

Classification of festivals

Today, the festivals that exist on the ground of former Yugoslavia, because of its versatile character and function, can be divided into several ways. Though, for better overview, we will offer one classification for which we consider to be valid and under which all festivals can be stated. Through this division we do not define fully the festivals (given here as an example), but we classify them through the function that they represent today. Having in mind that on the ground of former Yugoslavia there is a dissensus of what culture is, we made a list of some festivals we know of and we consider being part of the widely defined cultural space. Hereafter, we take a more detailed view of some of them through a certain prism that we offer, but with this we want to initiate the others to take part in the process and to give their opinions about the subject.

~ State-national-representative - festivals that are striving to show the cultural achievements on national level and to celebrate and value the artistic achievements within "the guild". Most of these festivals exist for a very long time and represent a way to stimulate the production, the cooperation and to value the success.

(Sterijino Pozorje, Gibanica, Vojdan Cernodrinski, Risto Siskov, Days of the Macedonian Music, Warm Cultural Wave, Biennial of Young Artists)

~ Creative industries - These festivals are, above all, international and are profiled as "brand" (not only the festival, but in certain cases the managers/selectors build a name, a brand through the festivals). They have economical impact, respectively, their aim is to show that the culture makes a profit in a way it affects the economic devel-



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opment. Some of these festivals are formed as private companies, firms, some of them are initiated by the state, the city, and some even by the NGO's. Most of them actually can not make profit in this way, but the mechanisms that they establish remain their main aim.

As a creative industry today can be considered those arts that already have their way in the market and their function is to widen it - but also to reprogram it, offering new challenges and positions for certain allied authors. In Macedonia, the support of the creative industry is promoted whilst the system cannot support the very politic, thus making it implicit.

(Skopje Jazz Festival, OFF FEST, Bitef, Young Open Theatre - MOT, Ohrid Summer, Bemus, Eurokaz, Skopje Film Festival, The Manaki Festival, EXIT, Taksirat, Dance Festival - Belgrade, Dance Week Festival - Zagreb, Dance Fest Skopje)

~ Self-organized/NGO sector - These festivals are formed because of the need to form and formulate a space that is missing, a space for cooperation, experiments, innovation, problem solving, reflection of the context and art, promotion of new - innovative arts. These festivals are built upon a programme and are organized with a team work, and stimulate non-hierarchical approach - self-organization.

(Action/Fraction, Kondenz, LocoMotion, Dispatch, Ring Ring, Perforations, Zensk Festival, Aster Fest, BIMAS (Biennial of Architecture), AKTO, Faces without masks, Freak Fest ...)

~ European festivals - These festivals promote the European principles/priorities. They are supported or formed by the European Commission and have the aim to promote a new community - the European community.

(Cinedays, European Culture Capital, BJCEM (Biennial of Young Artists from Europe and the Mediterranean...))

We are going to review the following festivals through the offered perspective: MOT (Young Open Theatre, commonly known as MOT - Mlad otvoren teatar) formed with the purpose to introduce new, young forms and to bring freshness on the theatre stage, EXIT and



ALARM - formed in order to bring new music styles, to serve as an exit from the everyday life, to represent an excess on the scene; and Dance Fest - formed in order to represent the movement, to promote the authorship, the contemporary dance, and to open the space that is missing.

We have chosen to analyze these three festivals in order to pose the questions - which is their function today? Does it have any kind of role in the development of the cultural context? Does that role affect the development of the community? What is the need for these festivals?

CASE #1: Dance Fest

Dance Fest is an NGO initiative of the Interart Cultural Center, formed in 1996. We consider that the basic idea on which this festival is based¹ (to follow the world trends in the development of the contemporary dance, to promote the Macedonian contemporary dance scene to the world, to develop new, young audience, to bring in the audience in the process of the development of the contemporary dance, etc.) is not in relation to what this festival performs today, respectively its potential is actualized in the form of continuing the existing institutional matrix.

Although the purpose of an associated group of citizens should be "freeing" the space where people can watch and show the courses of the contemporary dance, to support new associations, productions, audience, to offer "otherness" in the cultural space, on the contrary, this festival becomes a "showcase" of ballet ensembles, troops, institutions, ambassadors, politicians, and support of the official state cultural policy. All that promotes values that build false, non-reference context out of which you can not monitor the development of the contemporary dance art, although that is one of its aims. This showcase "captures" a space where the prestige is promoted, the elite culture is stimulated and represents a parade of ensembles that has no reference to what is happening in the field of the contemporary dance in Europe and in the world today.

1// Presented on their web site (<http://dancefestskopje.com.mk>)



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We see that certain mechanisms² (part of the promotional ones of the creative industries) are taken over and are applied in the contemporary artistic and cultural space in Macedonia, but they do not correspond with it and produce phantasms instead of realities.

This festival can be seen as an example of "privately-ordered freedom", respectively a space that is requested and initiated to prove that the author can create, initiate, correlate and to represent the community and the needs of the community (contemporary dance community that we can say it does not exist in Macedonia), but at the same time that freedom is used to implement and establish mechanisms through which this space will be hegemonized.

The need for this kind of festival in Macedonia arises as a result of the non-existence of theatre that has a modern dance repertoire and works on the expansion of the artistic productions. But, does this concept of festival fulfil that and in what way? Guests on this year's festival were The Dance Academy of Rotterdam, Igor Kirov (Macedonian choreographer that works abroad) and The State Ballet School Centre from Skopje. Last year there were representatives of The Academy of Rotterdam, The Ballet of Kosovo, The State Opera and Ballet of Istanbul, and in the previous years The Beli Theatre, St. Petersburg, Russia, The National Ballet of Ljubljana, Slovenia, and the troop Galili Dance from Netherlands were presented. The programme of this festival does not correspond to the idea of following the world trends in the development of the contemporary dance, and it is contrary to what we want to stress and point out, but we have to ask - is this festival a space where we can see, follow and analyze the things that are not represented on the Macedonian scene - the contemporary dance? The programme and the function of the festival is a successive complementing of the traditional theatrical matrix, ballet institutions³ that execute the function - presentation of the national theatres, ballets,

2// The protocol of elitism - promoting the creativity with red carpets, evening dresses, speeches, awards, big promotion, commercials, pomp, parades ...

3// Last year on the Ballet stage in Macedonia were staged two short modern ballets with the choreographer Raphael Bianco (Italy), a cooperation was established and the play Radiator was also staged by the choreographer Arthur Kugeline (Switzerland); performances by the choreographer Sasa Eftimova were produced, and widening of the repertoire and some new guests are announced.



and cooperation with choreographers that are part of these institutions. This festival doesn't offer diversity, innovations, and with that it does not represent an excess - which is one of the basic functions of the festivals overall.

However, it does not mean that it does not contribute to enrich the contents in the culture, especially in context such as the Macedonian, where the offer as well as the need is at very low level. In this context, we can note that the above mentioned festival is embedded in the existing models of the festival presentation, which corresponds to the institutional, state policy in the field of culture. This festival neatly follows, without an attempt for deconstruction and redefining, that reader action of the culture of spectacle which is well known and acceptable for the majority.

CASE #2: Young Open Theatre (MOT – Mlad otvoren teatar)

The International festival Young Open Theatre (MOT – Mladinski otvoren teatar) was organized for the first time by the Youth Cultural Centre in May 1976. The grand opening was denoted with the play of the Theatrical troupe "Drama Studio Prufkok" with the direction of Edwina Dorman.

MOT presents and enables the exchange - the circulation of young, fresh, experimental, avant-garde theatrical energy and experience between the participants and the audience of the theatre plays. Theatrical troupes and independent theatrical artists from over 50 countries of Europe and all over the world took part on MOT.⁴

According to the researches of the Institute for teatrology, the three main points that mark the essence of this festival are the young authors, the experimentalism and the openness for cooperation that is created during its theatrical existence.

4// http://www.mactheatre.edu.mk/main/fest_mac_mot.html



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The need for implementation of theatre that will present the young authors' energy and the actuality, where there will be interaction and association, exchange of ideas and concepts and where new, young forms will be created which will bring freshness on the theatrical scene and will announce the new protagonists on the scene, in an environment like the one in the former Yugoslavia during the seventies of the last century, clearly marks the policy of that time - "free space - free country".

The basic idea is to allow space to as more as possible authors where they can express themselves. So, in this way, with the formation of the state arsenal according to the principles "equal to all" on which basis was formulated and developed the cultural existence, MOT was created in Skopje, which as the state capital had to had "all the benefits of the civilized world".

After thirty years of existence, the festival continues to exist but had to change everything, even its essence - the socio-political and social ambience itself is changed and with all that, the role, the idea and the attributes of MOT are changed. Only one thing does not belong in this field - the dependence of the state which fully finances the festival since its creation.

The Macedonian teatrologist Jelena Luzhina says that today MOT does not mean a thing. According to her, the title itself is great, young open theatre, and the festival should represent exactly that. "If it is open and young then it should be alternative and not mainstream. But today MOT is exactly - mainstream. It should change its name or the concept because something is wrong. At the time of its creation it was known as an alternative festival. The state was happy to have a festival like that and was investing in it", says Luzhina.

Its role in the today's constellation is changed (which is a result of a long process and essential changes in the society itself, as the state was transforming from communism into transitional capitalism), its function is not even closely recognizable, and this young open festival is converted into a show of the best plays. In MOT take part plays that have "shaken up" the world, that have caused some kind of a sensation (how much its function is changed confirms last year's programme, when guest was the play "Pension F" of the director and actor Hubsj)



Kramar, worked upon the real event with the monstrous father Jozef Fritzl) or plays that can be easily get, on the basis of exchange with colleagues and exchange of projects.⁵ It is just an illusion that at MOT we will see the world and everything that is happening in it - most of the time the international character is valid for the wider region. The whole festival converts into a stale material which only exists on the romantic and nostalgic spirit of the generations of visitors that have built their theatrical taste following this festival. Today it has no "own internal essence", it continues to function "on thin ice", just as much as not to break the three decade continuity (the thought itself of dismissal of its functioning is scary) than to think over its function, role and aim as new conditions, unknown for MOT.

Although this festival was created out of the need for a festival like that, today it carries nothing new for the development of the community, for the support of the young, for gaining new audience. In the last few years, some old programmes were brought back and some new were created, as a market for the Macedonian plays (The Macedonian Open Theatre) that were seen by foreign producers, directors, authors, but still, these news bend and interrupt the basic concept, the festival becomes something else, the optimism and the youth spirit are transformed into senile dementia, lack of energy and a body that is on a life-support machine.

CASE #3: The "Exit Festival", Novi Sad, Serbia and the similar to it, the short-lived and almost renewed music festival in Macedonia "Alarm"

The EXIT festival came into being in the year 2000 as an act of rebellion against the regime of Slobodan Milosevic, that had for years been keeping Serbia out of touch with the outside world. That summer thousands of young people from Novi Sad gathered in the campus park by the Danube River where concerts, parties and art performances took place. There were also discussions and debates where the young were able to express their opposition to the imposed nationalism, xenopho-

5// This policy of exchange of plays can also be positive if it is formulated as collaboration, where it will not step back from the original idea and the concept of the festival, as well as the local needs.

bia, censorship and repression. The event lasted for 100 days and its grand finale was the 'Get out to Vote' party, which was held one day before the elections that saw the downfall of Milosevic.⁶

The idea of the festival from its very beginning was to create an independent state the "State of EXIT" which will promote the European values and will present Serbia as a free zone – a country which promotes another values (freedom of expression, exit from the isolation, difference, etc.) and is able to create a different perception of the reality by creating its own, with a passport and its own currency (vouchers) that symbolically open a space of "freedom".

However, through the years there has been a transformation of the primary aims and efforts. Today the symbols and values that Exit has taken for its imperatives are nowhere to be found and have become almost exclusive for their local context and audience. The festival has transformed itself into a retreat for west European teenagers who can afford the stay with their pocket money, whereas the local and regional audience became mainly distanced from the event because of their constantly lowering living standard. In this way, the festival distances itself to a greater extent from the alternative, impetuous principle which was its basic concept.

The Exit Festival today is formulated as an "ultra-commercial" music event, for which every visitor has to pay a ticket (not a symbolic one, but rather moneyed) in order to enter the "free-zone".

As a part of the programme the most commercial names from the international music scene perform each year, so that it becomes a parade of branded bands.

In Macedonia an attempt has emerged to create a similar type of festival on an isolated location which offers a different concept: promotion of healthy lifestyle, increasing of environmental awareness and harmony with nature. Namely, that is the "Alarm for Nature" festival which takes place beside the Ohrid Lake. This festival has not reached the grandness of the Exit Festival yet, though, the story still exists and this year its second edition is going to be realized.

6// The web-site of the Exit Festival: http://eng.exitfest.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=553&Itemid=197



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ALARM FOR NATURE includes work on particular projects, both in the field of ecology as well as in the field of music and art that will contribute to awakening the sense of connection and interdependence between the human and nature and to implement the healthy lifestyle in harmony with the natural surroundings. ALARM FOR NATURE unites the forces of the green army, music and art, education and student organizations, science and technology, architecture, governmental and non-governmental organizations, the young and the old, ALL in joint action to protect the nature and solve the problems concerning the environment. The three-day music festival in nature, with a possibility to camp, aims to draw out people, especially young people, from the grayness of the urban life and to evoke their love and respect towards nature⁷.

Alarm for Nature is, in fact, a commercial music event for which one has to pay an entrance ticket. In its programme it tends to include relevant brands and regional DJs, as well as international music names. Through its music contents, the above mentioned component of building an ecological awareness by promoting a different lifestyle usually is not visible to the visitors, and the results from this kind of announced actions are not publicly pursued.

What do the both festivals have in common?

The both festivals are striving to create an ambient of escapement, offer escapism "prolonged youth", and create an environment that should enable development of ideas using all of the available creative tools. The main themes usually follow the world and European trends, so that they build what is popular at the moment, they create „fashion of life“: coexistence, multiethnic cooperation, environmental awareness, human trafficking, etc.

They are meta-events in the field of culture, which impose a feeling of transformation - creating a space in which "young people" get the right to vote and think. They stimulate the young people to articulate, engage themselves, volunteer in order to achieve the "general welfare for all". In this way, by instrumentalising culture and art and the "im-

⁷// The web-site of Alarm Festival: http://www.alarm.com.mk/zosto_alarm.html



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munity" they offer, festivals are formed where the values of the neo-liberal matrix, whose final aim is the profit, are stimulated.

On the other hand, the sensation, which is offered by the programme, enables a huge number of visitors and increases the visibility and recognition of the festivals, thus enabling their further development and existence. The "glow" of their final success for which we read after they finish, makes us think that this kind of events truly change the way the audience acts, educate and entertain at the same time, bring the scenes and the "bitter enemies" closer to each other, calm down the "balkanism" suggesting a feeling of equality: socio-economical and political. Thus, on one stage we have got Macedonian musicians and DJs who in love and harmony cooperate with their Albanian colleagues from Skopje, Pristina, Tirana and Belgrade. We have got Albanian bands who sing in their mother tongue and everyone in the audience loudly applauds and tries to follow the tune, in this way bridging the language gap. We have got an audience which dances wildly in the rhythm of the music.

However, the most evident is the hidden semantics which is often lost in the euphoric atmosphere created by these festivals: the themes that are to be elaborated are completely inadequate to the set postulates and aims of the festivals themselves. At the end of the story, these festivals are commercial events created by commercial motivation which only at the surface represent the independent scene, create and promote artistic and cultural values. In fact, by abusing the skills gained while working in this sector, they shallowly and routinely create an event with a content that is seemingly different and relevant in relation to various social and political meanings. Precisely this skilfully hidden tendency differentiates them from the art festivals whose place they have taken.

The both examples can be also seen as an image of the actual state and needs in the places they occur. They consist of combination of organizers' need for a greater profit, financiers' need for a greater promotion, and the need of the audience for an event that "entertains", an audience which in a state of poverty and lack of opportunities to get out of the country's borders organizes its time and interests in accordance with the available offers.

