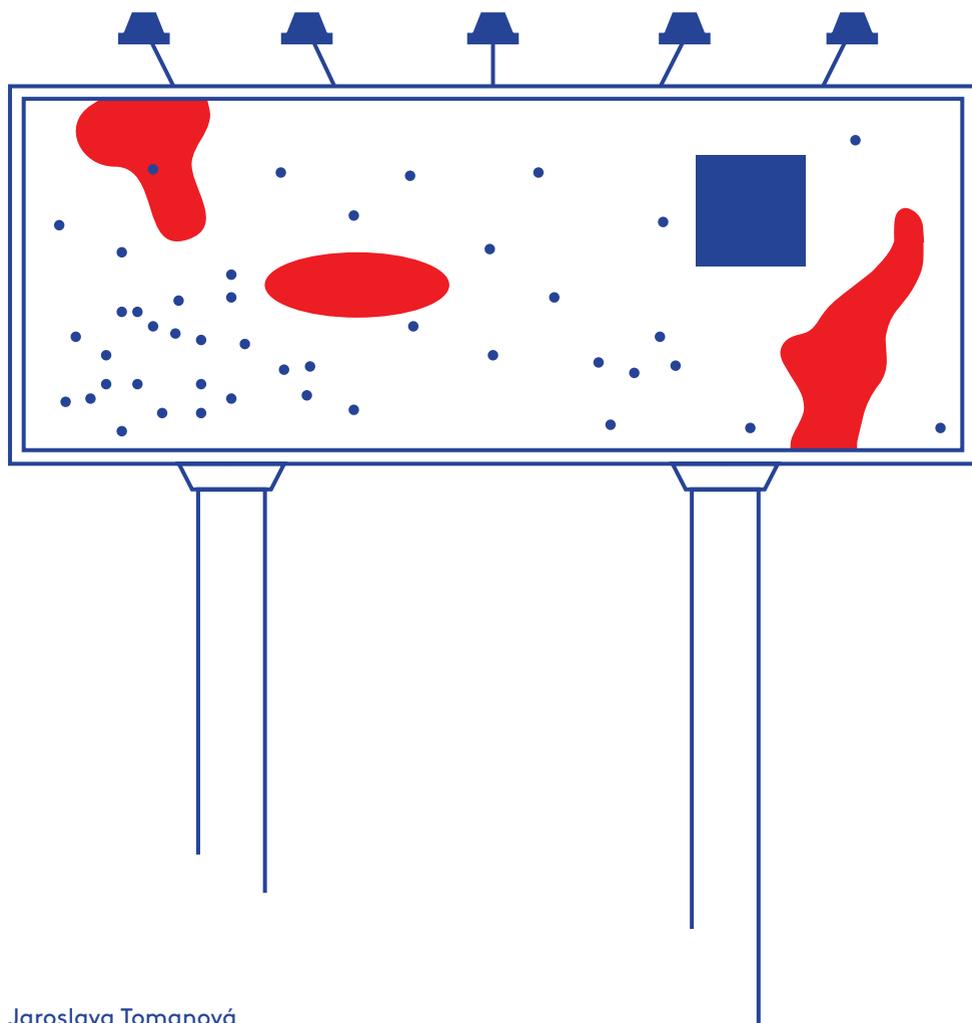


IV.

Multi-stakeholder platforms for promoting culture



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In democratic societies, representatives of different interests will negotiate about the value of culture and the arts, and they will discuss and decide on which forms and how much public support should be invested in selected sub-areas of the cultural field.

/Geir Vestheim/

This chapter will focus on multi-stakeholder platforms and will commence with a brief definition of the term. The first, rather technical definition says platform is “a raised level surface on which people or things can stand.”¹ It shows a symbolic characteristic of a platform. A second, more relevant meaning of the term, “the declared policy of a political party or group,” brings the expression closer to the interests of this review. In the public policy field, a platform on which policy makers can **discuss** various policy issues **while being seen by public** audience is a traditional model of democratic policy making. In the second definition, a platform as declared policy or other synonyms such as “programme, party line, manifesto, plan, plan of action, principles, tenets, objectives, aims”¹ are all relevant while focusing on the cultural sector and its governance.

The term ‘platform’ frequently appears in Czech cultural policy discourse. Here, the concept of a platform is understood in an active sense, where a platform is recognized as an agent of cultural policy playing an active role in policy making. The report from a conference *Střed zájmu 360*² articulates one of the most important needs of the Czech cultural and creative sector and is as follows:

„Platforms of collaboration and professional associations as essential tools of sharing experiences and advocating for relevant policy arrangements, improving quality of the practitioners’ education (e.g. reflecting on practical issues, improving business skills and widening the customers’ choice in particular fields, setting up an effective funding system and evaluating the public and non-profit non-governmental sector including the question of quantity and quality of the arts organizations).”

There are many other examples that demonstrate the need for a strong policy-making body, rather than a platform that provides space for discussion but has no ambitions to be a point of active policy change. Due to lack of space, the views of various cultural initiatives will not be analyzed further.

1 Oxford Dictionary 2016

2 Conference was organized by Arts Institute – Theatre Institute (IDU) in 2014, the report echoes findings of the multi-annual project Mapping Cultural and Creative Industries in the Czech Republic 2011–2015, which is available here <http://www.idu.cz/en/czech-cultural-and-creative-industries-mapping-201>. This mapping exercise is discussed in chapter 6

Formal or informal platform/agency

One of the key dilemmas of a multi-stakeholder platform is whether it should be formally established by a public policy-making body — a national or city government — (the question of spatial scope will be discussed in the next section) or whether it should be an independent, informal platform initiated by civil society, professionals, organizations or other entities within the sector. The latter option has the advantage of grassroots nature which is better established in the community of culture professionals and thus would require less effort in building trust (depending on reputation of involved organizations). However, the challenging part comes with ensuring that the collaboration with political and economic spheres of cultural policy is effective and democratic.

In the case of a multi-stakeholder platform with an extensive range of tasks and services for the cultural and creative sectors demanded by various cultural practitioners, a 'multi-stakeholder agency' would be perhaps a more accurate term. Oxford Dictionary defines the term 'agency' as „*a department or body providing a specific service for a government or other organization.*” Public agencies which are in charge of the strategic overview in the development of various areas of the public sector are numerous and fashionable in public policy making, increasingly in the last four decades, and particularly in the 'Western' part of the world. Basic characteristics of these types of agencies are: „*carrying out public tasks such as regulation, functioning at arm's length from the main hierarchical spines of ministries, public servants being core staff, financed in principle by the state budget or partially by charges (e.g., charging for a driving or television license), subject to at least some administrative law procedures (i.e., they are not wholly or predominantly private law bodies), being part of the state apparatus.*”³ The main reasons why agencies have started becoming a frequent public policy features of in the 'Western' countries are as follows⁴:

- Financial reasons: in the West since the 1970s, the need to economize the public sector has appeared widely, and, according to management theories, market oriented entities are more efficient than the public ones.
- Decline in citizen trust in government institutions.
- Rising citizen expectations with respect to the standards of public services.

3 Pollit et al. 2001, p. 275

4 ibidem

Moreover, according to research conducted by The Czech Academy of Sciences the problems that determine conditions in which Czech cultural institutions operate are as follows⁵:

- Political intervention in the management and operation of the contributory organizations.⁶
- The unresolved funding system.
- The lack of trust that cultural professionals have in politicians and decision-makers.

The listed problems show that, among others, lack of trust in public institutions and politicians and a need to economize and restructure public funding are complimentary reasons as to why governments around the world were frequently setting up public agencies to provide a strategic leadership for specific public issues. However, in case of government-established agencies, many challenges related to democratic functioning, securing sufficient funds and avoiding political influence are obvious. On the other hand, if such an organization was able to achieve great professionalization, reduction of political influence, a great deal of flexibility, efficiency and transparency, listen to its stakeholders and have access to the best IT technologies, it may be a perfect solution to cultural policy. The perfect scenario is, however, unlikely. Moreover, despite the well-promoted advantages of such agencies that can be seen as a sign of a government's progressive attitude and a modern thing to do, there is weak empirical evidence that simply setting up a relatively autonomous public agency to provide services to the cultural and creative sector will ensure such a positive result.

Both types — either a multi-stakeholder public agency or an informal multi-stakeholder platform for the culture and creative sector — have to obtain the trust of those individuals whose needs they serve. I believe that the first step in gaining trust is a democratic principle in an organization's functioning. Professor Geir Vestheim, an expert in cultural policy research who focuses on the “overlapping zone between culture, politics and money,” argues that in democratic societies, representatives of different interests within two different social fields (culture and arts on one side and politics, administration and economy on the other) „*will negotiate about the value of culture and the arts, and they will discuss and decide on which forms and how much public support should be invested in selected sub-areas of the cultural field.*”⁷ However, as the values of both social fields are different,

5 Vojtíšková and Lorencová 2015

6 Contributory organization (CO) = an organization established by a public body which is fully responsible for normative funding of the CO, providing it with property for its use, oversight of the CO's financial management, the appointment and dismissal of a CO's director and its dissolution (Vojtíšková and Lorencová 2015)

7 Geir Vestheim, 2012, p. 535

the overlapping zone may be tense, full of conflict and an area of power struggles. Therefore, „the overlapping zone cannot be identified to one single institution, it rather has the character of being a social sphere or a social ‘space’ where policy-making takes place. This implies that the overlapping zone is both formal and informal.“⁸ Equal balance of power and the minimization of a conflict can be achieved by mutual respect, role distribution, negotiations and the preference of common interests over individual ones. A key question that should be addressed while planning a new multi-stakeholder initiative is how to initiate and sustain the high ethical discipline described above.

Identifying the stakeholders in the overlapping zone is another fundamental part of a multi-stakeholder initiative. Following professor Vestheim, four groups of agents ensure the democratic legitimacy: (1) politicians elected by popular vote; (2) bureaucrats/civil servants working in public administration; (3) professionals working in cultural institutions or voluntary organizations of the cultural field; and (4) professional artists and their interest organizations. The inclusion of the business sector is in question, and it depends predominantly on the cultural policy market orientation widely known as ‘creative economy’.

The discussion about cultural policy orientation towards the concept of creative industries is not the subject of this chapter, however, this orientation would determine key activities and services that a multi-stakeholder initiative would carry out. Although the values and needs of artists and non-profit cultural organizations are mostly different from business-oriented entities, both categories are labelled as creative industries. If a multi-stakeholder initiative aimed its services to creative industries, it would have to strongly acknowledge and address differences between business and non-businesses entities to remain relevant for all.

Key activities and services

Defining key activities of a multi-stakeholder platform should be based on the needs of a particular locality and its particularities. I believe that it is crucial to get inspiration from elsewhere and learn from good examples, but also learn from the mistakes of others. The key task is to look at the Czech context, or potentially at examples from countries with similar political and economic development after the fall of communism, rather than adopting clearly neoliberal policy practices with efficiency as the predominant value. Professors from University of Zagreb, Milena Dragicevic-Sesic and Corina Suteu, emphasized that the use of ‘Western models’ of cultural policy in former Yugoslavia was caused by ‘immediate

8 ibidem

post-communist euphoria regarding these models’ and followed by ‘post awakening rejection’. In their view, both approaches are ‘wrong and superficial’. Moreover, they deemed that “inspiration for cultural policy and legislation can be reliable, but has to take the necessary time and allow reciprocal understanding and questioning”.⁹

Relevant literature mentions a range of activities and responsibilities, which usually the multi-stakeholder initiatives are in charge of. Strategic overview and the facilitation of the development of the cultural sector is the common mission of most reviewed examples. Specific activities can then be grouped in four major areas:

- **Policy making:** providing the overlapping zone for negotiations between culture, politics and money, guiding the implementation of policy plans, grant allocation, intervening in the property market to steer the development of the sector, promoting economic strategies for the sector, being official consultees taking part in the process of decision making, enabling development of the sector in places where it does not function ‘by itself’, and campaigning and lobbying for the sector.
- **Providing support and opportunities:** providing business and legal advice, creating links with education/training, facilitating interaction between existing enterprises and organizations, regularly bringing different stakeholders and professional organizations together, sending news digest and making sure the professionals are well informed.
- **Promoting and marketing** the sector or specific city areas/cultural clusters, drawing visitors’ and audiences’ attention towards specific sectors or areas and supporting community awareness through effective communication.
- **Monitoring and researching** the performance of the sector or specific city areas in all of their aspects, mapping the cultural and creative sector and needs assessment.

Spatial scope

Another critical issue is the area of action. There are examples of national agencies representing different aims and ways of functioning. In the Czech context, a politically autonomous, democratic, professional, multi-stakeholder agency or a platform focusing on creative industries or cultural policy with substantial policy-making power does not exist,

9 Dragicevic-Sesic and Suteu 2005, p. 96

although there are a number of professional organizations which represent the specific areas of the sector and are critically important. Among others, these are: CZECHDESIGN, Association of Professional Theatres (Asociace profesionálních divadel), Czech Fashion Council, Czech Chamber of Architects (Česká komora architektů), Audiovisual Producers' Association (Asociace producentů v audiovizí), Skutek Association (Spolek Skutek), Czech Music Council (Česká hudební rada) and Czech Association of Festivals (Česká asociace festivalů).

Yet in Vestheim's concept presented above, these organizations represent only the cultural and artistic fields in the cultural policy debate, whilst the other and equally important, political, administrative and economic fields are missing. Two ministerial agencies are in place in the Czech cultural policy context, The National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture (NIPOS) and The Arts Institute – Theatre Institute (IDU). Both of them are contributory organizations established by the Ministry of Culture. They are working on the arm's length principle providing a range of services e.g., research, promotion of the Czech arts internationally (IDU), providing networking opportunities such as conferences and workshops, publishing relevant literature and library service, providing information about jobs and funding opportunities, etc. However, their power in the cultural policy decision-making process is fairly low. They work as consultants for the Ministry to a limited extent because their management is directly subordinated to the Ministry of Culture.

According to the last major strategic cultural policy document, the Implementation Plan of the National Cultural Policy for 2015–2020, Ministry of Culture is preparing its 'Project Agency', a new agency that will be coordinating and managing its projects and providing help to non-governmental organizations in the cultural sector to apply for EU funds. The document, however, does not give any details on what kind of projects this agency will coordinate. Moreover, it will be providing information about various opportunities for funding and will facilitate sharing experiences across the sector. The document also states that, thanks to this agency, *"effective use of public funds for reasonable projects will be ensured and the public spending will be coordinated so wasting public resources will be prevented"*. The document does not provide detailed information on this initiative, but the brief description shows major similarities in the mission of the new Project Agency, NIPOS and IDU while other critical factors such as stakeholders, scope and balance of power are not addressed.

Furthermore, according to this document, so called 'cooperative platforms' for carrying out pilot programs of matching funds will be established. These platforms will *"encourage collaboration of private and corporate funders with the public ones and public-private partnerships will be supported"*. According to the plan, this should be achieved by the year 2016, though no funds have been allocated for establishing this organization. Detailed

information is not provided. The ambiguous rhetoric and unrealistic plans of the Ministry are now evident.

On the city and regional level, a number of multi-stakeholder agencies exist in Europe (e.g., Oslo Culture Network, Norway; Kreativgesellschaft Hamburg, Germany; Departure agency Vienna, Austria). Here again, in the Czech Republic, a politically autonomous, democratic, professional, multi-stakeholder agency or a platform focusing on creative industries or cultural policy with substantial policy-making power has not been established. Prague has the highest concentration of creative industries and is the flagship cultural heritage destination. The governance structure is highly complicated as the city is divided into 22 urban quarters, each with their own local councils. Similar to other Central and Eastern European cities, Prague suffers from lack of coherent governance. Hungarian cultural policy expert Krisztina Keresztély accurately captured the situation in Budapest, which is similar to the situation in Prague: *"The Budapest City Council has limited power, and finds itself permanently opposed to local districts' decisions. (...) The number of examples of cooperation between councils in the capital is also very low. The intermediate historical zone is under the authority of four different councils. Although all of them are facing similar problems, they represent different political parties, different priorities and different conceptions of urban development. Political incoherence also explains why short-term political decisions prevail in this area instead of policies meeting the challenges of social and cultural integration."*¹⁰

At the time of writing, the City of Prague does not have a valid document, which would transparently articulate the citywide cultural or creative industries strategy. The previous one was valid till the end of 2015. Prague City Hall has not released official information or a statement on its cultural strategy for the upcoming years at the time of writing this review. Establishing a multi-stakeholder agency or a platform which would have a substantial voice on cultural policy in Prague City Hall could be a challenging, long-term task. On the other hand, if its establishment was successful it could be a way out of the frustrating situation where notorious short-term and ad-hoc political decisions are a norm.

Conclusion

To sum up, if there is an idea to set up a multi-stakeholder initiative, a sophisticated approach and a collective endeavor of cultural organizations could be an effective starting point. Once there is a solid base of professional organizations listed above (p. 5) and ministerial agencies (IDU and NIPOS already carrying out great deal of services for the cultural

¹⁰ Keresztély 2007, p. 105

sector) which have already started working together, there is no reason not to proceed further and build on numerous meetings, conferences and workshops. Before setting up brand new multi-stakeholder agencies or platforms, it is wiser to work with existing cultural policy bodies and empower a grassroots organization which is already active in the field of cultural policy. Perhaps merging a few organizations into one may be a way to proceed. Necessarily, collective demands for negotiation of balanced power of all stakeholders and other essential changes in their structures would have to be pushed forward towards the professional, transparent and democratic overlapping zone with a dedicated mission and clear justification for its existence. Last, but not least, Vestheim's (2012) democratic social 'space' for policy-making, which is both formal and informal, could be a good positive vision for such initiative.

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