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Leadership patterns in cultural sector

There are two countries in Europe where the word "leader" is not used in the mother tongue. One is Germany, where *Fuehrer* was for a long time a synonym for Hitler, for evil leadership. The other is Serbia, where the word *VOĐA* (leader), as the title of a Radoje Domanović satire (short novel written in 1901), has marked generations with its negative meaning. Thus, we in Serbia are using the word *lider*, as our translation of the English word "leader," but even then, we are somehow reluctant to use it in the cultural sector (as our *VOĐA* became political *LIDER/LEADER*, even this Anglicism became problematic to use in the cultural realm).

Cultural leaders of today should go beyond their usual frameworks, their visible and invisible borders, agreed aims, and objectives of their organizations. Leadership should open new perspectives – not be focused on its own artistic area, on “my country, my strategic plan,” or just on restructuration and development of “my” activities or organization!

Leadership is not about creating celebrity of itself! Navel-gazing is a danger as much as it is a self-satisfaction! Yes, “creativity connects” (Jane Chu)¹, but creativity might also divide and exclude. Leadership has to enable dialogues, to help the arts and artists to be better embedded in the core of contemporary societies, not just to be temporary stars present in media because of their lifestyle and not their real achievements.

And, more than just enabling cultural workers to achieve agreed aims, leadership has to challenge those agreed aims and open new perspectives and horizons, sometimes in spite of everyone else and in spite of conventions and standards that are considered as the ideal benchmarks of achievements.

Rana Jazaji invited us here for our collective imagination and, I would add, for civic imagination (Enwezor), which is necessary to provoke public policies to go much further, beyond usual horizons and scopes of activities. But, there is a lack of imaginative leadership, a lack of innovative research projects, and a lack of brave attempts to face controversies in our field. And a lack of bravery to accept new, collective leadership models.

¹ All names mentioned without further reference relates to their papers and exposés presented on this World Summit Conference in Valletta, October 2016.

However, shared, collective leadership in culture has always existed – social movements, from romanticism onwards, created conditions for the arts and arts systems to develop. Impressionist painters re-created the art market (Hiam 2010, Willette 2014); leaders (curators, gallerists, artists, managers) around abstract arts and especially conceptual arts re-created, re-shaped and re-designed a whole artistic system, a complete value chain in visual arts.

Yesterday, a leader was a voice of a collective, a representative of an organization, society, or state. Ministers for culture, such as Andre Malraux and Jack Lang, Marcel Hicter, Misha Shvidkoy in Russia, and Izabella Cywinska in Poland led and represented their countries' cultures. But a leader in the future should empower others, other organisations, networks, and movements, encourage them to have a voice.

Leaders should advocate on a larger level that art matters, not because of economics, social change, or beauty in our everyday lives, but because arts are the best platform for critical thinking, for debating social injustice, for enabling empathy, for understanding and interpreting even those things we want to forget, for imagining and creating.

For me, the multifaceted art of Jochen Gerz (Vickery, Manus 2016) is the best example of cultural leadership in the cultural policy domain – more precisely in memory politics. His work is inspirational not only for other artists (like Milica Tomić and curators like Bojana Pejić); it is inspirational for the thousands of people who participated in “monument against racism,” or “monument against fascism”! It was also important for public policies – and they have changed – in Saarbrücken for example, or in Graz where policy changed twice, in different directions. Today, they are destroying Gerz' work – but that means that this work is provocative, that it is important, thus, they – new city policy makers – decided to destroy it!

Yes, cultural leadership should be a social process, a process that demands self-organisation and the creation of new international connections (I am deliberately not using the word "global" as this word today is used only for "prosperous global", for cities like Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Seoul, but not for Dhaka, Phnom Penh, for Nagorno Karabakh, for refugees in Africa, for forgotten indigenous enclaves in Latin America. Cultural leadership of the world today avoided giving statements about “refugee crises,” about wars in Syria, about military conflicts and wars that are destroying the image of the “brave new world” that we would like to create with such conferences.)

Leaders of the future, and especially cultural leaders of the future, should create a network of ethically responsible and professionally competent cultural operators, regardless of their economic power, political influence in their local surrounding, or political “approval” from those who are leading the world (and financing our projects, our mobility). The absence of Russians and Chinese is significant in this respect, as much as the absence of Crimea Tatars, Tibetans. Excluding both is the easiest way to achieve the success of the project, conference, or workshop.

Thus the network of the future should connect the Eurocentric Anglo-American Western world and the global south, not only to Tokyo but to Okinawa, not only to Istanbul but to

Diyarbakir, Lapland and Rattanakiri, the Gaza strip and East Jerusalem, South Sudan and powerful South Africa.

Cultural leadership has to be bold and face conflicts, not avoid them while happily discussing only the politically accepted challenges of the future (sustainable development, cultural diversity and diversity of cultural expressions, creative industries as development panacea, etc.). How come the Summit speaks only about positive trends and neglects, sweeps under the carpet, all controversies? Why do we accept being silenced? Is there anyone among us who dares to call things with their proper names, not to use euphemisms and not avoid critical issues?

We have to ask unpleasant questions not only to the governments of Cuba and North Korea, but also:

Why was the play *Behzti* by Sikh author Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti (Grillo, 2007), which was ready for its premiere at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and prevented from opening due to a street mob (Dec. 2004), never re-staged? In other theaters, in other European countries?

Why we have not discussed the performance “Apology of Norwegian National Theater for collaborating with Habima, Israeli National Theater” and its direct message to all leaders of Western cultural organizations?

Why Sunil Shanbag, Mumbai theater director, decided not to participate in a Shakespeare theater festival in Israel?

Why Tamil writer Perumal Murugan (Hindu 2016) had to publicly state “his” decision not to publish or re-publish anything anymore, and even his “resignation from writing” a word in the future? (Luckily, the court liberated him from nationalistic accusations on 5th July 2016, but that does not make the same impact in society that the accusations are making).

Why the book “12 impossible” (12 Arab censored stories) is still waiting for its Arab publisher, to appear in its original, Arab language?

Why no one knows about the blacklists of artists and intellectuals in South Korea?

Fear, anxiety, insecurity and securitization has conquered our cultural world – with bigger impact than spectacularization, glamour, cheap humor and commercialization.

Yes, we need big visions and bold actions, as Simon Brault has told us, nationally, but also internationally. We need to be firm to stop hidden censorship and auto-censorship in our cultural institutions and organizations, to stop justifying it by political correctness. We need to say NO to accusations of “defamation of the religion”; we have to say no to blasphemy laws and to United Nations resolutions that, in numerous countries, have been used as an excuse for censorship.

Throughout the world students are revolting. Mike van Graan is reminding us about South African revolt, Arundhati Gosh about protests of Indian students. The cultural community is

silent. Cultural “leaders” should join student leaders in those battles for democracy, for new politics of memory!²

We need more courageous intellectuals, administrators, managers and artists like Ai Weiwei, Marina Abramović or Katarzyna Kozyra. Remember Roger Casement – his letters from Congo influenced the world to force the Belgian King to change (at least a bit) exploitative colonization policy in Congo, and later his task in Amazonia was the same. But leadership has also many failures – his life is proof that nothing is black and white or simple to judge.

We need more people that will, like Jochen Gerz, create counter-narratives as he is creating counter-monuments. He created a space for remembrance of the Holocaust – now we need a new generation of artist that will create a space of remembrance for Palestine. Yes, I am a pessoptimist, as Emile Habibi, an exile in his own country, has been writing (*The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist...*). But, the future still has numerous possibilities...

Conclusions

What kind of cultural leadership is needed in the XXI century?

Definitely not the traditional one that successfully follows frameworks and rules, fulfilling organisational tasks and reaching expected (planned) achievements. Nor a charismatic, heroic one that is seducing and manipulating its followers; usually from enthusiastic emancipatory cultural movement comes an authoritarian end (non-emancipated culture). Nor ones who are capable of seeing trends and money flows and reshaping their organization or influencing artists to enter the “profitable” area (like psycho-social artistic activities with refugees, which are not changing their lives or the world; they offer some moments of joy and happiness but when the artistic action stops, the reality is even harsher to stand).

We need questioning, non-obedient, rebellious, permanent dissenters among cultural managers, who are at the same time resilient and responsible. We need those who can see

² “the university has been shut for the last two weeks. This, because of national student campaigns for free higher education that have at times turned violent with university buildings being set alight, for example. The “Fees Must Fall” campaign evolved the “Rhodes Must Fall” campaign of last year to remove the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, a British mining magnate/politician who had bequeathed the land as the location for the university. This campaign was a proxy for the broader campaign to “decolonize the university”. Art and photographs of previous – white – leaders within the university were destroyed in a bonfire, much to outrage of many who believed these to acts of barbarism, unbecoming of civilized study. More than twenty years into South Africa’s non-racial democracy, students who have no institutional memory of colonialism nor apartheid were, are now demanding the fundamental transformation of their publicly-funded universities at which they feel uncomfortable, “othered”. They are reminded, on a daily basis - through the semiotics of the university - that despite living in a constitutional democracy with non-racism as one of its founding principles, “whiteness” and “white privilege” still hold sway.” (Mike van Graan, paper, Cultural Diplomacy international conference, Belgrade, 1.10.2016)

in their environment and beyond where the power of change might come from and make space for them.

Leadership of tomorrow is more than role-model, catalyzer, or mediator. It is not about leader and followers (we should refuse that relation) – it is about social or organizational process.

We need generous, bold, political, critical, cultural leadership – leadership that empowers and acts through its own alliances – KOOOPERATIVA on the Balkans, or National Cultural Policy groups in 12 Arab countries (Al Mawred, see Dragičević Šešić 2015a), Cambodian Living Arts with all of their young leaders, trainers, experts and artists might try this path to face new leadership challenges.

- Leadership of tomorrow has to develop in collaborative, discursive and reflective ways.
- New visions and ideas should be expressed in narratives that can move citizens, cultural communities, and artistic groups, because they are offering new perspectives and horizons.
- Leadership demands commitment, responsibility (ethics) and adequate position.
- Engaging others with the capacity and readiness to listen and lead, to create new forms of self-organisation practices
- Discursive story-telling, articulation of ideas, capacity to negotiate, and persuade (create a story out of those ideas and imaginative proposals that do not have the strength to be clearly expressed).
- Readiness to come-up with bold and often tough decisions that are created from both collective dialogue and using civic imagination.
- Establishing unusual and strong alliances among different social agents (not only from the cultural domain).

And, to conclude: we need, and the world needs, the arts to have a strong voice, to be heard and considered.

“The arts sector depends on it. Our future depends on it. So let’s get started!”
(Simon Brault, IFACCA paper presentation, Malta, October 2016)

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