



Danube – Where to?

A cradle of European Culture and its future

International symposium of the documenta network on art and culture in the Danube Region

within the framework of the documenta 2011

Under the patronage of Minister President Horst Seehofer

CONFERENCE REPORT

1. Introduction

Under the patronage of Minister President Horst Seehofer and sponsored by Emilia Müller, Bavarian Minister of State for Federal and European Affairs in the Bavarian Minister-President's Office, the **documenta**, under the leadership of its First Chairman, Regina Hellwig-Schmid together with the Research Centre for Eastern and South-eastern Europe in Regensburg (WiOS), represented by its Vice-Chairman, Dr. Konrad Clewing, invited 39 artists, curators, academics and politicians from the 14 countries of the Danube Basin to a symposium in order to discuss perspectives in cultural policy and art which might promote transnational development within the European Danube Strategy (EUDRS) in the fields of art and culture. From 20th to 22nd October, under the key heading, 'Danube – where to? A cradle of European Culture and its future', experts discussed together with the public, possibilities and boundaries for new concepts in art and culture in the macro-region of the Danube area.

The interdisciplinary symposium took place in the Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, the largest museum of modern art in Eastern Bavaria, and was part of the international festival **documenta** 2011 from 15th September to 4th November which presented contemporary art and culture from Serbia in twelve different locations in the cathedral city. At the same time the symposium wound up a successful series of annual international festivals organized by the **documenta** e.V. in which, since 2003, the current work in visual and performing arts from one of a total of nine states along the Danube has been drawn to the attention of the public. By this means, a network of key players in the field of contemporary art and culture in the Danube area has come into being and thus provided a starting point in bringing together participants for the individual panels of the conference.



2. Conference Programme

2.1. Welcome address and official opening

In her opening lecture, Dr. h.c. Doris Pack, Member of the European Parliament and Chairman of the Committee on Culture and Education, elucidated the European Council's decision of 24th June this year on the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUDRS), which had been agreed upon over the previous 18 months by both the European Commission and the European Parliament. Dr. Pack was able to illustrate perspectives for interstate co-operation in cultural policy and identified the major challenges in the implementation of the EUDRS. As far as cultural policy was concerned, she viewed the strategy as a plan of action aiming to promote culture and tourism. The major challenge lay in the practical realisation by the individual countries and their people. In this context, the Member of Parliament advocated projects which would be less spectacular but more likely to join people together in highlighting and maintaining the diversity in the Danube region. Dr. Pack pointed out that the Danube region and its states formed a heterogeneous region. Improvements in infrastructure, particularly in the matter of Danube crossings, were important requirements; infrastructural measures were a pre-condition for cultural encounters. As an example she cited the fact that from Belgrade downstream, to the end of the border between Serbia and Romania there was only one bridge for crossing the Danube. Excursions into the neighbouring state, meaning cultural participation, for example in the form of a museum visit on the other side of the Danube, involved lengthy detours and a considerable measure of time and effort. "If the strategy is to make sense, we have to bring the people together," she said. Dr. Pack then elucidated several European programmes enabling interstate co-operation in the field of education and media in various forms, for example the programmes 'eTwinning', 'Danube Media Network', 'Comenius', and 'Comenius-Regio' as well as the 'Don@u-Online' project, in which 43 school classes from twelve countries in the Danube basin are integrated. The aim of these programmes, among others, was to support the creation of new sponsorships, and to realise new twin-projects, internships, language courses and workshops, in order to promote identification with the Danube Region.



In this connection, the Bavarian Minister for European Affairs, Emilia Müller, portrayed the **donumenta**, the international festival which had been initiated in 2003 and managed by Regina Hellwig-Schmid, with its focus on contemporary art and culture in the Danube region as a good example of networking in the field of art and culture in the Danube region. She gave thanks to Hellwig-Schmid and also Hans Schaidinger, Lord Mayor of the City of Regensburg, as patron, for their exceptional commitment in showing Bavaria a view of Europe as a Europe of and for the people. The thematic field of competing interests with which the symposium's participants had to contend was then outlined by Dr. Konrad Clewing of the Southeast Institute in the final welcoming speech. The historian reminded us that "A river not only connects, it also divides". This meant determining the areas of division and working on ways of finding points of contact where co-operation would be possible.

2.2. Protocol and Findings

The participants of the symposium illuminated the Danube region within the framework of three panel discussions in which the public also took part: the first focussed on the cultural scenes and on debates on cultural policy in the Danube region; the second on the role of festivals and their popularity in terms of publicity for cultural and artistic activity in view of the influence of networks; and the third concentrated on the contribution of culture, education and science to the development of civil society in the countries of the Danube basin.

The first panel discussion was moderated by **Bára Procházková**, editor and author of the Prague weekly journal 'Respect'. She opened with the question of whether the macro-region Danube existed as a reality in the cultural perception of the people living there or whether it was in fact a pure construct, imposed on the region from outside. The opinions which followed oriented themselves chiefly on the hypothesis of Europe as a union of cultural and shared values and less on a regional model; the manner of promoting art and culture was seen as a key factor in the evaluation.

According to members of the panel, many states in the Danube basin promoted art and culture only marginally or even not at all out of their budgets. **Dimitrije Vujadinović**, director of the Balkankult foundation in Belgrade reported that the Serbian cultural budget amounted to less than one per cent of Serbia's total expenditure.



In the Ukraine, according to **Yuliya Vaganova**, director of the independent Foundation Centre for Contemporary Art in Kiev, there was neither public funding of art and culture nor the moral valuation which this would bring. As a specific problem she saw the strong market orientation on the one hand and on the other hand a discrimination of artistic work, with which she found herself confronted in her country.

The Slovenian-German curator and theoretician, **Katja Kobolt** explained that many artists and cultural professionals, mainly women, lived under very precarious conditions.

Furthermore, according to **Nenad Zakošek**, political scientist at the University of Zagreb, Croatia, a great deal of nationalism was still in existence: "We all have a shared history, which is full of missed opportunities. Many encumbrances have been created, which all have yet to be overcome. Among these are nationalist discourses, which have still not disappeared."

In view of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, Kobolt demanded a new distribution of resources and warned against the subordination of cultural interests to the economy. "Even a small amount of capital invested in the field of art and culture is profitable. We need new models in the realm of public and private partnerships and interdisciplinary approaches. Art projects themselves should be developed from within and not implemented from the outside."

Vujadinović and Vaganova also underlined the importance of contexts and programmes which would benefit the production of art and the work of artists, particularly of the younger generation. In the whole region of the Danube, there was no possibility of a funded residence for artists. With regard to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, Vujadinović warned against the too hasty planning of art and culture under the economic aspect of profitable culture-tourism. It was art and its production which made encounters possible. A clear differentiation should be made between art and culture; however the whole field deserved to be treated with equal status to other areas in which the EU Strategy aimed to initiate development. As an example of an ambitious model project in promoting art and culture, the curator **Svetlana Racanović** cited the newly founded Marina Abramović Community Centre Obod Cetinje in Montenegro. What had formerly been an enormous refrigerator factory was in future to be a place for the production and presentation of film, theatre, music, dance and opera. A permanent art exhibition with the focus on regional art was also planned. "The international idea of a social body in the form of an artist's community, a living museum and a house of communication is to be reality here" explained Racanović.



A further example was the Ars Electronica (AE). Since 1979, AE had attracted local workers and encouraged local artists, explained **Manuela Naveau**, head of AE EXPORT in Linz. According to Naveau “Ars Electronica is simply a network of local and international artists”

The second panel discussion, moderated by **Dr. Hans-Simon Pelanda**, directorate of the donumenta e.V. and member of staff of the Goethe-Institute, Munich, was devoted to the question of where and how it would be possible for art and culture to achieve publicity within the context of the EUDRS.

The exceptional characteristics of festivals were elaborated by **Dr. Andreas Ströhl**, head of the department ‘culture and information’ in the Munich central office of the Goethe-Institute, and former manager of the Film Festival Munich. In his introductory lecture, he pronounced: “Festivals are islands, extricated from time and place. They are scenes of extravagance and excess and of all that is special”, and then he pointed out the central importance of informal networks, with the help of which existing contacts could be continued away from cumulative festival events. Naveau too emphasized the targeted work with the artist network of the AE as an important part of their activity. “The artists of the AE should be able to make use of the international contacts and be present there”, he said. To this end, the AE had concerned itself with seeking out new locations for presentations, for example the airport of the City of Vienna or a shopping centre in Tokyo.

“Every town can always be creative”, underlined then **Ivona Kreuzmanová**, the artistic director of Pilsen 2015 – European Capital of Culture in the Czech Republic. The internationally successful networker, especially in the field of contemporary dance, explained in detail the Pilsen concept, of focussing on human potential, of educating in art, creativity and culture. **Dr. Marton Mehes**, director of the Collegium Hungaricum in Vienna, pointed to the possibility and responsibility of artists themselves, to create networks and make use of funding and incentives. “Whereas there is a necessity for cooperation in the other eleven development fields of the EUDRS, in the field of art and culture this can create a unique opportunity” he added. **Vitalie Ciobanu** (Chişinău, Republic of Moldova) regarded infrastructural conditions as well as the necessity “for culture to find recognition as an end in itself, as meeting point and dialogue” to be an elementary prerequisite in this aim.



Recognizing the fact that the promotion of co-operation in the field of science, education and tourism forms one of the pillars of the EUDRS, the third panel under the leadership of **Dr. Konrad Clewing**, deputy director of the Southeast Institute, reflected on the opportunities offered by tourism to encounter the culture of neighbouring states and at the same time to strengthen the political importance of 'culture' through its economic potential. In his keynote speech, **Deljan Chaykov**, representing the team of the Bulgarian Coordinator Ivo Marinov, Deputy Minister of Economy, Energy and Tourism and Coordinator for Culture and Tourism in the Danube Strategy, recommended a strong union between art, culture and tourism in the EUDRS, in order to reach the people where they live. **Nebojša Matijašević** from the German Society for International Co-operation (GIZ), using the example of the Danube Competence Centre with its seat in Belgrade, illustrated how the development of tourism could be sustainably encouraged through mutual marketing measures and the transfer of appropriate know-how. Clewing took up this position and searched for grounds to justify the connection, bearing in mind the underlying danger it carried with it, of its leading to a heavy museumisation of art. The question of by whom art and culture should be financed, became in the end the panel's central question, which in summary brought the following positions into the debate. The economist, **Zvezda Dermendzhieva** from the Eastern Europe Institute in Regensburg pointed out that many of the countries of the Danube Basin had no clear concept of developing art and culture efficiently. Particularly in the private sector, there was more potential for development. The possibility of investment in culture had not yet been made clear enough to this sector. **Prof. Dr. Martina Eckardt** from the German Language Andrassy University in Budapest, who will be providing academic support for the EUDRS, discussed, among other things, the problem of the waste of taxpayers' money. "The more participation there is in the allocation of taxpayers' money for art and culture, the less waste there will be" she summed up. **Johann-Jakob Wulf** from the Young Citizens Danube Network in Budapest brought up a central deficit in the EUDRS. The PhD student at the Andrassy University made the criticism that in the document for the EU Strategy for the Danube Region the generation of 20- to 35-year-olds, i.e. the generation which the strategy was supposed to bring to life had been forgotten. The young were neither mentioned in any depth in the text of the document, nor would any of the topics dealt with in the text give any impulse to young people. Subsequently, he gave a report on the activities and the demands of the network of young persons, living in the Danube region who, as a result of this, had drawn up an appropriate strategy for the younger generation dealing with all four topic areas in the Strategy.



Concrete suggestions were for example, an ERASMUS-Danubia exchange programme for students, the setting up of special degree courses on the Danube region and the establishment of a European Danube Youth Foundation. Since the young network has already received the support, not least, of the German Parliament for this, the podium had grounds for optimism that the initial omission of the young in the strategy would still be able to be corrected. The symposium was able to set an immediate impulse for co-operation through the offices of Dr. Flavius Solomon (Romanian Science Fund, Bucharest). He made the podium an impetus for a plan to enlist the Romanian Research Fund in a venture to set up a regional exchange programme for academics within the region with a view to breaking up the previous practise of reducing the concept of 'study period abroad' down to 'experience in Western Europe'.

The conclusion of the symposium formed an open podium under the heading 'ideas exchange', lead by **Dr. Susanne Baumgart** which recapitulated the central themes of the talks on the previous day, and the first outlines of co-operation possibilities. Meeting and identity became key concepts.

The artist **Pavel Braila** told of the situation of artists in the Republic Moldova where there was no state support for independent artists. Similarly the artist and curator, **Elena Panayotova**, who lives in Bulgaria was able to give some insight into the lives of artists in the Danube Basin. There the state was the only promoter of art and culture. The municipalities did not come into question as promoters and therefore an art market did not exist. Art took place only on a private basis between artists and a small art scene. Co-operations such as the Upper Palatinate Artists House in Schwandorf took place purely on an individual basis.

Heiner Riepl, founder and director of the Artists House emphasized the importance of personal contacts in other countries: "If one is unable to find people who will show one their country and with whom one would like to work together, it is very difficult. One needs individual contacts. That is the best form of working co-operation." **Aron Fenyvesi**, manager of the renowned Gallery Trafó in Budapest, once again gave close consideration to the idea of localizing artistic creativity. "He who is locally active in the field of art, has to become part of local history, he must set himself in context and place himself against these backgrounds. This is what creates identity, especially in the European context", asserted Fenyvesi, in this way summarizing an important field of conflict for a future concept of the role of art and culture in the Danube region. At the end of the symposium, the representatives of the individual countries declared their willingness to promote intensive co-operation.



“In this we have made an important achievement in our meetings”, summarized Hellwig-Schmid in conclusion. “Representatives of art and culture from the fourteen countries of the Danube basin have made it their aim to bring their knowledge, specific to their country into cross-border co-operations and in this way to create a cultural value without par. An excellent offer in the context of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region,” the donumenta initiator and symposium director was pleased to reflect.

3. Surrounding Programme

The symposium was complemented by a surrounding programme which had its main focus in the civil society and human rights. The lectures by Nataša Kandić, director of the Centre for Human Rights in Belgrade, and Johanna Paukovits, spokesman for the Amnesty International Network of Southeast Europe in Vienna, both met with great interest from the public. Both were able to provide an extensive insight into ongoing violations of human rights in individual countries in the Danube basin and into forms and strategies for dealing with the past. There followed a report from the opposition literary group BETON from Serbia and the Kosovo, represented by Saša Ilić from Belgrade and Jeton Neziraj from Prishtina/Priština on their activities and who also read excerpts from their literary works. The evening was moderated by Erich Rathfelder, author and correspondent for Southeast Europe.

Zoran Živković, author in Belgrade was invited to the opening of the symposium. The internationally renowned author presented chapters from his new book ‘The Five Wonders of the Danube’. The reader was the actress Anna-Maria Wasserberg. The text was composed by the Regensburg director Joseph Berlinger. The Serbian DJane Spoma provided the musical concept for the subsequent exchange among the members of the podium.

4. Public

The symposium was open to anyone who was interested in the development of cultural and artistic concepts on an international and transnational basis. It was particularly aimed at artists, curators, politicians, historians, political scientists and those in charge of cultural and artistic institutions.



5. Echo from the Press

The media and public were kept informed about the Symposium 'The Danube – where is it going? The Future of a Cradle of European Culture' both in the context of the **documenta** 2011 – Serbia, as well as in the form of an independent, excellent, interdisciplinary think-tank. The process of communication began with invitations to the first press conference for the **documenta** 2011 – Serbia on 28th June 2011. From the 15th September, the symposium was announced in a press release as an independent event. In addition to existing distributors for media from the whole of Germany, a special distributor was compiled containing around 40 addresses focussing on such media in Bavaria, Austria and relevant media for art and culture which had already at some time previously in any form dealt with the topic of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region; personal contact was made with political and cultural editorial offices, in order to adapt the news value of the symposium optimally to the individual target readers. An appropriate measure of advance promotion was achieved via the new agency dpa and so also in the Bavarian local and regional media. Representatives of the Süddeutsche Zeitung, Donaukurier, Bayerischer Rundfunk and the Mittelbayerische Zeitung took part in the symposium themselves. A press release, summarizing the statements and results from a media perspective was issued on 27th October.