

Post Funding Eastern Europe

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CCCK – Center for Communication  
and Context, Kiev

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The Center for Communication and Context (CCK) has been developed during a residency period in Kiev in August 2006 as a collaboration between Ingela Johansson, Volodymyr Kuznetsov and Inga Zimprich. Within the exhibition Private With Public CCK started to investigate its host-center's history, ideological background and future perspectives. Getting involved with a former Soros institution the idea emerged to follow other cases of Soros Centers and to investigate other East-European institutions which were established with the help of or dependant on Western cultural funding. Under the term of Post Funding we would like to expand this project during 2007, re-searching emerging local financial models and the interdependencies developed in cultural East-West exchange.

Since our first visit to the Center for Contemporary Art, Kiev (CCA) the local situation transformed significantly. With the appearance of the Pinchuk Art Center CCA's exclusive role to provide a window to and from the West has changed. Given the space to shift its focus CCA is reformulating its program aiming to provide more space for experimentation, research and exhibition practices beyond the merely visual.

However, the relevant decision of the Renaissance Foundation whether to support the Center in the future is still pending.

We would like to thank Yuliya Vaganova, director of CCA, for her support, her courage and energy. Without her this project would not have been started.

CCCK is documented at [www.ccc-k.net](http://www.ccc-k.net)

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### Appreciated counterparts

Through the downfall of the Soviet Union, the Balkan wars and the EU's Eastern expansion the countries of Middle and Eastern Europe have undergone fundamental re-orientation processes and exposed their vulnerable cultural and economic identities. At the same time they got inscribed into international funding policies. With different aims, national, trans-national, private as well as state-owned investors discovered those 'new territories' in which art and culture are often used to smoothen transitions. Motivations to invest into cross-border culture and art projects vary from philanthropic world-views with George Soros as most known example to image campaigns of damaged politicians.

Economically striking attention for culture appears especially in times of local conflicts, wars and revolutions, also in order to strengthen democratic forces. Questionably is that once situations stabilize, often the international and financial attention decreases which leaves accomplished, self-sustaining as much as stagnating constellations behind.

Not only is it controversial whether cross-border projects always proof sustainable. Lacking detailed knowledge and insight into a local situation makes it difficult to develop trust and close cooperation between funders and grantees from which meaningful collaboration could come forth.

At this moment investment within the Ukrainian context is done in the first place by those who keep existing spaces open and keep using them under difficult economic conditions. With their precious energy, inspiration, openness and time few dedicated individuals manage to establish a critical distance to their own environment and at the same time keep the thin membrane of activity in motion. Refining one's own practices and discourse means to obtain a space which any situation requires in order to develop further. Creating and maintaining space – physical, economical as much as intellectual space are the key challenges in the contemporary Ukrainian art situation.

It demands a strong intellectual and economical fundament to stand up to local and international initiatives which might as much compromise artistic endeavors and working conditions as they seem to promote them at the first sight. Therefore we hope that CCA will continue to be run by and to support appreciated counterparts who challenge our assumptions and who, constructively and with insistence, know better.

We hope that this compilation of interviews taken since August 2006 can add to a process of perspective-making.

Inga Zimprich

Jerzy Onuch

Director of the Polish Institute  
and chairman of the board of Center  
for Contemporary Art, Kiev

'Context' is a very important, even crucial word in Ukraine. It is a useless exercise to try to understand Ukrainian art without possessing knowledge of the context it stems from. The situation here depends very much on cultural and historical coordinates. The notion 'context' applies when there are different and contrasting points of view, which makes context difficult to be decoded here. If you have lived in and experienced one single society and share this experience with others who have had the same experience: Which context are you talking about? If you have lived and experienced only one context then reality presents itself as a given. There is no other context that people in Ukraine can compare with. Hence the unease when using the concept or decoding its meaning.

The major goal of CCA when it was established was to create a context for contemporary art and contemporary art's functioning in Ukraine. In ten years we have invited international artists and have set up exhibitions here. Organizing actions, presenting artefacts and having exhibitions with local artists – these things were done for various reasons. One of the aims was to put Ukrainian art in an interna-

tional context – even if this contextualization happened within the frame of the local institution. It was also essential to create a context for the audience in order for it to encounter international contemporary art.

One has to bear in mind that the notion of contemporary art only appeared in Ukraine in the middle of the 80s during the post-soviet era. During Gorbachov's perestroika the notion of contemporary art did not exist, there was no use of this term. Even today journalists and critics refer to contemporary art as a foreign concept – written in English in the Latin alphabet as if it were not transferrable to Ukrainian. It is very easy to translate: 'Contemporary Art' in Ukrainian simply reads 'suchasne mystetstvo' – nothing more, nothing less. But people still consider the idea of contemporary art as something imposed on them.

The open society was the underlying concept that made George Soros establish some twenty Centers for Contemporary Art in Central and Eastern Europe. Arts and culture were tools to promote this vision. After approximately ten years he thought that these centers accomplished their mission. He also saw that many countries were prepared to create similar programmes by themselves. In most countries of Central Europe Soros Centers proved added value, one more institution and resource center. Slovenia, for instance, was very well prepared to develop its own cultural programmes; generally,

the Balkan countries were quite advanced. In these countries institutions existed that dealt with contemporary art and culture. But the Centers at the outskirts of Soros activity in Ukraine, Kasachstan or Russia were the only institutions working with contemporary art in the region. CCA Moscow was amongst the first Centers to close since it had no perspectives whatsoever to generate alternative income. Here at CCA we decided to try the almost impossible: to keep this institution running because we believe that the existence of this institution is crucial.

The challenge when establishing CCA in Kiev was to connect a foreign concept to the local situation. How can that be done? Our ambition was to transform this foreign body into something that is rooted locally. Today a new generation of artists has stood up who started their careers in the Center or in the perisphere around it and the audience grew with them. We finally arrived at a situation that could be developed. But development requires resources and investment. Yet the Ukrainian cultural field has no means to raise support.

I find it difficult to be positive about the local art community. Perhaps it is a remnant of the soviet mentality. Artists were a very important part of the propaganda system and during the soviet era the art community formed a kind of social aristocracy in its own right. They received substantial support from the state

and in return served the propaganda. In a sense they've never actually been socially or politically active as the role of artist was conformist by definition. Being non-conformist meant to take a difficult stance. In the West a non-conformist approach is essential to being an artist; artists fulfill the role of critics within the system.

Obviously some artists were non-conformists, but their position was marginalized and they were punished for their actions. The so-called art community developed attitudes that can be in a nutshell defined as: "Milk the cow as long as you can. But then do not try to feed the cow, but try to find another cow."

At some point the Soros Center or Soros institution was the cow, a very milky cow. And now it is Pinchuk foundation. Whoever has the chance, goes there to get work done. Everyone is complaining: they lack this and do not have that. But I ask: Why isn't there one single artist-run space? I would like to see a group of artists trying to create their own structures – however small or big such an initiative might be in its beginning and see them fight for it. But here the attitude prevails that without a space, without being granted the necessary means we can do nothing. The belief that there is no need to be active is still dominant.

Although I am 'technically' Eastern European I have lived many years in Canada, a very pragmatic society. Many Ukrainians show the

following attitude: "It is very well to say how things work in Poland or Canada. Here, however, we do things in a different way." And I always ask: "What is the definition of a straight line? The definition of a line is the same in Ukraine, Poland, Germany and Canada: it is the shortest distance between two points. So if this is the same, then why are certain things not straight here?" It is a form of denial: "We are different." This is an excuse for not doing things the way they should or could be done. Group R.E.P. for instance is hybrid in nature. On the one hand they are complaining as the elder artists do but on the other hand they try to activate their surroundings. The situation is slowly changing. If you consider life in this country, with its changes and transitions, it makes up perfect material for artistic production, for critical or apologetic works. It could be fuel for the arts, but only very few artists are making use of it.

Alexandr Soloviov

Curator of Pinchuk Art Center, Kiev

When the Soviet Union and its political system fell apart there were hardly any galleries. An art market or art institutions didn't exist. Before Soros it was a zero situation. This was a paradoxical moment. A generation of young and promising artists was operating in an institutional void. What had happened years before in the West, a movement with squats and different independent organizations of artists, started in Ukraine only during the nineties. The young rejected the old traditions and were anticipating for changes.

At that time Ukraine was run by bureaucratic nationalism that could not meet the demands of the artists. New art should be international in character, which was difficult to achieve in a period of national ego-centrism.

New artistic tendencies in different cities of the former Soviet Union – Odessa, Petersburg, Moscow and Kiev – grew, which coincided with the foundation of the Soros art institutions. The first director of the CCA in Kiev, Marta Kuzma, took on the important role of moderator of the Ukrainian art movement. For a year she was supervising the situation, visiting artists in different cities in Odessa, Harkov and Lviv. Marta Kuzma also pulled it off that the CCA settled in its current building and invested a lot

of work to turn it into what it is today. The CCA started from ruins. With Soros money it was possible to expand the technical infrastructure and a burst of artistic production followed. Having finally a physical space and new tools propelled the development of contemporary art. The main motor was Soros. Thanks to these finances we could establish an infrastructure.

Still it was difficult to keep the young generation in Ukraine. Many of the promising young artists went to Moscow to find an actual market there. The situation only changed when other countries showed interest in Ukrainian contemporary art. Ukrainian art was exhibited in Great Britain, Germany and other countries, which proved an important impulse.

Today, the biggest challenge in Ukraine is to supply art galleries and institutions with money. This is the most crucial and relevant interaction. New governmental and private investors appear. The situation boils down to this: No finances no art. That is what we are talking about if we speak about the CCA. There is no perspective. In the West there is a market for contemporary art. Ukraine has none. We simply cannot fight with what we don't have.

Nikita Kadan

Artist, painter and member of R.E.P.  
(Revolutionary Experimental Space),  
lives and works in Kiev

The crisis of language in the Ukrainian art scene is a problem and at the same time holds a potential. Most of the basic vocabulary we use is a remnant of the former political system and as such proves unusable and devalued. There is little influence on our language from the outside. This is a huge critical potential since foreign influences can reveal a comical or exaggerated attitude. The language at hand is provisional and superficial and experimenting with it makes modern Ukraine a field for critical examination of language in its entirety.

R.E.P. group parasitizes on platforms of social representation – be they commercial, political, or religious. The group produces a number of mock appearances as a commercial organization, a party, a religious sect. As R.E.P. we produce our works – direct actions and interventions – in common public arenas to stimulate dialogue. On the one hand we use the language at our disposal within the given situation. On the other hand we try to enrich it with our own artistic language to allow for communication beyond stereotypes.

The conservative academic education that I experienced is part of my professional back-

ground and it's simply impossible to ignore it. This training corresponds with the experience of society as a whole and this experience is culturally unique.

An education of this kind can be fruitful for artistic development or it can simply result in the formal mastership of certain media and techniques. These two possibilities exist as parts within a bigger experience. Still the Ukrainian situation offers no alternative to the traditional art education but in itself it is no longer repressive.

In my own artistic practice different influences coexist. Next to the traditional background an important part is self-education.

It is finally possible for young artists in Ukraine to organize themselves in communities and develop alternatives to create new experiences. Only after those changes it will be possible that the official educational system and institutions change.

Yuliya Vaganova

Director of Center for  
Contemporary Art, Kiev

The Center of Contemporary Art is relevant because all connections between local and international institutions run through the Center. The young artists programme offers young artists a place to work, to exhibit and to take new steps in their development. We started in 2000 with the launch of an open competition for young artists. This developed into a residency plan that offers young artists studio spaces and encourages them to exhibit. These opportunities are hard to find in Kiev and we are glad to offer them. With the international residency programme we take a further step and invite local Ukrainian artists and artists from abroad to work together. I hope the model developed during this residency will stand tall and can be continued after this project so that it becomes an integral part of CCA's programme. Also the educational programme of CCA will be important in the future.

Right now we need to concentrate all efforts on assuring the Center's continuity. Interest in culture is generally low and currently our financial future is uncertain. It is hard to be in doubt, to be in the middle of nowhere. The future of CCA does not depend on personnel policy or the board members' activities, but is highly intertwined with governmental policy and

the ministry of culture. What causes problems is the inability to create a stable financial climate that allows culture to develop in Ukraine.

Equal opportunities for people, institutions and artists to apply for grants are a necessary precondition to give an institute as the CCA a fair chance. This would allow more initiatives similar to this one to develop and to be run professionally. We hope for changes in the policies of the city council and the ministry of culture.

When the Soros Foundation stopped direct funding to the Center of Contemporary Art several years ago we still received indirect funding from a Soros body through the International Renaissance Foundation. The Renaissance Foundation, a co-founder of the Center for Contemporary Art, has to take a final decision now regarding its funding policy towards the center. If the CCA needs to close for lack of funding, we should make a public statement about this since it is a telling sign about the role culture plays in this country.

The current financial situation for cultural matters is devastating. It endangers professionalism in arts. People who depend on fixed incomes simply cannot afford to work in the cultural sector. If culture becomes a hobby for the well off only, if it becomes a free-time activity it is impossible to demand high-quality and qualified work. It worries me to see many young artists working in advertisement and design

to earn a living. We lose many talented people who we urgently need. Young artists who are capable of thinking and working conceptually are essential to develop the Ukrainian art scene. It is simply necessary to be fanatic about your profession and your work, to be highly motivated and show determination. It is a question of attitude to be able to work in the cultural field today in Ukraine.

Even if we have to close this institution, I believe it is possible to continue its mission under different conditions. To run a programme with young artists and residencies could even be done from home. To develop such a programme is possible with very little resources. But at the same time we hold the responsibility to provide professional conditions and improve the cultural working conditions in Ukraine generally.

Les Reines Prochaines, a very interesting artists' group from Switzerland asked us last year: "Why is it that only women are working in the cultural field?" I am very sorry to tell you that this is still a very patriarchal society. Cultural work is simply not profitable and it is therefore left to the women. I do hope that things may change now that more powerful women are participating in the public debate. They are brilliant and learn to apply their skills. More female politicians might influence the general role-division in the country. Sadly enough the gender-issue is still very important in Ukraine.

Alevtina Kakhidze

Artist, board member of Center  
for Contemporary Art, Kiev

It happened in Kiev that a collector wanted to change the paintings he bought for prettier ones he recently saw in an exhibition. The artist found himself in the dilemma whether he should change the paintings or not, which is illustrating the inherent contradiction of an art gallery: Is it a shop or not? I love this story as an illustration of this contradiction.

After two years having lived abroad I wouldn't say I was driven out of the general attention of the Kiev art market because I had never really been there. I have some doubts sharing my observations on the current development in the art market in Kiev, as I am afraid to scare people. If you ask me how the landscape of curators, theorists and critics in Kiev is structured, I simply can't detect any structure. I observe that progress in visual art still depends greatly on collectors. Artists in Kiev stick to the idea of the collector. They avoid questioning whether a work needs to be bought in order to determine its quality. They also avoid confronting that this mentality in turn increasingly prevails in the minds of the collectors.

The feeling of shame attached to creating visual arts in Ukraine compared to the economic reality of many Ukrainian or other

citizens will exist until everyone possesses the luxury to produce art.

The goal of CCA or any non-profit art institution is to present art, which makes it enough to take a smell at an art piece in order to feel full. This is the fundamental difference between a non-profit art institution and a commercial space.

The mechanism for emerging artists to produce and exhibit their work in Kiev is linked to the law of supply and demand, but great artists appear independently of those demands.

I just believe the form of presentation is part of my projects; sometimes a presentation is costly, sometimes a presentation needs to cost nothing and I'd better do it cheaply. Also I do separate fundamentally whether it is my idea, which costs money or the presentation of my idea. In the first case I ask the audience to pay, in the second case I take the responsibility on myself. I try to alternate the first case with the second.

Oleksiy Babych

Student of literature, works  
as translator in Kiev

I wonder whether it is at all surprising that the funding from the Soros foundation decreased during the last years. If the objective has been to destroy a mentality that could object to Western social values, then this mission has been accomplished. In Ukraine a strong mentality reigned that disagrees with Western politics, a wild mixture of different influences. The very bases for divergent opinions and attitudes have been destroyed in Ukraine. Probably because Soros saw his mission accomplished, to eliminate the threat to Western moral values, he does not invest more money. This is a completely subjective opinion of mine.

During my stays in Europe I noticed that every provincial town could afford to show contemporary art exhibitions. In Kiev there are few private galleries but no one has an overview on their activities.

Still it is interesting to question how they finance cultural exchange projects as for example artists from rather small European countries visiting and discovering Ukraine. Are they funded through institutions based on multinational co-operations? With Marx or the Frankfurt School I'd remark that it's the same process of alienation that generates this funding.

Multinational co-operations exploit labour force in third world countries such as Malaysia to name but one. The extra value produced by the poor adds steadily to a growing multinational capital. Within these international economic currents a certain amount is set aside to encourage people who are not forced to go to the office every day and who call themselves artists to create some installation. Probably they don't produce masterpieces but rather engage in a communicative situation that is actually there to smoothen the social creases created by current economic constellations.

This artistic activity is set to maintain a universal system based on Western values that are advertised and practiced in contemporary Europe. To my mind the non-conformist artistic attitude is non-conformist only on the surface. In depth it affects the individuals in that it opens up a passage through which a deeper integration into the current order seems more acceptable. Its social function is to allow regular people to continue their jobs, accept the welfare and work towards a decent living.

From my own experience I must say that once you lead a regular life and strive for pragmatic values you forget that there are people who do things not according to the norm. And when I come here to the CCA I notice that these people live, they exist – be it in Ukraine or abroad. In spite of the capitalist financial support, they do work and this is after all optimistic.

Nebojsa Milikic

Artist and cultural organizer at  
Kulturni Centar REX, Belgrade, Serbia.

A deeply rooted tradition of the Serbian intellectual and cultural middle class is to oppress the facts and neglect the popular culture of Serbia, turning a blind eye to the taste and needs of a broader public. The bases for contemporary art is composed of a broad – in terms of social stratigraphy – educated middle class that is wealthy especially in terms of free time. The Serbian middle class, lacking money to invest into artworks themselves, relied on money to produce a sort of pre-fabricated simulation of cultural life severed from political and economical realities. The term of "urban culture" functioned as a universal adapter term to respond to this need. Fellow students from Western Europe and America are very sensitive to listen to the cries that come from the East and generously respond by partaking in the cultural and economical colonization of Eastern Europe by providing templated cultural formulas.

The relationships that developed between funders and grantees I would describe as an alliance between the petit bourgeoisie of the West and of Eastern Europe. Since the latter was lacking the resources to realize their intellectual middle class ideas they were provided with funds from Western Europe or the States. I don't

think there has been a serious attempt to establish an economic foundation through polishing the cultural surface; I consider these structural relations rather an unintentional side effect. Definitely this dependency developed mutually: foundations were trying to imagine what grantees could dream of and grantees in turn were more than eager to live up to the foundation's expectations. This two-way traffic as documented in most applications and project-reports is worth investigating though they might read as late-night confessions.

Speaking about the post-Soros situation in Belgrade, certain institutions have survived after the funding was cut, in particular those who did not entirely depend on Soros – and others didn't make it, especially those founded by Soros did not find other legitimations or structures. The former CCA Bel-grade got in charge of running the Museum of Contemporary Art. Even if this museum was not a re-invention of an institutional concept it was for certain a unique strategical and logistical approach to run an institution of that profile.

The funding decreased after the so-called 'democratic changes' from 2001 onwards. I assume that the funders themselves have to fund-raise in order to deliver grants to regions like the Balkans, Caucasus, Ukraine, etc. The more critical a political and economic situation appears the more interest can be raised amongst funders of funders. Sometimes this motivation feels like a

simple exotization or even following a trend. But there is also a form of routine that goes like: "Throw it there, you cannot miss."

It was sad to see how most grantees would do anything to get funded. Subconsciously, I assume, as if they were suffering from a bout of fever. As a reaction art critique and art theory produced a critical discourse that to my surprise did not critically evaluate the artists own behaviour in this relations but instead bestowed the heads of foundations with the role of the 'bad guys'. The main motive here I assume is jealousy towards those who managed to get most of the money.

## Colofon

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