality of life in Romania. This leads to no recognition of the importance of research.

Moreover, continuous updating is needed – There is a deficit of information: as the existing information is scarce and, due to rapid pace of change that characterises the countries in the region, whatever information there is quickly becomes obsolete. This is problematic, since the few existing reports (such as those made in the framework of the Council of Europe's exercise or the Compendium) are for the moment the only comprehensive references and in many cases they are obsolete.

In the current context there is in SEE a critical need for strategic thinking and for a strategic linking of all the actors relevant for cultural development (in an inter-sectorial approach). An evaluation and legitimisation of cultural issues is required, as well as an evaluation of cultural consumption which is significantly changing in the region.

What research?

- There is a need for **applied research**, and not (only) the traditional academic research. This research can have two possible objectives:
    - **to document policy**, e.g. making comparisons between existing policies in different countries;
    - **to evaluate policies**, which as Mark Schuster pointed out, is a difficult task; what should be evaluated, however, are the different ways of implementing the policies (the programmes, tools, the resources, the institutional arrangements designed to implement policies, the intended targets, the intended and actual outcomes, etc).

- There are some **tensions** which must be acknowledged: between research and consultancy; research and evaluation; research and advocacy.

- In addressing the different components of the public policy model/chain referred to by Mark Schuster – **from data to information to evidence** – the lack of data was generally identified as a key problem. More generally, what are the sources of information? Although some exist, they are neither coordinated, nor used to their potential (such as in the field of publishing). Also, there is a need to develop new **cultural statistics** frameworks, to lobby the institutes of statistics so that they collect information relevant for the cultural field, which currently remains uncollected, and to push for a more diversified data collecting in this area. The statistical frameworks established by the EU should also be taken into account in this process.

- What is the **agenda for research**?
  Sanjin Dragojevic argued that generally in the region the impetus to advance matters has been external. The question is how to make this impetus come from within the region? There is a need to **develop a regional agenda**.

- research should be used to facilitate the process of modernisation in the context of new players (such as the EU) coming in the region;
- priority areas of research should include cultural consumption, cultural industries, evaluation of cultural projects, evaluation of cultural policies (of policy implementation mechanisms), and development of cultural indicators.

- There is a **lack of a comparative paradigm**. There is a need for **a common methodological framework and a regional approach.**

- There is also a problem in the **dissemination** of the results of existing research; this is due partly to language issues, but also to the lack of marketing skills, and of the lack of infrastructures for dissemination, of communication channels. There is therefore a need to **map and collect and make more widely available the existing research on SEE**. Such efforts already exist and should be made use of (e.g. RECAP, CPRO, the Canadian Cultural Observatory), along with the other communication instruments of Policies for Culture (such as the electronic periodicals and the website). In this respect, the PfC website, intended as a virtual resource centre in the field of cultural policy research in SEE, can be a highly effective instrument.

Who does the research?

It was estimated that in SEE there are very few research groups and hardly any consortia of universities working in the field of cultural policy research, the field being characterised by Lidia Varbanova as a **'patchwork' approach**. What is also very feeble is neutral, independent research. Of course, the situation differs greatly from country to country, and there are important differences in the region in terms of existing research capacities.

However, it was argued that **potentially a research community does exist in the region**; what is missing is a pragmatic, project-approach, capable of bringing together the people who can work on a specific project. Thus, according to the mapping exercise on academic programmes addressing cultural policy (in different forms and to different extents) done by Corina Suteu in 2004, there are 18 such universities in SEE (from 30-40 in Eastern Europe as a whole). There are also, though they represent an exception, research institutions such as IMO (Zagreb) and the related Culturelink network. Creating a platform of cooperation between these universities, as well as other non-academic partners, and launching pilot research laboratories within them could make use of the existing potential and interest.

How can such **platforms** be created and how can specific research projects be organised, both within the country as well as in view of comparative exercises in the region? Think tanks, online research clusters, consortia of universities with different backgrounds and profiles (within a country and regionally), focus groups, etc. are all possible solutions. PfC could play, in the framework of such regional exercises, the role of a framework, a coordination body, a facilitator, or simply the disseminator of the research results. Also, considered fundamental was the provision of support for young researchers, and the creation of platforms of encounters between researchers where they can meet, present their projects, exchange and confront with others.

Another important drawback identified was the **very feeble links with other research communities**, addressing other fields in the humanities and not only. It was considered that establishing such links and developing more interdisciplinary research approaches will be beneficial not only for a strengthening of the research capacities, but also for making a stronger case for culture.

Who uses research?

There is a gap between the policy and research communities, due to both civil servants and decision-makers, on the one hand, and researchers, on the other hand:

- **Researchers.** Vesna Copic argues that academics lack knowledge of cultural policy practice and how government works, and must also make efforts to build links with the latter;
- **Public administration**. It was estimated that a critical obstacle (if not the greatest, as Sanjin Dragoevic argued) in all the countries of the region is the public administration;
- **Politicians**. It was pointed out that in the SEE (and beyond) there is a **lack of political will** to recognise the importance of culture. In turn this leads to a failure to recognise the importance of research in the field, and a failure to provide the means for and make use of the results of research in the design and evaluation of cultural policy.

In order to bridge these gaps and to contribute to more informed decisions, there is a need:

- to build partnerships:
    - stronger links between different institutions – universities, different ministries and other public agencies;
    - with relevant European partners which can also influence national decision-makers;
- to develop independent research centres/platforms;
- to develop advocacy initiatives and partnerships with key European or international institutions (such as EU, UNESCO, Council of Europe, etc.), which have an influence with the national decisions-makers.

Colin Mercer concluded that what we need is to **develop a stakeholder research culture**, i.e.

- research funding for cultural policy which recognises it as being as legitimate as 'the environment', as an object of knowledge and policy;
- involvement of end-users of research in the development of research programmes (e.g. the Strategic Partnerships with Industry for Research and Training);
- recognition that policy is not the prerogative or sole preserve of policy-makers but a constantly negotiated 'line of conduct' between stakeholders.

PLANNING: Planning for concerted action/ what to do

In order to address both the above identified needs, as well as the opportunities, and with a view to **building inside the countries in the region a stronger and legitimate research community to deal with cultural policy issues**, it was determined that the main areas to be given priority were:

1. **Undertaking a more comprehensive mapping exercise of what already exists with the purpose of creating links and effectively exploiting what exists**. The areas to be mapped are:

- which are the existing research infrastructure and capacities – their profile, interest, expertise;
- what research has been/is being done;
- which are the existing and potential users of research – who used it; why did they use it; why wasn't it used;
- which external actors are to be involved in this process.

2. **Developing research capacities: Using the existing research infrastructure and further developing it**

- reinforcement of reliable data resources in SEE;
- coordination between existing institutes, universities, laboratories, as providers and users of statistical data and research;
- exploring partnership with other European research organisations or initiatives, such as ERICarts, CIRCLE, RECAP, the LAB, CPEG, the Boekman Foundation, or the OSI Center for Policy Studies, with other research institutes, publications, etc.;
- building inside the countries in the region a stronger and legitimate research community dealing with cultural policy issues through participation in research projects. Project-related analysis and research activity can contribute to the institutional development of research institutions;
- involving students and young researchers in cultural policy research projects and facilitating their participation in high level conferences in the field.

3. **Relevant relationship with both the decision-making levels and the influential social sectors** (to give visibility and relevance)
establishing a strong research focus on issues that touch on the economic and political levels and stimulate interest for the subject: namely, the creative industries, the arts and building of social capital, culture and development, culture and employment (this will help induce a sense of cultural policies as interacting with other important sectors of the public sphere, and of cultural policy as a 'line of conduct').

4. **Giving sustainability and weight to the research activity itself**

- organising researchers' meetings; these could allow existing research, commissioned or not, to be confronted; bring in the younger generations; inform other disciplines (e.g. anthropology, political sciences, sociology, economics, etc.), thus fostering 'quality' research in the region;
- entering relevant relationship with existing initiatives and events in the field of research (e.g. meeting of the Association for Cultural Economics in Vienna in 2006) or other relevant fields (e.g. the Eurocities meeting in Zagreb in 2005) and exploring the possibility of organising SEE satellite meetings or a wider SEE participation;
- using the PfC website to its full potential, initiating an online library of existing research on specific SEE cultural policy research issues, and using the website for the dissemination of the results of existing research;
- through its activities, the Task Force could become recognised as a think tank of national and international policy-making in the field of culture.

5. **Raising regional awareness about global issues and regional challenges**

- putting forward a 'regional agenda for research', self-identified as being relevant from the inside, not from the outside;
- dealing with research related to difficult parts of the region (rebalancing the absence of or low research potential in countries such as Albania, Bosnia, Moldova or Kosovo);
- running lobbying actions in parallel; encouraging the taking into account of the research needs by the EU (framework 6 and framework 7 in preparation);
- developing forums at national level where research and political communities can meet and exchange viewpoints, and where the information and knowledge acquired are the basis of a fundamental policy discussion and debate.

Following these main lines, Policies for Culture aims to organise its concrete **activities in 2005** in the field of research along the following lines:

1. **Undertaking a comprehensive mapping of existing resources, infrastructures, opportunities** – of what exists and can be put together in order to address the identified needs – in cooperation with different partners in the region interested in this exercise. Partnerships outside the region should also be envisaged. Thus, one of the proposals made was to suggest and advocate for the inclusion of the topic "research" in the Compendium, asking respondents to specify what sort of research institutions exist in each of the countries, what are the research capacities, and which are the key research topics in the field of cultural policy.

2. **Documentation** (dissemination of the mapping exercise) **& debate** via the website:
    - online forum debates (as "open source research" such as IFACCA has been proposing). PfC has already developed such a tool which will be launched by the end of 2004; the goal is for it to be widely made use of starting from 2005 so as to test the PfC's target group's interest in and use of such a tool;
    - online library of existing research. Collaboration with similar initiatives, such as RECAP, should also be explored;
    - online library of current or planned research.

3. **Organising a researchers meeting** (autumn 2005) and facilitating the participation of researchers in other important international conferences in the field (as well as exploring and launching such collaborations for the future).

4. **Development of (regional) research projects**:
    - exploring possibilities and developing a regional cooperation project in the field of cultural policy research, with a focus on impact assessment, developing cultural indicators, and evaluating cultural policies;
    - exploring the opportunities and concrete means of participation in the research project on the development of a European Public Space coordinated by ESCUS (Sheffield).

These activities, further pursued and developed by the PfC platform acting as a framework of cooperation with a variety of partners, could facilitate the development of a research forum and a space for debate for SEE. In this way they will contribute to the development of the research capacity "by doing", i.e. by the means of developing specific projects and facilitating a better use and coordination of what already exists.