

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Media and Culture

November 2015, Prishtina



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SWEDEN

Introduction

Focus group “Media and Culture” was held on 13 October 2015 in Prishtinë within the Forum for Cultural Development project that aims to further develop and strengthen the Cultural Forum established in 2011 through provision of advice and valuable knowledge about cultural policies in Kosovo. Project is funded by the European Union Office in Kosovo and implemented by Forumi Kulturor /*Cultural Forum*/, Teatri Oda /*Oda Theatre*/ and Dokufest.

Focus group discussion was carried out on the research topic focused on the media and culture implemented by Besa Luci, journalist and Editor-in-Chief of Kosovo 2.0. This research, amongst others, is focused in the examination of interconnected nature of media and culture; media and culture as tools enabling a platform for society development, etc. This research also aims to identify some of the issues featuring the relation between the media and culture in Kosovo, and tries to provide interesting perspectives and trends that could be further analyzed at a later stage. For the purpose of this research, only the journalism is considered as media, while culture is tackled

from two perspectives: culture as a way to produce culture activities and media text as “cultural” artifact. To respond to above questions in the Kosovo context, author of this research specifically argues about the role attributed to the media and the one they perform, as well as how media represents cultural activities and production. Focus group was aimed to feed this research with information and content.

“Forum for Cultural Development” project started its first interventions in December 2013, and is planned to last until November 2015. During a two-year period, Forum for Cultural Development will produce at least 28 products of cultural policies that would result from researches, debates, focus groups and conferences. The Project will strengthen the network of independent culture community; it will build its internal capacities and will influence drafting of Kosovo’s cultural policies through the production of knowledge for culture. In addition, project will encourage dialogue and cooperation between the independent culture sector and public authorities so that concrete solutions for cultural development in

Kosovo could be achieved.

Focus group “Culture in the State Policies of Kosovo”, held on 13 October 2015 in Prishtinë, was attended by the following participants: Ardianë Pajaziti, Besa Luzha, Arban Mehmeti, Rreze Kryeziu, Valon Xhabali, Besa Luci, research author and Rozafa Basha, focus group moderator.

Discussions – Summary of Key Discussions

Focus group was opened with a short presentation by Besa Luci, research author. She initially presented the structure and purpose of her research, and focused on unfolding the issues that, according to her, are key to understanding the relation between the media and culture in Kosovo society. Amongst others, she introduced the various roles of media in the culture in general. One of the key focuses in tackling this topic was to elaborate the predominant trends of production, representation and “packaging” of the news in Kosovo. According to her, the dominant trends are: “protocol journalism” – whereby media focus only on the news received from the media conferences and press releases; culture as “soft issue” – whereby the cultural text is presented as entertainment and leisure text; culture as “soft power” – a practice which links cultural representation and production with better and larger representation at international fora, with cultural actors impacting the creation of extended understanding of identity policies; online media; media as “civil servant” of cultures – responsibility for the oversight and functioning of public cultural institutions and

ways to ask for their accountability; poor professional trainings of journalists and financial unsustainability that impacts how the journalist understands his/her role in the media and how the editorial policies are set.

Author also highlighted that even though at the first glance media in Kosovo seems to cover culture well, as every daily and information portals have their culture section, and there are exclusive culture websites; almost every TV and radio station have their own culture shows, it is still unclear what this cultural content in the media is conveying and within which framework it is represented. As author indicates, this issue is of paramount importance since ideological approach towards the media and culture shows the contents and messages conveyed which in one hand reflect the dominant system of values and trust built, but also show how the opinion on culture and media in general is presented.

Lack of Financial Support of Culture in the Media

Following the presentation by the author, the discussion with the participants was opened. Initially the debate was focused on the sluggish support for the media dealing exclusively with culture or complete lack of it. According to Mrs. Pajaziti, Director of Kultplus, businesses hesitate to support the media/ portals since they are mainly focused towards those most read or clicked as their profits are bigger there. Showbiz and entertainment news are usually read most, therefore dailies and portals opt to provide news of such nature. As indicated above, the lack of support by businesses for the media dealing exclusively with culture is coupled with the insufficient support by the state. Some explain this lack of support with the general opinion that such state sponsoring is seen as conflict of interest and political bias. During this year, MCYS allocated a very small budget for the above information platform, which is also confirmed by Mrs. Pajaziti based on the activities performed by Kultplus. There are some examples from the region, such as the culture portal in Croatia, www.kulturpunkt.hr, whose biggest supporter is the Ministry of Culture of Croatia and Directorate of Education,

Culture and Sports of the Municipality of Zagreb. Following up on this, Mrs. Luzha pointed out that the media such as Kultplus, considering that their main purpose is the promotion of arts and culture, should have received more support by the MCYS, since this Ministry has one Department whose key responsibility is the promotion of culture.

As opposed to non-public information platforms, public media paid from taxpayers' money, which, according to the participants, have the obligation to serve the public, should have more cultural contents in their programs. Culture and/or arts programs are small in numbers, while educational programs for children and youth in the field of arts and culture are few or inexistent. According to Mrs. Kryeziu, those existing programs, according to a research done within the framework of ReMusa festival, are broadcasted in late hours when the number of audience that could be reached is quite small. This can be noticed more in the public TV outlet funded through national tax system, which is considerably lagging behind in the provision of cultural and artistic contents in comparison to some private TV outlets. The participants sug-

gested that public media, such as RTK, considering that it now has 4 channels, to have one channel exclusively for arts and culture. The participants provided the example of BBC3, an exclusive channel for arts and culture.

Concerning the media space given to culture, examples were shown when marketing more than the rest infringes and narrows the media space for culture and arts. Therefore, the cases when at the last moment the text for arts and/or culture is shortened or completely removed to make room for an advertisement, have been quite evident.

Lack of genuine financial support impacts the quality of art and culture texts. According to the participants, culture journalists are paid less compared to their colleagues covering other sectors. Being aware of such editorial policies, the motivation for qualitative coverage of this field is lower amongst the culture journalist. Participants agreed that even though there are exemptions, lack of general awareness amongst the businesses and public sector alike for supporting the culture in the media and culture media in general comes as a result of wrong social perception which does not see culture as something that

brings economic prospects.

Do the Media have the Mandate to Promote Culture and Arts?

The discussion was continued about the mandate of media to promote arts and culture and to produce and distribute news for them. Knowing that media creates trends through the distribution of news, a question arose on whether there are mechanisms for compelling the media to distribute more culture and arts related news. Amongst others, participants agreed with the fact that there is a significant gap in the education system when it comes to arts and culture. This problem needs to be initially tackled through education reforms with the involvement of different sectors. MEST and MCYS should help that culture and arts be more included in curricula, thus impacting the refinement of taste. In this respect a question arose on whether the media have such an emancipation mandate, and what this education role means.

The participants agreed in general that in order to refine the taste for arts and for cultural emancipation, the media has an important role to play, especially in explaining, analyzing and creation of basic understanding on these fields. In this sense, it was pointed out that the media instead of only distributing news on cultural events and activ-

ities, the broadcast media can play its educational role through documentaries and specialized TV programs, while written media can provide explanatory and critical texts. According to the participants, the public media can specifically play this role, and in cooperation with governmental departments should contribute to the improvement of cultural level amongst the youth.

The participants later on raised questions on whether there are any ways for artistic and cultural producers to enter into partnership relation with some media so that they could impact the increase of their cultural content. Since this public and private financial support is insufficient, there is a need to look into ways of cooperation of artistic community with the media so as to help the improvement of the culture emancipation role for the society in general. Mrs. Luzha showed the practice of Chopin Fest festival, that she is managing for several years now. She provides to RTK free of charge the recordings of all concerts that RTK can use to enrich its cultural programs. Such a practice enables the RTK to broadcast cultural contents without having financial obligation to pay the instrument players

and TV broadcast rights for these concerts. She added that such a way to build partnerships with the media also happens when artistic and cultural producers are invited to give opinions and be speakers for cultural activities at TV debates or in printed media in exchange of promotion space of their artistic activities in those media.

Other Discussions

Relation between the media and cultural actors – According to the participants, it has been noticed quite often with a lot of media that when they give space to a cultural event they behave as giving a favor to cultural actors and producers. This approach, according to the report author, is quite wrong, as the media have an obligation to report and promote these events since they have a contract with the public.

Text as cultural artefact – While the larger part of discussion was carried out by stressing the difficulties in finding space to promote cultural and artistic activities in the media, the report author highlighted that the function of media more than being a promoter of culture and arts, should be the one of criticizing of cultural products, creation of understandings and unfolding of genuine values. When reporting for a performance, the media here does not explain the problematic linked with its context, as well as the situation of such a problematic in the local context.

Lacks of professionalism – The participants see the low quality of culture representation in the media as a conse-

quence of the lack of adequate professional competence of journalists covering the culture. There are few journals, information portals/TV stations that have specific journalists to cover this sector. The existing ones, due to low motivation, strive to move to the journalism sector of politics and actualities, due to higher readability and better salary promotion opportunities. During the recruitment of these journalists there are no specific knowledge or skill related requirements from the field of culture and arts.

Recommendations

Based on discussions in focus group the following list of recommendations was generated:

- RTK, as the only public medium in Kosovo, both in radio and TV channels, should have specific channels dedicated to culture and arts. Except for distributing information on cultural and artistic events, with the purpose of cultural emancipation and refinement of general artistic taste, it should also broadcast cultural contents, documentaries, debates, discussions with authors and critiques, etc.
- MCYS needs to intensify its support for information portals and platforms dedicated to arts and culture.
- Media should invest more in culture sections. Journalist with adequate skills and trainings should be recruited, and there should be no financial discrimination in comparison to journalists working in other sections.
- Media should build partnerships with artistic producers, and in exchange for more space in the media, they should provide opportunities to cover concerts, recitals, festivals, etc, that would in turn result with richer programmatic cultural content.

Cultural Forum

Oda Theatre held numerous meetings during the end of 2011 with the purpose of establishing a network of the cultural organizations in Kosovo. These meetings were attended by more than 60 participants, representatives of different organizations of culture, thus creating the possibility to organize the founding Assembly on 23 March 2012, which laid the foundation of the Network of Independent Organizations of Culture – Cultural Forum. The founding Assembly laid the foundation of the Cultural Forum with 22 independent organizations as members. Through democratic voting, the Statute was adopted and the network presidency was also elected. The Cultural Forum is an entity registered as a network of independent organizations of culture. It was decided that the role of interim Secretariat will be assumed by Oda Theatre until the capacities are built to form a professional secretariat of the network.

The Cultural Forum of Kosovo is a network of independent organizations of culture in Kosovo, established with the purpose of:

- Strengthening the independent organizations of culture by developing

their capacities for the implementation of their programs ,

- Promotion of member organizations,
- Inclusion of member organizations in decision-making,
- Boosting the support for the independent cultural scene,
- Protection and improvement of the position of organizations vis-à-vis the relevant institutions in Kosovo and abroad.

The Cultural Forum aims to fulfill its mission through the following activities:

- Communication and networking of independent organizations of culture,
- Dynamic exchange of information and experience,
- Lobbying and advocacy activities,
- Specific trainings for the needs of member organizations,
- Organization of debates and fora,
- Coordination of artistic and cultural activities.

Forum for Cultural Development

Forum for Cultural Development is a Project aimed to further develop and strengthen the Cultural Forum established back in 2012, by providing advice and valuable expertise for the cultural policies of Kosovo. The Project is supported by the European Union Office in Kosovo, and implemented by the Cultural Forum, Oda Theatre and DokuFest. The first Project activities were carried out in December 2013. The Project is supposed to continue through to November 2015. During this two year period, the Cultural Development Forum will come up with at least 28 cultural policy products that will result from research, debates, focus groups and conferences. The Project will also strengthen the network of independent culture organizations, built its internal capacities and impact the development of culture policies of Kosovo by producing the knowledge for culture. In addition, the Project will spur the dialog and cooperation between the sector of independent culture and public authorities so that concrete solutions for Kosovo's cultural development could arise.



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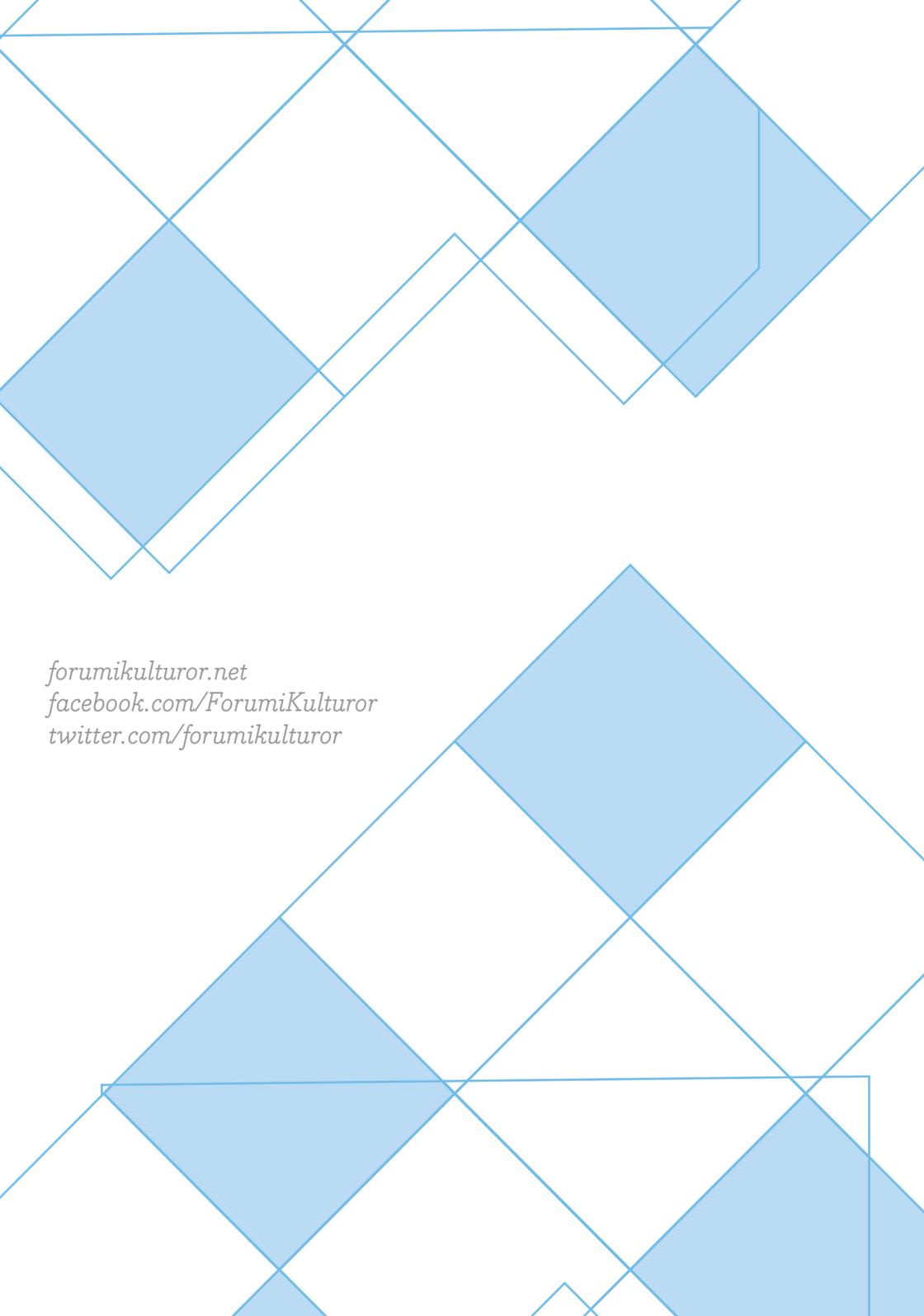
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The image features a complex, abstract geometric pattern composed of overlapping squares and lines. The squares are rotated 45 degrees, creating a diamond-like appearance. The lines are thin and light blue, forming a grid that intersects with the squares. The overall effect is a layered, architectural design. The text is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the image.

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